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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

**MARKETING POST SIXTEEN COLLEGES**

**A Qualitative and Quantitative Study of Pupils' Choice of Post  
Sixteen Institution**

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy

**MARKETING POST SIXTEEN COLLEGES**

A qualitative and quantitative study of pupils' choice of  
post sixteen institution

by **Jane Valerie Hemsley-Brown**

The thesis concentrates on both the supply and the demand sides of the post sixteen education market place. On the supply side, the study examines four key issues - responses to competition; changes in the performance of colleges; the effect of the market on social inequality; and the possibility of bias and manipulation in marketing information.

Firstly, on the supply side, the marketing undertaken by one sixth form college is examined alongside quantitative data from college records, (retained over a period of twelve years.) Data are analysed to determine patterns and trends in the profiles and qualifications of students entering the college throughout the period when a 'niche' marketing strategy was emerging.

On the demand side, qualitative research data were collected through a series of interviews with twenty five fourteen to sixteen year olds, in a multi-site study. Analysis concentrates on the decision making processes and strategies emerging during the period when students selected among post sixteen colleges.

The study concludes that firstly, the potential to manipulate information about colleges is increased in a culture of markets and competition. Colleges need to evaluate and gain feedback on the success of promotional communications through marketing research, to monitor the development of the college's reputation, as well as to identify new markets. Secondly, markets have the potential to allocate resources by socio-economic class. Colleges seeking to reduce inequalities in post sixteen education and training need to ensure that a number of niche markets are identified, appropriate to local need and labour market conditions, to accommodate a range of decision makers in the market. Thirdly, the findings suggest that sixteen year olds are rarely able to give coherent reasons for selecting colleges until they are exposed to the marketing and promotional information provided by colleges. The findings emphasise the importance of effective promotion and public relations, to ensure that positive and accurate marketing information is entering the marketing and choice cycle.

Finally, a 'Typology of Decision Makers' is developed to summarise the decision making behaviour of sixteen year olds. The study concludes with a 'Marketing, Choice and Communications Input-Output Model', which highlights the significance of 'psychological defence mechanisms', and 'reinforcement strategies', in the decision making processes employed by sixteen year olds when selecting among post sixteen colleges.

## **MARKETING POST-SIXTEEN COLLEGES**

A qualitative and quantitative study of pupils' choice of post sixteen institution

*Abstract*

*Table of contents*

*List of figures*

*List of appendices*

### **Chapter 1**

#### **MARKETS, CHOICE AND POST SIXTEEN PROVISION**

1.1	An Emerging Marketing Perspective	1
1.2	The Origins of the Market Argument	5
1.3	Key Elements in an Educational Market Place	7
1.4	Criticisms of the Free Market Argument	10
1.5	Post Sixteen Provision	13
	1.5.1 Participation in Post Sixteen Education	13
	1.5.2 The Development of Sixth Form Colleges	15
	1.5.3 The Role of Further Education Colleges	16
1.6	The Focus of the Study	18
1.7	Key Research Issues	21
1.8	Summary	23

### **Chapter 2**

#### **MARKETING RESPONSIVENESS AND QUALITY**

2.1	Introduction	25
2.2	The Origins of an Enhanced Market Culture in Post Compulsory Education	26
2.3	The Nature and Dimensions of Marketing	30
	2.3.1 The Origins of the Discipline of the Market	30
	2.3.2 Criticisms of Issues Relating to Marketing in Education	32
	2.3.3 Developing a Model of Marketing for Education	35
	2.3.4 The Clients in Educational Markets	37
	2.3.5 The Significance of Competition	38
	2.3.6 The Principle of Market Segmentation	40
	2.3.7 Methods of Identifying Target Markets	43
	2.3.8 Market Planning and Strategy	45
2.4	The Significance of Responsiveness and Innovation	46
2.5	Excellence, Improvement and Quality	48
	2.5.1 Results and National League Tables	50
2.6	Summary	51

## Chapter 3

### CHOICE, RATIONALITY AND DECISION MAKING

3.1	Introduction	53
3.2	Choice in the Compulsory Sector	54
3.3	Choice in the Post Compulsory Sector	57
3.4	Theories of Decision Making	60
3.5	Motivation Theories and Choice Behaviour	62
3.6	Rationality and Maximisation Behaviour	63
3.7	Bounded Rationality and Satisficing Behaviour	66
3.8	Decision Making Strategies	67
3.9	Decision Making Processes	68
3.10	Dynamic Decision Making	72
3.11	Rationality and Economic Utility Models	75
3.12	Factors Affecting Rationality	77
3.13	The Significance of Coercion on Decision Making	80
3.14	Post Decisional Dissonance	81
3.15	Summary	84

## Chapter 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

4.1	Introduction	86
4.2	Selecting the Research Methodology	86
4.3	The Characteristics of Qualitative Methodology	89
4.4	Selection of Sites for Case Study Research	91
4.5	Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality	94
4.6	Selecting the Research Instrument	96
4.7	Selection of Sample Cases	96
4.8	The Interview Schedule	99
4.9	The Research Schedule	99
4.10	The Interview Process	103
4.11	Collection and Recording of Interview Data	107
4.12	Reliability	111
4.13	Validity and Validation	113
4.14	Internal Validity and Causal Relationships	116
4.15	Generalisability and External Validity	117
4.16	The Characteristics of Quantitative Methodology	119
4.17	Quantitative Data Collection	120
4.18	Reliability, Validity and Generalisability	121
4.19	Summary	122

## Chapter 5

### THE SUPPLY SIDE OF THE MARKET

5.1	Introduction	124
5.2	The Historical Context of the Quantitative Survey	125
5.2.1	Phase 1 - Marketing and Promotion between 1979 and 1982	125
5.2.2	Phase II - Marketing and Promotion between 1983 and 1986	126
5.2.3	Phase III - Marketing and Promotion between 1986 and 1989	126
5.2.4	Phase IV - Marketing and Promotion between 1990 and 1994	127
5.3	Collection of data from college records	128
5.3.1	Total student intake between 1979 and 1991	129
5.3.2	Courses	132
5.3.3	Previous schools	135
5.3.4	Catchment area by postal district	138
5.3.5	Entry qualifications	143
5.3.6	Exit Qualifications - Achievement at 'A' Level	147
5.4	The Relationship Between Examination Results and Enrolment	149
5.5	Local 'A' Level Pass Rates	151
5.6	Summary of Results Emerging from Quantitative Data	152
5.7	The Marketing Strategies of Local Colleges	153
5.8	Summary of Findings	156

## Chapter 6

### ANALYSIS OF SUPPLY SIDE ISSUES

6.1	Introduction	158
6.2	The Development of a Market Orientation	160
6.3	The Foundation Phase	160
6.4	The Transition Phase	163
6.5	The Expansion Phase of Development	164
6.6	Developments during the whole period	166
6.7	Summary of findings	170

## Chapter 7

### THE DEMAND SIDE OF MARKETING

7.1	Introduction	172
7.2	Pupils involved in the Study	173
7.3	Decision Maker Styles	180
7.4	Self Reliant Decision Makers	181
7.5	Independent Decision Makers	181
	7.5.1 'Stayers'	185
	7.5.2 'Leavers'	188
7.6	Resolute Decision Makers	192
7.7	Complacent Decision Makers	194
7.8	Maximising Decision Makers	196
	7.8.1 'Idealists'	196
	7.8.2 'Re-takers'	202
7.9	Compliant Decision Makers	208
	7.9.1 'Vocationalists'	208
	7.9.2 'Academics'	211
7.10	Summary	216

## Chapter 8

### ANALYSIS OF DEMAND SIDE ISSUES

#### DECISION MAKERS IN THE POST SIXTEEN MARKET PLACE

8.1	Introduction	218
8.2	Comparison of Research Findings against the Vigilant Decision Making Model	220
	8.2.1 Alternative Courses of Action	221
	8.2.2 Assimilation of New Information	223
	8.2.3 Assessment of Risk	224
8.3	Stated Reasons for Choosing a Post Sixteen College	226
	8.3.1 Academic Versus Vocational Pathways	226
	8.3.2 Results and League Tables	228
	8.3.3 Ethos and Hard Work	229
	8.3.4 College Buildings and Facilities	231
	8.3.5 Travel Considerations	232
	8.3.6 Brochures, Prospectuses and Open Evenings	233
	8.3.7 The Concept of 'Reputation'	234
	8.3.8 Parental Influence	235
	8.3.9 The Influence of Teachers	237
8.4	Unstated Reasons for Choosing a Post Sixteen College	238
	8.4.1 Image and Self Esteem	239
	8.4.2 Peer Group Pressure and Social Class Identity	240
	8.4.3 Self Deception	242
	8.4.4 Reinforcement and Bolstering	243
	8.4.5 Transfer of Blame and Exaggeration of Negative Characteristics	245

8.5	Specialisation and Diversity	246
8.6	Quality and Performance Issues	247
8.7	Bias and Manipulation in Promotional Information	250
8.8	The Marketing Agenda	251
8.9	Summary	253

## Chapter 9

### **CONCLUSIONS** **MARKETING AND DECISION MAKING IN POST SIXTEEN** **EDUCATION**

9.1	Introduction - Responses to an Enhanced Market in Post Sixteen Education	255
9.2	The 'Supply Side' - The Response of Post Sixteen Colleges to an Enhanced Market Culture in Education	256
	9.2.1 Analysis of 'Specialisation' and Excellence	256
	9.2.2 Improvement in Performance and Cost Effectiveness	258
	9.2.3 Perpetuation of Social Inequality	260
	9.2.4 The Responsiveness Continuum	262
9.3	The 'Demand' Side - Student Consumer Responses to an Enhanced Marketing Culture in Post Sixteen Education	267
9.4	The Preliminary Search Stage	267
	9.4.1 Preconceptions	268
	9.4.2 Psychological Protection Mechanisms	269
	9.4.3 Self Image and Group Identity	270
	9.4.4 Distortion and Exaggeration	271
	9.4.5 Post Hoc Justification and Self Deception	272
9.5	The Refined Search Stage	273
	9.5.1 Utilitarian Considerations	274
9.6	Decision Maker Psychographics	277
9.7	Effects of Manipulation and Bias in Marketing Communications	285
9.8	Key Issues in the Marketing of Post Sixteen Colleges	287
	9.8.1 Marketing Research	287
	9.8.2 Market Positioning	288
	9.8.3 Promotion and Public Relations	288
9.9	The Marketing, Choice and Communications Input-Output Model	292
9.10	Summary	296

*Bibliography*  
*Appendices*



## **List of Figures**

<b>figure 2.1</b>	<i>Threats to current practice</i>	34
<b>figure 2.2</b>	<i>Market Segmentation</i>	42
<b>figure 3.1</b>	<i>The major criteria for vigilant decision making</i>	69
<b>figure 4.1</b>	<i>Schools selected for the research</i>	93
<b>figure 4.2</b>	<i>The Research Schedule</i>	100
<b>figure 4.3</b>	<i>Locations of Schools and Colleges</i>	101
<b>figure 4.4</b>	<i>Research participants</i>	102
<b>figure 5.1</b>	<i>Breakdown of total intake between 1979 &amp; 1991</i>	129
<b>figure 5.2</b>	<i>Intake totals between 1979 &amp; 1990</i>	130
<b>figure 5.3</b>	<i>Number of fifteen year olds in schools</i>	130
<b>figure 5.4</b>	<i>Participation in Further Education in Great Britain</i>	131
<b>figure 5.5</b>	<i>Comparison of National Participation Rates and the intake at the college 1979 -1989</i>	132
<b>figure 5.6</b>	<i>Number of enrolments in each year cohort, showing course followed</i>	133
<b>figure 5.7</b>	<i>Enrolment between 1979 and 1991 by year of enrolment</i>	134
<b>figure 5.8</b>	<i>Figures showing 'A' level enrolment by type of school previously attended</i>	135
<b>figure 5.9</b>	<i>Number of students on 2 year A level courses by year of enrolment</i>	136
<b>figure 5.10</b>	<i>Intake from local feeder schools enrolled on 'A' level or GCSE courses</i>	137
<b>figure 5.11</b>	<i>Pupils attending the college from some schools outside catchment area</i>	137
<b>figure 5.12</b>	<i>Number of pupils attending the college from the postal district surrounding the college</i>	138
<b>figure 5.13</b>	<i>Catchment areas, 1979 &amp; 1991</i>	140
<b>figure 5.14</b>	<i>Catchment area map 1979</i>	141
<b>figure 5.15</b>	<i>Catchment area map 1991</i>	142

<b>figure 5.16</b>	<i>Mean average number of 'O' levels or GCSEs (grade C or above) achieved between 1979 and 1991</i>	143
<b>figure 5.17</b>	<i>Total number of sixteen year old school leavers gaining 5 or more 'O' levels or GCSE passes between 1979-1991</i>	144
<b>figure 5.18</b>	<i>Comparison of total intake figures and the number of students with more than 8 GCSE grades A-C</i>	145
<b>figure 5.19</b>	<i>Entry qualifications of enrolled students</i>	145
<b>figure 5.20</b>	<i>Entry qualifications of enrolled students</i>	146
<b>figure 5.21</b>	<i>Candidates with 9 'O' levels or GCSE A-C grades</i>	146
<b>figure 5.22</b>	<i>'A' level percentage pass rates at the sixth form college</i>	147
<b>figure 5.23</b>	<i>National 'A' level percentage pass rates</i>	147
<b>figure 5.24</b>	<i>Mean average 'A' level Scores</i>	148
<b>figure 5.25</b>	<i>Pupils leaving school with two or more 'A' levels</i>	148
<b>figure 5.26</b>	<i>Relationship between 'A' level pass rate and entry qualifications</i>	149
<b>figure 5.27</b>	<i>'A' level pass rate, enrolment figures and percentage of students enrolled on 'A' level courses the following year</i>	150
<b>figure 5.28</b>	<i>'A' level pass rates 1992</i>	151
<b>figure 6.1</b>	<i>Timeline of Changes in the Profiles of Students Enrolling at the Sixth Form College</i>	159
<b>figure 6.2</b>	<i>The Developmental Stages of a (product line) Niche Market</i>	167
<b>figure 7.1</b>	<i>Listing by rank order of GCSE success</i>	174
<b>figure 7.2</b>	<i>Factors affecting students' choice of post-sixteen destination (1)</i>	176
<b>figure 7.3</b>	<i>Factors affecting students' choice of post-sixteen destination (2)</i>	177

<b>figure 7.4</b>	<i>Factors affecting students' choice of post-sixteen destination (3)</i>	178
<b>figure 7.5</b>	<i>Social class classification</i>	179
<b>figure 7.6</b>	<i>Grouping of students according to decision maker style</i>	180
<b>figure 8.1</b>	<i>Characteristics of Analytical Principles</i>	219
<b>figure 9.1</b>	<i>The Responsiveness Continuum</i>	264
<b>figure 9.2</b>	<i>Decision Making Factors</i>	279
<b>figure 9.3</b>	<i>Clusters of Decision Makers</i>	281
<b>figure 9.4</b>	<i>Typology of Decision Makers in the Post Sixteen Market</i>	282
<b>figure 9.5</b>	<i>Input Output Model of Post Sixteen Decision Making</i>	284
<b>figure 9.6</b>	<i>Summary of Marketing and Communications in Post Sixteen Colleges</i>	289
<b>figure 9.7</b>	<i>Input - Output Model of Marketing, Choice and Communications</i>	294

## **List of Appendices**

*page*

<b>Appendix a</b>	<i>Information needed for planning and control</i>	<i>(1)</i>
<b>Appendix b</b>	<i>Market segmentation</i>	<i>(3)</i>
<b>Appendix c</b>	<i>Market Strategy and Planning</i>	<i>(5)</i>
<b>Appendix d</b>	<i>Responsive organisations</i>	<i>(6)</i>
<b>Appendix e</b>	<i>Questions that helped in the planning of interviews</i>	<i>(7)</i>
<b>Appendix f</b>	<i>Interview questions - five interviews</i>	<i>(8)</i>
<b>Appendix g</b>	<i>Interview report samples</i>	<i>(15)</i>
<b>Appendix h</b>	<i>Ways of assisting interviewees</i>	<i>(24)</i>
<b>Appendix i</b>	<i>Results questionnaire sample</i>	<i>(25)</i>
<b>Appendix j</b>	<i>Research criteria (Guba and Lincoln (1982))</i>	<i>(26)</i>
<b>Appendix k</b>	<i>Drop out rates between 1979 &amp; 1991</i>	<i>(27)</i>
<b>Appendix m</b>	<i>Total number of leavers</i>	<i>(28)</i>
<b>Appendix n</b>	<i>Analysis of intake between 1978 and 1990</i>	<i>(30)</i>
<b>Appendix o</b>	<i>Analysis of leavers between 1979 and 1991</i>	<i>(31)</i>
<b>Appendix p</b>	<i>Feeder schools - by year of intake</i>	<i>(32)</i>
<b>Appendix q</b>	<i>Student leavers by postal district</i>	<i>(36)</i>
<b>Appendix r</b>	<i>GCSE (c or above) entry qualifications</i>	<i>(38)</i>
<b>Appendix s</b>	<i>Totals - Achievement at 'A' level</i>	<i>(39)</i>
<b>Appendix t</b>	<i>Interview with Vice Principal responsible for marketing at city college</i>	<i>(40)</i>
<b>Appendix u</b>	<i>Interview with Vice Principal responsible for marketing at FE college</i>	<i>(45)</i>
<b>Appendix v</b>	<i>Interview with Vice Principal responsible for marketing at the sixth form college</i>	<i>(53)</i>
<b>Appendix w</b>	<i>Percentage 'A' level achievement</i>	<i>(57)</i>
<b>Appendix x</b>	<i>Questionnaire Summary Sheet</i>	<i>(58)</i>
<b>Appendix y</b>	<i>Characteristics of analysis</i>	<i>(59)</i>

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# Chapter 1

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION - MARKETS, CHOICE AND POST SIXTEEN PROVISION

#### 1.1 An Emerging Marketing Perspective

This chapter summarises the historical background of choice and markets in post sixteen education, including a review of post sixteen provision, and the introduction of a market culture in the further education sector. The ideology of free market principles is examined in relation to education, and key elements and key criticisms of the main aspects of markets and marketing are explored and identified. The final section outlines the proposed methodology, key research questions, key issues and the aims of the research.

'The provision of education and training for post 16 year olds has been subject to changes in content and structure for most industrialised countries.' (Parkes, (1985) : 159) In April 1993 'a new sector for post-16 education' was created, 'when maintained further education and sixth form colleges were removed from local authority control'. (Bates, (1994) :6) The government has launched an ambitious programme of reforms in an attempt to raise educational attainment and 'the new sector is at the forefront of the Government's aim to increase full time education and training opportunities for students aged 16 +. (Bates, (1994) : 6) 'By the year 2000 (the government) plans to ensure that 50 per cent of young people achieve two 'A' levels - or their equivalent.' (Smithers, (1994) : 3)

The 'White Paper' of 1984, 'Training for Jobs' argued it was 'necessary for more students to be attracted, and retained in the vocational education sector.' (Ardley, (1994) : 3) In 1985, the Audit Commission produced an influential document that

explicitly called for better marketing by colleges,

whose existing provision in this area was criticised. 'Obtain Better Value From Further Education', made the point that colleges had to become much more businesslike in their operations. In 1989, the pace of change quickened with the introduction of the Education Reform Act, that delegated to college governors increased financial and management powers, accentuating the importance of a market led approach to education and training. (Ardley, (1994) : 3)

The Government accepted that transformation on this scale could 'not be achieved through the traditional academic route,' and aimed to improve 'both academic attainment and vocational skills through the introduction of two new vocational pathways.' (Smithers, (1994) :3) In 1991, the document 'Education and Training for the 21st Century, states

(Our) overall aims of engaging more young people in education and training, and raising their attainment, require improvement throughout the system. (DES, (1991) : 3)

The document continues by stating a number of pledges which includes the commitment to;

- \* ensure that all young people get better information and guidance about the choices available to them at 16 and as they progress through further education and training:
- \* give colleges more freedom to expand their provision and respond more flexibly to the demands of the customers. (DES, (1991) : 3)

A market driven system relies on information, and access to information.

Coleman claims that,

the marketing process can involve a 'dialogue' with customers enabling the identification of needs through market research, followed by planning, the use of marketing mix and the application and evaluation of the resulting strategy. (Coleman (1994) : 363)

Ranson, (1993) argues that,

The market is a political creation, designed for political purposes, in this case to redistribute power in order to redirect society, (...) The market in education



is not the classical market of perfect competition but an administered market carefully regulated with stringent controls. (Ranson, (1993) : 338)

Scott, (1989) supports this view by claiming that the education system is 'a managed and not a free market.' (Scott, (1989) : 19) Additionally, Baker (1992) believes that, 'Marketing is essentially about non-price competition, and (that) this concept is central to its theory and practice.' (Baker, (1992) : 159) Le Grand et al., (1992) : 21) describe markets as,

a form of economic organisation in which the majority of allocation decisions are made through the ostensibly uncoordinated actions of large numbers of individuals and private firms. (Thomas, (1994) : 44)

Baker provides an explanation for the preoccupation with 'markets' as a solution to the problem of allocating resources. He explains that,

With the growth of democracy throughout the world, the collapse of the Soviet economy in the early 1990's and the abandonment of communism it is clear that the market system approach offers the best solution to the central economic problem of maximising satisfaction through the consumption of scarce resources. The process by which this is achieved is marketing. (Baker, (1992) : 17)

Since the early 1980s there has been a growth in the number of publications and research studies giving attention to aspects of marketing in education, (Megson and Baber, (1986); Davies and Scribbins (1985); Keen and Greenall (1987)), and in particular in the compulsory sector, to 'choices' made by pupils<sup>1</sup> and their parents in maintained sector schools. Whilst there has been considerable interest in the subject of 'choice' and parental choice of school, research to date has concentrated on parents' choice of schools for their children at 11+. ( for example, Elliot, 1982; West, Varlaam and Mortimer, 1984; Alston 1985; Stillman and Maychell, 1986; Petch, 1986; Adler and Raab, 1988; Hunter, 1991; West and Varlaam, 1991), but there is little which concentrates on choice at 16+. Previous studies of

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis, the term 'pupil' is used to define a fourteen to sixteen year old, in year 10 or 11 (fourth or fifth form) of a school, who has not yet embarked upon post sixteen education. The term 'student' is used to define a sixteen year old, after GCSE examinations, who has joined a college or a school sixth form

parental choice of school provide a long list of factors which parents claimed were important. (See for example, West and Varlaam, (1991) a study exploring views of parents of fourth year primary pupils about secondary schooling.) Research by Walford (1991) and by Edwards et al., (1989) are major studies of school choice, investigating pupils' reasons for choosing schools, but without reference to the market, or to the marketing activities of schools.

Research concentrating on choice in the post sixteen sector, is provided firstly by Taylor, (1992), and is concerned with awareness, and attitudes to post sixteen education. The research concentrated on post sixteen options, including awareness of youth training, and guidance provided by schools. Secondly, research drawing on interview data with both prospective pupils and key policy makers in FE institutions, is provided by Foskett and Hesketh, (1995). 'Particular attention is focused on the different educational pathways or 'trajectories' young people choose to follow in an increasingly diverse FE sector.' (Foskett and Hesketh, (1995)).

One of the aims of this research is to gain insight into the process of decision making and choices, made by students when selecting post sixteen colleges, in a culture of markets, marketisation and promotion. The study uses qualitative and quantitative data collection methods as a basis for providing understanding and clarification of the full implications of exercising 'freedom of choice' in the post sixteen educational market place. The purpose of the study is firstly, to describe, analyse, and conceptualise decision strategies undertaken by sixteen year old interviewees selecting among post sixteen colleges in one local area. Coleman, claims that,

It would appear possible that marketing techniques may make only a marginal difference to the choices made by students and parents. (Coleman, (1994) : 371)

The literature survey will concentrate on the nature and dimensions of marketing, and choice, equity, and aspects of decision making including stages and strategies for reaching decisions. (see Chapter 3). Secondly, the thesis will attempt to explore the development and outcomes of a market

orientation achieved in one post sixteen college, by carrying out a statistical analysis of data collected from files retained by a sixth form college, and will examine changes in the characteristics of year cohorts of students, throughout the 1980s, when a market driven ethos was gradually introduced. Discussion and critical analysis will concentrate on the meaning and significance of the findings, with particular emphasis on extending understanding of the marketing process, in connection with the decision making strategies of sixteen year olds. Both the 'supply' side, and the 'demand' side of decision making within the framework of post sixteen education markets, are the focus of this thesis.

This chapter is concerned with the background to the development of a market culture, or 'the expansion of marketisation' (Foskett, (1995)) in education, and provision of post sixteen education. The chapter is set out in three main sections; The Origins of the Market Argument, including Key Issues, and Key Criticisms of the Market Argument; Post Sixteen Provision, including the Development of Sixth Form Colleges, and a Background to Further Education Colleges; and Research Issues, including Methodology, Key Issues, and Key Questions.

## **1.2 The Origins of the Market Argument**

The 'free' market argument is characterised by several attributes, but is divided into five principal but overlapping ideas, defined by Schotter, (1990) as individualism and selfishness, rationality, utility maximisation, faith in laissez-faire economics, and a trade-off between 'efficiency on the one hand, and equity on the other.' (Schotter, (1990) : 29)

The first element is identified by Schotter as, 'individualism', or 'selfishness'. The 'free market ideal' is claimed to be, 'invariably individualistic, holding that no social action must be sanctioned by the will of the rational individuals composing society.' (Schotter, (1990) : 2) Thomas believes that, 'Self interested behaviour is necessary for market success' (Thomas, (1994) : 45)

That, 'by pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.' (Adam Smith, cited in Copley and Sutherland (1994) :64)

Modern free market thought couples a belief in (this) self interestedness, with a belief that economic agents are rational calculators capable of solving the implicit mathematical maximisation problems they face in their everyday lives. This view comes to us from the early microeconomists who developed the theory of utility - Dupuit, Jevons and Menger. (Schotter, (1990) : 14)

Affirmation is also provided by Bredo who expands on this argument by explaining that,

a market approach focuses attention on individual interests, while ignoring collective interests. It looks at how individuals pursue their private interests and assumes that this private pursuit will also advance the public interest. (Bredo, 1987 : 74)

The second key feature of 'the free market argument assumes that economic and social agents are rational in that they are fully aware of their own preferences and capable of making all of the calculations necessary to pursue their interests efficiently.' (Schotter (1990) :2) Edwards, (1967) summarises the importance of 'rationality' and the third key element, of 'utility maximisation' by stating that,

....economists (...) centre on the notion of the subjective value or utility of the alternatives among which the decider must choose. They assume that people behave rationally; that is, that they have transitive preferences and that they choose in such a way as to maximise utility or expected utility. (Edwards, (1967) : 54)

Fourthly, the greatest contribution of Adam Smith was his insistence that the freedom of individuals to maximise their own interests, leads, "as if by an invisible hand to promote an end which is no part of his intention". (Schotter (1990) :11) The notions of the 'invisible hand of the market', 'self interest', 'rationality' and 'maximisation' behaviour in making choices, checked only by competition in the market place, are founded upon the political and

economic theories of 'natural order', described by Adam Smith, (1776) in 'The Wealth of Nations.' (see Shapiro, (1993) : 50)

The final element of the free market, identified by Schotter is, the 'trade off between efficiency and equity'. (Schotter, (1990) : 29) He observes that, 'policies that promote equity often contradict those that promote efficiency and stabilisation..' (Schotter, (1990) :13) The change however, in ethos and the shift in emphasis from equality to choice and the market, under a banner of 'efficiency', is a major western policy adjustment rather than merely a whim of UK Government committed to saving money and destroying 'egalitarianism'. Iannaccone (1987) argues that,

the educational policy shift from equity to excellence is a component of the larger similar national domestic policy shift. These changes are world wide in breadth. In depth they reach to the long existing roots of American Lockian liberalism and America's commitment to capitalism. (Iannaccone, (1987) : 63)

The toleration of some inequality and a shift towards greater freedom of the individual, changes the emphasis away from the state exercising manipulative control over the individual for the state's long term benefit, towards an emphasis on individual rights.

These political and economic ideals were seized by the writers of the New Right in the early 1980s, and coupled with further writing by Hayek (1973), and Friedman (1981). 'The key to the Hayekian utopia is market competition based on total economic individualism.' (Ball, (1990) :3) 'The Conservative Government in the UK has over time introduced complex administrative regulations designed to create a highly structured market of educational choice.' (Ranson, (1993) :334)

### **1.3 Key Elements in an Educational Market Place**

The key issues which are presented to support a market driven education system are that enhanced 'choice' for the consumer, places colleges in a

competitive environment, which leads to greater 'cost effectiveness', (Sexton, (1990) : TES); improved efficiency, (Bredo, (1987) : 69); greater diversity, (Ball, (1990) : 6); an improvement in standards, (Leonard, (1988) : 52); higher 'quality', (Elmore, (1987) : 80); and 'greater responsiveness'. (Elmore, (1987) :87)

The first, and most fundamental element - 'choice' was highlighted by Kenneth Baker in a speech in August 1988. He argued that, 'true choice should not simply be the privilege of the rich. It should be available to all.' (Kenneth Baker, (1988) cited in Ball (1990) : 7) The government has never made any attempt to hide its real intention - to launch the education service into a market place, driven by choice, placing institutions in competition with one another in order to reduce the dominance of producers, or educationalists. Clark, (1961) 'sees competition as the "availability of alternatives", in which availability implies both the existence of alternatives and the ability of participants to choose freely between them.' (Baker, (1992) : 156)

Secondly, increased competition between colleges (and also between schools) is intended to lead to greater 'cost effectiveness' and 'efficiency'. Warnock commented that,

A liberal education cannot any longer be defended on the grounds that it leads to a civilised or enjoyable life, nor on the grounds that people continue to want it. It must also be shown to produce value for money in a market economy. (Warnock, (1991) : 150)

'A basic government objective has been to improve the efficiency of the public sector by increasing competition.' (Gray, (1992) : 176) Sexton alleges that,

a free market pulling up standards by the bootstraps is worth a thousand ministerial speeches and a million circulars. Virtually by definition it gets the best value for money. Effectiveness and efficiency in the use of all the resources available follows. (Sexton (1990) TES)

Thirdly, Ball claims that the principle of free market economics described by

Hayek (1973), requires 'diversity'.

Choice in his sense is only real if there are diverse products to choose from, the argument would be that if all schools ...(or colleges)... are comprehensive, then there is no choice. The market cannot tolerate equality. (Ball, (1990) : 6)

Fourthly, 'an element of competition can in the right circumstances, improve quality.' (Leonard, (1988) 52) However, Davies and Ellison claim that 'few attempts are made to establish quality standards which are recognisable and acceptable to a broad group of clients.' (Davies and Ellison, (1991) :135) 'The difficulty in talking about 'standards' is that the concept is, like 'truth' or 'goodness' or 'beauty' both logically indispensable and yet impossible to define without considerable philosophical elaboration.' (Pring, 1992 : 21) Pring discusses the problems attached to defining, and identifying 'improvement of standards', and 'quality' in education, and observes that,

a government which has claimed that the improvement of standards is a priority is also the government which has proclaimed the superiority of market forces in determining what those standards should be. (Pring, 1992 : 17 )

However, the claim has been made that,

educational standards and the quality of education for the mass of the population will not improve until state controls particularly those of the local state, are drawn back to a level compatible with maximising (.....) choice. (Flude and Hammer, quoted in Stillman, (1990) : 56)

Finally, the individual will benefit it is argued, because in a competitive climate the producers are forced to consider 'customer' demands, and reduce their costs, whilst improving quality or value for money, to sell their goods against fierce competition from other producers. (see Edwards and Whitty 1992, : 101) Elmore (writing in connection with the compulsory sector), argues that educational institutions operating in a market culture, will be required to respond to the needs of clients, and in particular students.

Underlying the arguments for increased choice in education is a set of assumptions about the effect of individual choice in the responsiveness and

performance of schools. (Elmore, (1987) :84)

Keen and Greenall (1987) writing in connection with 'responsiveness' in the post compulsory sector in education, discuss 'public relations' in colleges and claim that,

Public relations practice is the process of organised two-way communication between an institution and its audiences; its objective is to build a level of mutual understanding and respect which allows the institutions goals to be more readily met. (Keen & Greenall, (1987))

Maclure argues that, 'one of the keys to the new deal for further education lies in 'changes in organisation, presentation and philosophy required to make colleges responsive to contemporary needs.' (Maclure, (1990) :11)

To summarise, the key issues which relate to the introduction of a market in education, are based on the belief that competition between institutions will lead to 'considerable improvements'. (Walford, (1994) 5). The educational improvement rationale is based on the belief that providers are constantly under competitive pressure to be more responsive to the needs and preferences of the clients. The Hampshire Vocational Education and Training Development Plan (1991-1994), summarises the aims for further education in the county as;

to ensure that the post sixteen service is managed and delivered as effectively, and efficiently and economically as possible; and to ensure that colleges are able to respond quickly to changing user needs. (HCC, (1991) :21)

Post sixteen colleges are being encouraged to become entrepreneurial, to compete in the education market place, and to be 'managed like businesses'. An understanding of how marketing can be applied to education is therefore essential if the goals of a college are to be 'kept in harmony with the environment in which it operates.' (Pardey, (1991:239)



#### 1.4 Criticisms of the Free Market Argument

The proposals to change dramatically the way the education service operates rapidly led to an explosion of speculative writing about the way in which education would be irreversibly transformed by what was considered, radical legislation. Many writers, (see for example, Bredo, (1987); Elmore, (1987); McMurtry, (1991); Braithwaite, (1992)), have speculated about the way the market in education will operate, by analogising models of marketing strategy operating in industry, with values and principles operating in educational settings. (see Chapter 2)

In addition to the apprehension which many educationalists have about the promotional and advertising elements of marketing, many are concerned that the whole philosophy of education as an ideal, would be totally and unfavourably changed. There is some doubt expressed about the appropriateness of a market model for education. Braithwaite argues that,

Education is a diffuse product to sell and does not meet the primary conditions for a true market economy, namely well informed consumers, many buyers and sellers of the commodity, regular buying patterns that ensure that past buying mistakes are not repeated and that the consumption of the goods/ service has no effect on others. (Braithwaite, (1992) : 51)

The recurrent themes associated with potential negative aspects of enhancing a market culture in education are on the 'demand side' of the question,

\* The stance that, 'knowledge about and awareness of choices and how to assess them, is class biased.' (Kerchner & Boyd (1987) :101)

\* The problem of 'whether the consumers of education, should be given the central role in deciding what kind of education is appropriate for them.' (Elmore, (1987) : 79)

In view of these concerns research questions are raised, on the demand side, by Gray who acknowledges that,

Customer choice is an important consideration in every sector of the education service. (.....) Some understanding of the decision making processes, whereby potential customers decide to register for an educational course, or attend a particular college is necessary if educational marketeers are to inform and persuade their potential customers. (Gray, 1991) : 113)

Based on questions raised on the demand side, the research seeks to explore, analyse and conceptualise aspects of decision making and choice of post sixteen college, by undertaking interviews with a wide selection of fourteen to sixteen year olds, in a multi-site study. 'Based upon (....) the view that individuals pass through a number of stages in coming to a decision ....' (Baker, (1992) : 174)

On the supply side of marketing, the recurrent themes are that,

- \* Selection effects are very relatively strong, and make it easy to be fooled into believing that a new programme produces higher achievement when it simply attracts an educationally more advantaged group of students. (Bredo, (1987) :75)
- \* Whether the providers of education should be given the autonomy and flexibility to respond to differences in the judgements of consumers about what is appropriate to education. (Elmore, (1987):79)
- \* Fear that large scale promotion warfare will ruin the smaller institutions that cannot afford marketing and will create more competitive stalemate among the larger institutions. (Kotler et al., (1987) :13)
- \* Perhaps most significantly, marketing and public relations are seen as manipulations of the truth and hence both immoral and contradictory to the aims of pedagogy. (Foskett, (1992): 3-4)
- \* The reforms may in practice serve to sustain more familiar patterns of social inequality. (Edwards and Whitty, (1992) : 114)
- \* Centralisation ..(in schooling).. has meant

larger sized units, a reduction in the ability of the consumers to choose and an increase in the power of producers. (Friedman, (1980) : 191)

On the supply side of the question, the research seeks to explore these issues, by undertaking survey research in the post sixteen sector throughout the 1980s, when legislation dictated that more emphasis should be placed on marketing, and on encouraging larger numbers of 16 year olds to participate in further education. The issues will be thoroughly challenged and explored, by discovering what changes have emerged in a sixth form college which has operated in a market environment for 12 years.

## **1.5 Post Sixteen Provision**

### **1.5.1 Participation In Post Sixteen Education**

In 1989, the Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker MP, the then Secretary of State for Education and Science addressed the Association of Colleges of Further and Higher Education by saying,

Further Education is not just the bit in between school and higher education. (...) We have set in hand the changes which will achieve a better foundation at age 16. Now I believe that the time is ripe to give a similar powerful thrust towards education and training thereafter (.....). In short, it is time for an initiative to promote Further Education. (Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker MP, cited in Maclure, (1991) : 1)

The Education Reform Act in 1988 - which was concerned with the education of pupils in schools, 'strengthened the hand of parents as consumers.' (Maclure, (1991) : 2) However, Maclure describes the main impact of the Education Act on post compulsory education, by claiming that,

by focusing strongly on the compulsory school period 5 - 16, it has thrown into relief the egregious deficiencies of the education system beyond 16 - the high drop out rate, the poor record in vocational education and industrial training, and the contrast between the higher education participation rate in

Britain, and other advanced countries. (...) It was also obvious that the opportunity for 18 year olds was only likely to increase in the proportions which Baker envisaged if there was a steady increase in the participation rate from 16 - 18. (Maclure, (1991) :2-3)

The stated intention of the changes or reforms, is to enable colleges to raise participation rates, and to enhance the achievement of 16 -19 year olds. Smithers observes that, 'future funding is based on money following students, so schools and colleges will be in competition' for sixteen year olds. (Smithers, (1994) : 4) Maclure claims however that, 'without any deliberate national policy decision, the FE share of full time education post sixteen has been steadily growing.' (Maclure (1990), :9) 'A fast growing proportion of young people are choosing to continue their education beyond compulsory schooling.' (Smithers, (1994) : 4) According to the Education Statistics for the UK (1989 and 1995 editions)

\* more than half the 16-18 year olds (55%) participated in post-compulsory education in 1987-88; 18 per cent were in school, 33 per cent in further education and 4 per cent in higher education. (Maclure, (1991) :13)

\* there is a falling 16-19 year old population - numbers of 16-19 year olds were expected to fall in 1990 by 20%. (Taylor, (1992) :320)

\* Between 1980 and 1992 the proportion of 17 - 18 year olds in education full-time and part-time, rose from 50 to 70 per cent; those in colleges from 27 to 35 per cent. With sixth form colleges included, those in the new college sector are over 40 per cent. (Smithers, (1994) : 4)

\* in 1995 83% of 16 -18 year olds are undertaking some form of education or training, and 58.6% are in full time education or training. (DFEE, (1995)

The changes which enhanced and emphasised a market culture in education, were designed to give colleges, on the 'supply side', more freedom to respond to student needs, and students, on the 'demand side', more 'choice'. Baker, (1992), explains that,

The science of economics is founded essentially upon the analysis of the interaction of supply and demand, and the causes and consequences of this interaction - one might say the issues of what will be produced and how - so the art of politics is concerned mainly with who will receive what share of the resultant output. (Baker, M. (1992) : 19)

'The incorporation of colleges, and the increased autonomy of schools appear to indicate that the accountability of educational institutions is moving towards the consumerist control of the free market ....' (Coleman (1994) : 362) Prior to the 'incorporation of further education colleges as autonomous bodies,' (Bush, (1994) : 2), the post sixteen sector comprised , sixth form colleges, tertiary colleges, and further education colleges.

### **1.5.2 The Development of Sixth Form Colleges**

The initial intention of setting up sixth form colleges, (the first two were opened in 1969), was that sixteen year olds attending local schools would transfer to the local sixth form college, as an alternative to staying in the sixth form of a school. The sixth forms of comprehensive schools were to close in areas where sixth form colleges were established. The arguments were largely economic. MacFarlane confirms that,

A sixth form college drawing pupils from several secondary schools, would be able to offer a greater variety of courses for the 16+ age group than a comprehensive school. .... A sixth form college would attract well qualified staff and use them more economically. (MacFarlane, (1978) : 36)

MacFarlane also acknowledges that selection was beginning to occur at 16, because the sixth form of a school had traditionally been offered only to pupils gaining sufficient entrance qualifications.

Clearly, the system whereby admission to the sixth form was dependent upon passing four or five 'O' levels was extremely wasteful of the country's talents and could be very unfair ..... (MacFarlane, (1978) : 43)

However, MacFarlane acknowledges that sixth form colleges are 'open access', open to all, who 'would benefit as a student, or merely as a person, from going on with his education beyond the age of sixteen.' (MacFarlane, (1978) : 46)

Whilst MacFarlane, ((1978) : 42), acknowledges that, 'Comprehensive education is concerned with equality', he explains that,

The natural clientele of such a college will obviously be those pupils who have gained most from their experience at school, (...) Those who have experienced neither academic success nor any form of personal fulfilment at school are likely to turn to the work situation for a better deal. (MacFarlane, (1978) : 46)

Although sixth form colleges were open access, Maclure claims that, 'there is certainly a temptation for colleges to pursue the prestige attached to preparing students for university and polytechnic entrance.' (Maclure (1991) : 35) Shorter, (1994) confirms that, in sixth form colleges, 'their clientele was usually mainly interested in academic success.' He goes on to acknowledge that,

As a marketing device this was most effective to young adults and their parents, in providing both 'freedom', open support and subtle direction in institutions of manageable size. This appeared to be in contrast with the vast, impersonal, world of the FE College. (Shorter, (1994) :463)

Sixth Form Colleges, were a significant element in post 16 education in the two decades before the passing of the 1992 'Further and Higher Education Act'. (.....) These ..... colleges generally had an immediate effect in increasing the post-16 participation rate. (.....) Some independent schools also found them a potential competitor, offering wide, high quality, free 'A' level provision.... (Shorter, (1994) : 461-462 )

### 1.5.3 The Role of Further Education Colleges

Bates argues that, 'historically the success and achievements of these (Further Education) institutions have not been readily recognised by those who have had little contact with them. (Bates, (1994) :6) He goes on to observe that

despite this apparent 'ignorance' the sector has developed to the point where it is the largest provider of full time courses post 16. Colleges in this sector offer a range of vocational and non-vocational courses that is unsurpassed anywhere else in the post 16 sector. (Bates, (1994) : 7)

During the early 1980s, the provision of courses in colleges of further education was rationalised under the Business and Technician Education Councils, (BTEC). Throughout the same period the FE sector had to reflect;

- a) Declining numbers of courses for the more traditional manufacturing industries, accompanied by a wide range of courses to cope with training in new technologies;
- b) An increase in demand for general and continuing education;
- c) Pre-employment courses reflecting youth unemployment; (Parkes (1985) :161)

Snell, (1992) observes,

The absence of a clear definition for FE is reflected in both its structure and method of operation. The service is essentially pragmatic and entrepreneurial in the way it works. (Snell, (1992) : 83)

Maclure argues that although colleges of further education have a 'key role' to play in the education of 16-19 year olds, 'FE is not simply, or even primarily, about the 16-19s. (Maclure, (1991) : 51) Further Education offers services to all students over 16, and no-one attends under compulsion. The lack of compulsion in Further Education, means that 'FE depends on attracting students by the quality of what it offers.' (Maclure, (1991) :52).

The considerably diversity of the FE sector, suggests that the ways in which these colleges will respond to competition, and the need to become more

'responsive' to customers' demands, will show considerable variation. Snell claims that,

Marketing as a systematic approach to the development of FE was developed in the first half of the 1980s. It arose as the result of official concern expressed by the Audit Commission and by HM Inspectorate about the lack of responsiveness and effective promotion within the service. (Snell, (1992) : 87)

The emphasis on competition between post sixteen colleges, is likely to change the balance between the various different kinds of post sixteen provision in a local area. 'A market model, by definition largely eliminates the local authority planning function.' (Maclure, (1991) : 83) The colleges whether nominated as sixth form colleges, or further education colleges will have to respond to the needs and wants of clients, including potential students. 'Each college will be a semi-autonomous, competitive unit.' (Maclure, (1991) :85) Unlike schools, colleges are not required to provide study in any compulsory areas but, 'the Funding Council will set targets for them to achieve, and these will be based on each college's estimation of their 'market' as projected in their business plans'. (Bates (1994) 6)

However, in 1992, a new sector was created, comprising sixth form colleges and further education colleges, when 'five hundred institutions were established as independent corporations with charitable status, funded through a newly established Further Education Funding Council.' (Bates, (1994) :6) 'The funding arrangements under the aegis of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) have openly encouraged a competitive culture within which FE institutions compete with neighbouring institutions in an attempt to gain a larger share of the market place.' (Foskett and Hesketh (1995) : 1) Post sixteen colleges have been more actively involved in marketing since 1992, to recruit more students each year in order to retain their funding. As a consequence of this reform, the differences between sixth form colleges, tertiary colleges and further education colleges, are likely to gradually diminish in the future.

The next section summarises the aims and issues of the present research.



## 1.6 The Focus of the Study

During 1991, when the research study was conceived, the researcher worked as a middle manager and teacher as part of a marketing team in a sixth form college in the south of England. There were 850 full time students attending the college aged 16-19, and a small number of adults on short courses. The college caters for the south of the county, encompassing several towns and a city, and suburbs on the border of an adjacent county. The marketing plan states that,

The college is narrowly focused on general education with about 750 students taking 'A' level and 85 taking GCSE<sup>2</sup>s, and a limited number taking vocationally based courses in secretarial subjects. Competition for this general education market comes from (...) FE college, (...) Sixth Form College, (...) Catholic school sixth form, and the sixth forms of several independent schools, including the (...) grammar school sixth form. (currently, 30% of full time students are from the independent sector) (Molyneaux, (1992) : 1)

Hemsley-Brown, (1991) in a case study of the sixth form college, concluded that ,

the increased attention to marketing from 1985 onwards, which has included drawing attention to the pass rates, and publicity aimed at the independent sector, resulted in an increase in student numbers from 1988 onwards. (Hemsley-Brown, (1991) :106)

A number of questions were raised in connection with the marketing strategies adopted by the college, during the late 1980s. The research by Hemsley-Brown (1991), highlighted a number of key questions which demanded further enquiry. Firstly,

Since 1985 the results have improved, and the number of students at the college has increased - is there any correlation between the entry qualifications of students, and the pass rate at 'A' level? (Hemsley-Brown, (1991) : 106)

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<sup>2</sup> General Certificate of Secondary Education, (GCSE), Ordinary Level Examinations, ('O' level) and Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) grade 1, are all regarded as equivalent to GCSE grades 'A', 'B' or 'C' - a 'pass' is therefore referred to throughout as the equivalent of 'GCSE grade 'C' or above'

The college marketing team had emphasised the pass rates at 'A' level prominently in the marketing literature, and exhibition material, during the 1985 - 1990 period especially. To inform the marketing process, and future planning, it would be advantageous to determine whether such promotional activities had attracted better qualified students, and whether the higher pass rates could be attributed to a significant increase in the entry qualifications of sixteen year old entrants. Secondly,

the proportion of ex independent school pupils has risen since 1985. (...) There might be some evidence in the research for claiming that enhanced choice increases inequality, because evidence of class bias is introduced. (Hemsley-Brown, (1991) :109)

The marketing team members had targeted independent sector schools between 1984-5 and 1988, and it was becoming apparent that students' home addresses were much further afield than during the earlier years of the college's existence, (1979-83). Had the marketing activities excluded applications from local school pupils? Was there a gradual shift in the geographical catchment area of the college, because of the marketing activities undertaken during the 1980s? Thirdly, 'students responding to a survey claimed that their reason for choosing the college was 'the results are high' (94%).' (Hemsley-Brown, (1991) :109)

The current sixth form college students quoted the promotional slogans written by the marketing team, when answering questionnaires about their reasons for choosing the college. It became clear that to identify the patterns of choice and decision making among sixteen year olds in the local area surrounding the college, attention needed to be given to underlying reasons, and intentions, which would be unlikely to come to light through a student or consumer questionnaire. A study of the decision making processes of 14-16 year olds over a longer period, might more accurately and reliably inform the marketing process. Fourthly,

the popularity of the college has allowed selection to continue and students of low ability are excluded. The college appears to be under no pressure to respond to the needs of students outside the 'A' level market. (Hemsley-Brown, (1991) :110)

The marketing activities were wholly controlled and directed by the senior staff, but the courses which were set up to meet the needs of non - 'A' level students were declining, and student numbers on one year courses were reducing each year, with no explanation provided. The college had gained a reputation for 'A' level courses, but it was not clear what mechanism was in operation to reduce the number of applications from students with lower qualifications, so dramatically. This research aims to investigate these issues, and seek connections between the change in the qualifications and backgrounds of the sixteen year old intake, and the marketing activities of the college during the 1980s.

### 1.7 Key Research Issues

Fundamental questions which need to be addressed seem to be, on the supply side,

- \* How did an open access sixth form college respond to a falling rolls situation?
- \* What effect did the marketing efforts during the 1980s have on future cohorts of sixth formers?
- \* How has the population of the college changed during the period since it became open access?
- \* What does the numerical data indicate in terms of the changing qualifications and backgrounds of the pupils attending the college?
- \* Is there any evidence to suppose that 'excellence' will result from the competitive environment in which colleges are expected to operate - excellence is an elusive quality in education?
- \* Has the 'quality of education' provided 'improved' during the period?
- \* How will 'quality' be measured? Are the examination results higher - and how do they relate to the entrance qualifications of applicants?

On the supply side of the market, using statistical analysis of data base

material, the research sets out to;

- a) examine the changes in the descriptive profiles of students attending the college during the period of study;
- b) determine whether the catchment area has changed significantly;
- c) examine the entrance and exit qualifications of individuals to determine any significant correlations between the examination achievement at GCSE, and 'A' level. (see Chapter 5)
- d) examine the effects of marketing strategy on any increase in social inequality in post sixteen education.
- e) contribute to an understanding of 'responsiveness' by examining ways in which colleges respond to competition in the educational market place.

On the demand side, there were a number of issues raised which require investigation,

- \* Is there a mismatch between the reasons potential students give when they are questioned, and the underlying reasons implied by the choice they eventually make?
- \* Will pupils choose colleges which are more 'effective' and reject 'ineffective' colleges'?
- \* Will all students have access to the information they need, in order to make well informed decisions about colleges?
- \* Is it fair to accuse all organisations which operate in a market culture, of manipulative promotional techniques? How biased is marketing information, and will colleges be guilty of this manipulation?

The research's main intentions were - on the demand side of the market, to

- a) examine the reasons and underlying motives, provided by sixteen year olds, for the decision they make when choosing a post sixteen college;
- b) to improve and extend understanding, and knowledge of the underlying mechanisms which constitute a decision making process in connection with choice of post sixteen college;
- c) provide information to assist the development and improvement of promotional material available to assist students in choosing an appropriate college for their needs;

The research which took place between January 1992 and November 1993 involved, on the demand side, a multi-site study, based on interviewing fourteen to sixteen year olds over a period of two years, and interviewing Vice Principals responsible for marketing in three colleges. (Additionally, questionnaires were administered to the same sixteen year olds, during interviews, and by post.) The researcher believes that a study of the responses of interviewees over a long period - of two years, and in particular, observation and analysis of final outcomes, together with interviewees' reflections on choices, will provide sufficient data to inform the search for underlying meaning, and rigorous analysis, and will enable conclusions to be reached which might be closer to a 'view of reality.' (Lofland and Lofland (1984) : 71) Through the process of investigation, examination, reflection and analysis, the researcher expects to gradually clarify and elucidate the issues related to the research questions. (see Chapter 7)

## **1.8 Summary**

This chapter has considered the historical background and introduction of a market culture in the post sixteen sector, and examined the framework and ideology of free market principles, in relation to education. The key elements, and key criticisms of the main aspects of markets and marketing were explored, and identified. The background and historical development of post sixteen provision was described, and included, the historical development and ethos of sixth form colleges and further education colleges, and participation trends in the 16-19 year old age group. The final section outlines the proposed methodology, key research questions, key issues, and aims of the research.

Chapter 2 will discuss aspects and issues relating to the development of a market culture in post sixteen education, focusing on the nature and dimensions of marketing, including notions of responsiveness, and quality in

educational markets. Chapter 3 is an analysis of choice, decision making, and rationality, followed by decision making strategies and models. Chapter 4 provides a description and discussion of the research methodology in connection with the study of this thesis.

Chapter 5 focuses on the presentation of survey research findings, and provides statistical data, and graphical material to support analysis of the findings of the study in relation to the 'supply side' research questions. Chapter 6 is a discussion and analysis of data connected with the supply side of the marketing post sixteen colleges. Chapter 7 provides descriptions, and discussion of the findings, and results of interviews and questionnaires in relation to the 'demand side', research questions. Chapter 8 is a discussion and analytical critique of the implications of the findings of the study in relation to the 'demand side' of marketing, and Chapter 9 provides a summary and conclusion to the thesis.

## **Chapter 2**

## CHAPTER 2

### MARKETING, RESPONSIVENESS AND QUALITY

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines issues related to marketing in education, focusing on the origins of an enhanced market culture in post compulsory education, and the discipline of the market, including definitions of marketing. An examination of the criticisms of a market culture in education follows, and the concept of competition, with an emphasis on the importance of the client in education markets, is discussed. Finally, consideration is given to the claim that enhanced competition between colleges, through marketisation, improves 'responsiveness' and leads to an improvement in 'quality'.

'The conservative Government in the UK has over time introduced complex administrative regulations designed to create a highly structured market of educational choice.' (Ranson, (1994) : 334) The educational choice initiative is based on the belief that the market is a better way of bringing about the necessary changes in education. Walford explains that these changes were largely made

in the name of increased choice and competition between institutions. Institutions are now to be free to compete in the market and provide whatever services the local community requires. (Walford, (1994) :103)

If choice is to become a vehicle for educational improvement, then colleges need be prepared, and in a position to respond to student demands and preferences. Schools and colleges must provide a mechanism which will enable them to respond to and influence the preferences expressed by potential students who select amongst the school sixth forms and colleges available. Lynton Gray, in 'Marketing Educational Services' (1989), claims that marketing is

now established as a necessary part of the



management function in the post-school sectors. Colleges recognise that they are competing for a declining number of 16 year olds. (Gray, (1989) : 49)

## **2.2 The Origins of an Enhanced Market Culture in Post Compulsory Education**

In 1985, colleges were explicitly urged to become more businesslike and entrepreneurial in their operations by the Audit Commission document, 'Obtain Better Value From Further Education'. Greater competition between institutions in the market place was emphasised, and in 1989 a market led approach to education and training was encouraged with the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act. The 1992 Further Education Act established all colleges of further education and sixth form colleges as independent institutions. MacFarlane acknowledges that,

Conservative Government thinking, with its emphasis on competition and the virtues of the market place as a means of raising post 16 participation, coupled with distrust of LEAs and educational experts, gave them little alternative. (Shorter, (1994) : 461)

'The organising principles of the market make assumptions about the public, about their orientation capacities and resources.' (Ranson, (1993) : 334)

The four principal assumptions are concerned with, promotional and communication issues, as a way of increasing participation in post sixteen education; assumptions about the responsiveness of colleges; the promotion of a fully integrated system of post sixteen education; and factors associated with competition, which are claimed to be 'effectiveness', 'efficiency' and 'cost effectiveness'.

Firstly, during the 1980s, when the Conservative government were wrestling with an economic recession and the rise in unemployment, attention was focused on Further Education, and a series of government documents was released in an attempt to encourage FE colleges to provide more appropriately trained school leavers for the needs of industry. Writing in

1985, Parkes, observed that,

In the United Kingdom, **participation rates** for 16-19 year olds under schools or FE regulations, full or part time, have until recently been less than 40 per cent. (...)The volume of post 16 provision, whether education, vocational preparation or training, is of a lower order than all other EEC countries except Greece. (Parkes, (1985) : 160)

By promoting a marketing culture in further education, (through the document, 'Education and Training for the 21st Century), the government hoped to

\* extend the range of services offered by school sixth forms and colleges, so that young people face fewer restrictions about what kind of education or training they choose and where they take it up. (DES, (1991) : 3)

The document acknowledged that these proposals were ambitious and required 'major cultural change in our attitudes towards further education and training.' (DES, 1991 :3) The fundamental change would be in the relationships between post sixteen colleges and their clients, students, as well as employers. This change was brought about through the creation of a competitive market in education in the belief that, 'Marketing contributes to the organisation's success by determining the kind of relationship it has to its consumers or the beneficiaries of its goods or services.' (Pardey, (1991) : 1)

Potential students need to be provided with information to enable them to choose between the services offered within the educational market place. **Promotion** in some form, became essential for survival. Access to a constant supply of information became a fundamental necessity. This view is supported by Thomas who observes that,

The market must be competitive, allowing providers and consumers freely to enter or leave the market. They must also have information on all the available choices. Without such knowledge there is the risk that choices will not be as efficient as they could be. (Thomas, (1994) : 45)

Secondly, the enhanced marketisation of post sixteen education makes

assumptions about the 'responsiveness' of colleges. The Further Education system was accused of being entirely 'producer' led, and 'unresponsive' to the needs of students and employers. Pratley's Signposts (1980) map of 16-19 educational provision, sets out comprehensively the dilemmas of fragmentation in further education,

piecemeal and retrospective course design; the implementation of TEC<sup>1</sup> by lecturers without teacher training; feverish activity taking place all over the country; 70 professional bodies who award qualifications. (Parkes, (1985) : 163)

Pratley reinforces the view that 'provision tended to focus on the more able and on industry's needs: a reactive rather than proactive response' (Parkes, (1985) :163 A more rationalised system of post sixteen education was called for, including the restructuring of vocational education and training to emphasise the need for FE colleges to become more **responsive** to employment needs nationally and locally.

The Hampshire Vocational Education and Training Development Plan 1991 - 1994, states the commitment,

\* to achieve a post 16 curriculum with the following key characteristics, flexibility, **responsiveness**, (...) maximising the learning of all students; equality of opportunity; accessibility; (HCC, (1991) : 12)

Kotler and Fox (1985) define a 'responsive' educational institution as one which

makes every effort to sense, serve and satisfy the needs and wants of its consumers and publics within the constraints of its mission and budget. (...) and not only surveys current consumer satisfaction but also researches unmet consumer needs and preferences to discover ways to improve its service. It selects and trains its people to be consumer minded. (Kotler and Fox, (1985) : 29)

Thirdly, the Government White paper, 'Education and Training for the 21st Century' (1991 : 3) pledged to strengthen the Education Reform Act, (1988)

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<sup>1</sup> Technician Education Council

by building on these reforms so that a '**fully integrated system** of education and training exists, which allows a steady progression from school through further and higher education and training to work'. The overall aims listed in the DES (1991) document includes pledges to

- \* give colleges more freedom to expand their provision and respond more flexibly to the demands of their customers.

The Hampshire Document, Vocational Education and Training Development Plan 1991 - 1994, states that 'aim 1' is :

- \* to achieve a coherent system of educational provision post 16 (HCC, (1991) : 12)

Finally, the DES document emphasises levels of 'quality' assurance in further education, and states that 'colleges have primary responsibility for quality control' (DES, 1991 : 38) The document continues to expand on the nature of 'quality' by stating that,

- Colleges need effective systems to improve their quality and contribute to their own efficiency and effectiveness. (DES, (1991) : 38)

Choice theory supports the criticism of government monopoly and bureaucratic models, and aims to make education efficient, by subjecting the system to the influence of market forces. In this way, it is argued, an open competition is created, between one institution and another, making it imperative that colleges respond to student preferences in order to grow and prosper. However, 'the evidence is not yet strong enough to suggest that choice per se promotes educational excellence for all students.' (Braithwaite, (1992) : 51)

The Hampshire document (1991) makes a commitment to 'quality' by emphasising management, and aims

- \* to ensure that the post 16 service is managed and delivered as effectively efficiently and economically as possible (HCC, (1991) : 12)

Novak, (1991) supports the view that an emphasis on 'market forms of organisation, is the basis of efficiency, productivity, inventiveness, and

prosperity.' (Novak, (1991) :112, cited in Thomas H. (1994) :45) The claim that greater efficiency and effectiveness will result from providing greater choice is difficult to measure. The problem of defining effectiveness is discussed by Sizer, (1982) who asks,

what do we understand by the term 'effectiveness' and should a distinction be drawn between effectiveness and efficiency? Is an organisation effective if it achieves the objectives it has set itself, and should those objectives be appropriate to the needs of society? (Sizer, in McCormick, (1982) : 67)

## **2.3 The Nature and Dimensions of Marketing**

### **2.3.1 The Origins of the Discipline of the Market**

Most definitions of marketing focus on the belief that marketing is central to an organisation, and emphasise the needs of clients or customers. Gray writes optimistically about marketing in the compulsory education sector and attempts to view its introduction positively. He believes,

marketing is a central management task in any organisation. Every school benefits from the careful examination of the needs of its clients and customers, and from the resulting efforts to meet those needs more precisely. Services such as the education service are particularly vulnerable when they fail to listen to their customers... (Gray, in Foskett 1992, : 175)

Few educationalists would argue with the idea that students should be a central consideration when planning improvements in colleges. Few would argue with the need to promote education, and to increase its value amongst its various publics. The belief that marketing is aimed at increasing consumption of the commodity, is surely not distasteful either. Caldwell and Spinks, (1992 : 77) have developed a view of marketing compatible with an educational setting, which is based on the needs of the customers, and see competition as occurring only 'where such competition will not produce demonstrable harms, all in a manner that preserves or enhances the student's or society's well being.' (Coleman, (1994) : 364)

Adam Smith - the guru responsible for the philosophy of 'the invisible hand of market forces'. (Copley & Sutherland, (1995) : 62) believed that

the price that emerges from voluntary transactions between buyers and sellers - in short in a free market, could co-ordinate the activity of millions of people, each seeking his own interest, in such a way as to make everyone better off ....cooperation not conflict is the rule. (Kangun, (1972) :3)

Bradbury suggests an alternative concept of marketing as 'sensitively serving and satisfying human needs (.....) a democratic rather than an elitist technology (...) effective marketing is user oriented not seller oriented.'

(Bradbury, (1990) : 47) Gray supports this view, he believes that,

the school is there to provide a service, and to respond to the needs of its pupils and their parents and employers, and this lies at the heart of effective marketing. (Gray, in Foskett, (1992) : 177)

This view is further supported by Foskett, who introduces the important concept of 'dignity' in the relationship between the school and the parents.

He believes that

marketing is a carefully managed process that identifies the needs and demands of clients or customers rather than riding roughshod over them. For a service industry such as education it is essential that the dignity of this relationship is maintained at all times .... (Foskett, (1992) : 4)

In view of the changes in legislation in the 1980s and the marketisation of the education service, there is a need for colleges to consider their place in the community, and to reflect on the way in which the college is perceived by its various publics. Many colleges in the past have relied upon an unofficial grapevine which has conveyed information to people in the locality. Hoy and Miskel argue that colleges must 'change their organisational frameworks as well as their attitudes if they are to thrive.' (Bush, (1992) : 21)

Joseph (1976) argues that 'choice presentation may then take on the appearance of a faith - of unquestioned assertions about 'the overwhelming superiority' of the blind unplanned, uncoordinated wisdom of the market

over the rational but ineffective interventions of the state' (Joseph, (1976) : 57) The notion that the wisdom of the market will somehow be unplanned, and temporary, or a system which relies on the producers swaying from one idea to the next with no real knowledge of the demand or understanding of their own future is fearful, but is unnecessarily alarmist. There is no indication that the market model requires any less planning and forward thinking than the bureaucratic model. The market model far from being blind and unplanned requires careful research and forward planning based on the gathering of relevant information about potential student needs. The government however, has no intention of abandoning the education system to the vagaries of the market, as though its future were unplanned and unknown.

### **2.3.2 Criticisms of Issues Relating to Marketing in Education**

Foskett, (1992 : 3) reveals that 'issues relating to marketing and image are to be found on the agendas of governors' meetings and senior management team meetings with a frequency that would have been unthinkable two decades ago.' He goes on to recognise that, 'there is however, an unease that quickly emerges when such issues are discussed.' (Foskett, (1992) :3) Stigler, (1963) alleges that, 'the intellectual has never felt kindly toward(s) the marketplace; to him, it has always been a place of vulgar men and base motives,' - and further concern is shown by McMurtry, who believes that, 'the defining principles of education and of the market place are fundamentally contradictory in; their goals; their motivations; their methods; and their standards of excellence.' (McMurtry, (1991): 214). This view is further supported by Bradbury, who claims that,

marketing is regarded as an activity integral to commerce or to trade, but which should be alien to the professions or to the caring services. (Bradbury (1990) :46)

Why should the concept of marketing within education, engender so much

contempt mistrust and fear? One of the underlying attitudes which contributes to this hostility seems to be the impression that marketing is synonymous with 'aggressive selling'. Kotler et al., acknowledge these fears - and indeed warn that this approach would be inappropriate in education, they say that,

aggressive promotion can attract the wrong students to the college - students who drop out when they discover they don't have the qualifications to do the work or that the college is not what it was advertised to be. (Kotler et al., (1987) : 6)

This problem typifies one of the fears which many educationalists have, that by jumping on the 'marketing bandwagon', the education system will prostitute itself by mimicking the money grabbing, unscrupulous methods apparent in some business marketing strategies, and many educationalists find this unpalatable, and contradictory.

It is important to emphasise however that 'marketing is a great deal more than the advertising and other 'selling' activities which many people still associate with the term.' (Gray, (1991) : 2) Educationalists however, are very anxious about entering a world in which they fear profit, exploitation and biased promotion seem to feature as prominent elements. Kotler also amplifies this concern and says that,

the issue that frightens some observers is not that marketing will be ineffective but that it may be too effective. (.....) They fear that large scale promotion warfare will ruin the smaller institutions that cannot afford marketing and will create more competitive stalemate among the larger institutions. (Kotler et al. (1987) : 13)

Is there any evidence to support the prediction that this fate might befall the education service? Kotler, (1987) : 3) suggests, it is 'the fallacy of viewing marketing as primarily promotional' that is at the root of the fear of marketing. Marketers are thought to be unscrupulous - and not guided by moral conscience, but by profit. This is a principle upon which many believe the free market depends. This view is supported by Gromyko, who criticises the American free market saying that 'Americans cannot see that capital yields a profit to its owner only because other people are exploited.' He goes on to



observe that, 'profit is the pitiless filter through which everything to do with culture and art and the country's spiritual life has to pass' (Gromyko, (1989) : 95 & 97)

Organisations are not only accused of exploitation through the accumulation of profits, they are also frequently accused of exploitation through biased, manipulative promotional techniques. However, is it fair to accuse all organisations which operate in the free market of manipulation and bias? Are all free market enterprises guilty? Kangun found caustic support for this argument in Sinclair Baker's writing.

To increase sales almost anything goes - misrepresentation, deception, lies, unless actionable. (...) This attitude inevitably breeds the permissible lie - the half truth, (...) A half truth is generally the worst half. (Sinclair Baker, (1969) in Kangun, (1972) : 100)

Might colleges tell only half truths about themselves in order to encourage more students to join a course or attend the college? How may this eventually affect their reputation and the number of students applying to the school? Research may need to monitor the progress of this form of promotion to see if it emerges in the educational market place.

In summary, Foskett, (1992) quotes Megson and Baber (1986) and Keen and Greenall (1987) to provide an astute synopsis of the way in which marketing is viewed by some, as a 'threat to current practice'. He describes these threats in figure 2.1 provided below:

### **Figure 2.1**

#### **Threats to current practice**

- 1 It is seen as the intrusion of an alien concept, an idea that has no origin in education, and which traditionally has played no role in it.
- 2 It is seen as the spread of commercial ideas to the more altruistic world of education.
- 3 It is seen as a retreat from the school's central focus on teaching.
- 4 It may be seen as another example of the growth of the 'administrative' function in schools.
- 5 It is regarded by some as the misuse of scarce

financial resources and the channelling of those resources into non-educational areas.

6 Perhaps most significantly, marketing and public relations are seen as manipulations of the truth and hence both immoral and contradictory to the aims of pedagogy. (Foskett, (1992): 3-4)

### **2.3.3 Developing a Model of Marketing for Education**

Post sixteen colleges have been criticised for being unresponsive to change, and in particular, unresponsive to the needs and expectations of their clients. Can educationalists accept the preferences and demands of the 'clients' over and above their own convictions however? How well does post sixteen education fit a 'market model' or are there unsurmountable problems to be overcome? Keep is not convinced that the managerial models operating within private business have anything valuable to offer educationalists. He warns us that,

there is a risk that, if the education system and schools are not presented with a critical and up to date analysis of managerial techniques, they will find themselves adopting practices whose effectiveness is now being called into doubt. (Everard, (1986) in Keep, (1992) : 52)

Surely this concern would imply that marketing should be approached with the alacrity and rigorous research of a good scholar, rather than the skepticism of the unschooled? It seems therefore wise to investigate and analyse the managerial models, practices, and strategies, considered successful in the business world very critically, before recommending these as paradigms suitable for adoption in educational management. (see appendix a - information needed for planning and control)

The hostility which some writers in education have shown towards the 'marketisation' of education is sometimes generated by philosophical speculation about the outcome of wholeheartedly applying free market principles, operating in manufacturing industries, directly to the education

service, and revealing substantial mismatches in doctrine. McMurtry, who compares education and the market, to reveal conflicts in this way, argues that,

It follows therefore that to understand the one in terms of the principles of the other as has increasingly occurred in the application of the market model to the public educational process is absurd.  
(McMurtry, (1991) : 216)

Such speculation often disregards any valuable lessons which might be learned from a market model, and focuses only on the problems. Such speculation also relishes the discovery of inevitable conflicts by making direct comparisons with manufacturing industries, and a non profit making service organisation, such as a school or college.

Good researchers and educationalists rarely start without considering the knowledge gained by others in a similar position to themselves, even though some of the philosophy might be outdated, or inappropriate. The challenge of building a marketing model appropriate to education is surely an exciting new voyage and needs to be undertaken by those who understand and care about the future of the education service.

There is a good deal of support among writers for the idea that colleges would benefit from promoting themselves more effectively. Bradbury, believes that colleges have already informally undertaken some form of marketing, although they would never describe the activity in this way.

Marketing offers a way of rendering professional those things which schools have been notoriously amateurish about - their internal analysis of their own strengths and weaknesses; their forward planning; their communication and negotiation with parents and with the social environment in which they operate.  
(Bradbury, (1990) : 47)

Educationalists need to ensure that they have some control over the information which makes up the school or college's reputation. They need to work to build up a communication network using all available channels of information exchange, to ensure that they communicate effectively with all those people who have an interest in the education service. Kangun

believes that in this respect, 'the business heritage of marketing provides a useful set of concepts for guiding all organisations.' (Kangun, (1972) :71)

There is no suggestion that the marketing strategies which have been designed for business and commercial purposes are appropriate to the situation in a school or college, but the wisdom and experience of marketing in other spheres must surely be the best place to begin building a marketing model appropriate to an educational setting.

#### 2.3.4 The Clients in Educational Markets

Definitions of marketing emphasise the importance of the 'client', the consumer or the 'customer'. Who are the 'clients' in education? The students, employers or a wider audience? A college serves many people in the community. The debate about choice in education and the recent recession has made it all too clear that everyone has an opinion about education. Kotler and Cox are skeptical about consumers' ability to express what they are searching for, he suspects that the onus is upon the marketers to **anticipate** and **speculate** about future needs, and through a process of innovation create a new product which matches the demands of the market. They say, that the

consumers' ability to express these needs, to verbalise what they want, particularly when they do not know what is technologically feasible, is limited. (Kotler and Cox, (1984) : 39)

Markin takes an optimistic and intelligent line, and suggests

the possibility of altering consumer behaviour, or affecting it favourably, depends to a considerable extent upon the marketer's ability to both structure and restructure consumers' beliefs or attitudes. (Markin, (1969) : 197)

If we consider the possibility that the producer is able to affect consumer behaviour and is not a blind slave to clients' unregulated demands, then the business of satisfying consumer and client needs is more palatable and

indeed, very challenging. Colleges have often in the past been guilty of ignoring the perceptions of students and employers and the wider community and imposing their own professional judgement of the issues, without indulging in any form of persuasion. Davies and Ellison who approach the phenomenon constructively suggest that,

teachers should..... be striving to assist their clients to a more sophisticated interpretation of the product or service and of the school's success criteria ..... (Davies and Ellison, (1991) : 3)

The process of working in a more responsive way, is a cycle, which relies upon gathering information and responding to client needs, as well as ensuring adequate information is provided for potential students to enable them to make well informed choices.

### **2.3.5 The Significance of Competition**

The White Paper 'Education and Training for the 21st Century' stated that vocational qualifications and colleges of further education are still undervalued. We want to see full equality of status between them and their academic counterparts. (DES, (1991) : 2)

One of the major objectives of the marketisation of post sixteen education was to bring about not only a change in the way post sixteen colleges operate, but to bring about a total revolution. A revolution would be required to transform two systems, sixth forms and sixth form colleges, and further education and technical colleges, into one system whereby colleges were given equal status but were recognised as different in purpose. Creating equality of status between vocational and academic education could not be achieved through legislation alone. A totally new structure needed to emerge, along with a change in attitude in the minds of the public, the students, as well as educationalists. The enhancement of a market system to generate greater 'competition', was viewed as the most appropriate mechanism to achieve this end.

The principal reason which has been given when public monopolies have

been privatized and broken into separate units, is that it will create competition and provide the public with more choice. Politicians have persuaded the electorate that if a large public monopoly is privatized, and forced to compete in a free market for business, then the individual will benefit in a number of ways. The individual will benefit it is argued, because in a competitive climate the producers are forced to consider customer demands, and reduce their costs, whilst improving quality or value for money, to sell their goods against fierce competition from other producers. In colleges, is 'value for money' a worthwhile aim for the benefit of students in the system? How will 'value for money' manifest itself?

Beneath the rhetoric of 'choice', 'cost effectiveness,' 'excellence', and 'individual freedom', is the belief that 'opening up the educational system to the discipline of the free market will solve the problem of social authority and hierarchy; that different types of colleges would emerge for different types of mind / people' (Flew, (1987) : 220). Snell, (1992) claims that a free market system in education will promote 'diversity'. (in Foskett, (1992) : 83) Kotler speculates on the possibility of increasing diversity amongst institutions operating in a competitive free market climate.

The real contribution of marketing thinking is to lead each institution to search for a more meaningful position in the larger market. .... Marketing competition at its best creates a pattern of varied institutions, each clear as to its mission, market coverage, need specialisation, and service portfolio. (Kotler et al., (1987) : 13)

Kerchner and Boyd, (1987) are not convinced that diversity will result from greater competition in the educational market place however. Such diversity can only occur when there are a sufficient number of organisations within a locality to offer a good range of options. There is some evidence that colleges who once cooperated well within their own locality are unwilling to enter into a battle over potential students, and prefer to continue with a collaborative style. Keep, (1992) suggests this approach is warranted, and finds that in industry this behaviour is not uncommon for mutual benefit.

In order to enter the competition however, a college needs to be able to make claims which distinguish it from competitors. This does not however

mean that the organisation must demonstrate superiority in all respects. The organisation needs to establish a position in the market place, based on its strengths, and find a way of conveying what those strengths are, to the most appropriate people, or potential students. Smith claims that,

product differentiation is securing a measure of control over the demand for a product by advertising or promoting differences between the product and the product of competing sellers. (Smith, in Cox, (1982) : 44)

### **2.3.6 The Principle of Market Segmentation**

Many educational institutions think of themselves as organisations which encourage everyone, from all social, economic, racial (and frequently academic) backgrounds, to enter the institution, and gain from the benefits the school or college has to offer. The philanthropic view relies on the premise that it is not ethical to select students on the basis of for example, social class, race, or economic grouping, and in the age groups receiving compulsory schooling, it has not been considered appropriate to select on the basis of ability, or academic potential, (since the dismantling of the tripartite system.) The comprehensive ideal in compulsory education is based on this philosophy. The philosophy that under the age of sixteen all students, as far as possible, should receive their education in an environment which is socioeconomically, academically and racially unsegregated.

However, in a market orientated climate, an institution is more likely to be successful if it sets out to attract a 'cluster' of people with similar attributes to those who have already shown their support for the institution. The likelihood of attracting a very different type of student from those who already support the organisation may prove less fruitful. Lunn, (1968) continues by saying that,

our basic approach is not to try to fit the consumer to a predetermined set of classifications; it is rather to derive new classifications from a study of the

consumer. (Lunn, in Cox, (1968) : 49)

'Markets consist of buyers, and buyers are likely to differ in one or more respects. They may differ in their desires, resources, geographical locations, buying attitudes, buying practices, and so on. Any of these variables can be used to segment a market.' (Kotler, (1982) : 217) The possibility of dividing potential students into different groups, would suggest that 'market segmentation' might be a way of analysing the characteristics of potential pupils and students and dividing them into identifiable categories, to be provided for in the educational market place. (see for example Cannon, (1988) :110) If a college already attracts a group of students who are identifiable by, for example socioeconomic grouping, academic background and aspirations, then it is more likely to be successful in market terms if it attempts to attract people from this specified group, than if it attempts to identify a group, such as low wage earners, or people with learning difficulties, who are not presently represented in the institution.

In order to carry out promotion successfully the group of people for whom the service is most appropriate need to be identified, and targeted. 'If marketing a school centres on the concept of effective communication, then it is vital to have a clear view of the target audience.' (Davies and Ellison, (1991) : 11; also Kotler, (1982) :104) For many schools and colleges, the process of identifying organisational strengths, and identifying specific groups of potential students is a major task, and is not within the experience of educational organisations who have been operating within a bureaucratic system. Markin explains that, 'Product differentiation and market segmentation are both efforts to capitalise on differential advantage.' (Markin, (1969) : 244)

How do business organisations segment their consumers? What factors are taken into account? Cannon, (1988) lists some main issues considered when segmenting a group of people into identifiable potential clients, and these categories may be appropriate in education. Kotler's, (1982) description of 'market segmentation' offers a number of possible interpretations, some of which might prove to be feasible in a school or college situation. A list of different types of market segmentation is provided



in figure 2.2 below. (a detailed list of categories to assist with market segmentation is provided in appendix b)

**Figure 2.2**

**Market Segmentation**

There are five basic patterns of market coverage possible with a product market segmentation scheme. Product market concentration, product specialism, market specialisation, selective specialisation, and full coverage.

*Product market concentration* - consists of an organisation concentrating on only one market segment, (here teaching print journalism to adult learners).

*Product specialisation* - consists of the organisation deciding to produce only one product, here print journalism, for all three markets.

*Market specialisation* - consists of the organisation deciding to serve only one market segment (adult learners) with all the journalism products.

*Selective specialisation* - consists of the organisation working in several product markets that have no relation to each other except that each constitutes an individually attractive opportunity.

*Full coverage* - consists of an organisation making the full range of products to serve all the market segments.

(Kotler, 1982 : 105)

Smith is optimistic about the opportunities which target marketing through segmentation, offers colleges in an attempt to generate greater participation in further education, especially amid growing competition from other institutions. He observes that,

colleges are now booming in response to a rapidly rising staying on rate, and to a burgeoning demand from the new market segments that have been opened up. ( Smith, in Cox, (1982) : 46; )

### 2.3.7 Methods of Identifying Target Markets

Kerchner and Boyd support a conjecture, which is the concern of many educationalists opposed to the introduction of a free market - the fear that 'markets are particularly vulnerable to allocating services according to economic class.' (Kerchner and Boyd, (1987) : 101). There are however numerous lists of market segmentation methods, and there seems to be widespread agreement that markets can be segmented into groups using four major categories. Baker quotes Kotler, (1980) and groups the variables into

- \*Geographic
- \*Demographic
- \*Psychographic
- \*Behaviouristic (Baker, 1985) : 199)

Whilst this form of market segmentation might produce groups of target markets which also fall into socio-economic groups - social segregation is not inevitable. A college for example, targeting a group of students by age and geographical location will not necessarily attract students from a narrow socioeconomic band. However, the implications for marketing to 16-19 year olds, in a bid to increase participation is recognised by Chisnall who found that, 'in the 16 -19 group, three out of four from a professional background were continuing their education, compared with only one in four from homes of semi-skilled or unskilled workers.' (Chisnall, (1985) :115)

Kotler believes that organisations which fear competition, and anticipate falling numbers have much to gain from adopting a 'target marketing' approach, and suggests that even if competitors 'have already established dominance in all but a few segments of the market, the organisation might start to concentrate its marketing in one of the remaining segments.' (Kotler (1982) : 231) Kotler describes 'target marketing' as

a style of marketing where the organisation distinguishes between different segments making up the market, chooses one or more of these segments to focus on and develops market offers and market mixes tailored to meet the needs of each target market. (Kotler, 1982)

Colleges which have identified as a target market students who fall into a less advantaged socioeconomic segment, need to work hard to ensure they communicate effectively with students in this sector, to enable them to make a well informed choice. Murnane, (1986) believes that these students are less inclined to make vigilant searches for information to enable them to make well informed decisions. He claims that,

knowledge about and awareness of choices and how to assess them is class biased. The evidence so far is that the lower class parents are much less knowledgeable about available choices for their children than are parents from homes with high incomes. (Murnane, (1986) : 182 in Kangun, (1972) : 3)

It is important therefore to be aware of difficulties encountered when targeting the traditionally less advantaged groups in society, more specifically the problems of communication, and sifting of information required to inform potential students' choices. Gray points out that

a marketing perspective must contain centrally within it the clear recognition that the public service should be available to satisfy the needs of all its publics. This includes those groups traditionally disadvantaged in their access to high quality education. Marketing is a vital means by which such groups are first made aware of the opportunities available to them, and then helped to make full use of the services thus provided. (Gray, Foskett, (1992) : 178)

Market segmentation in practice addresses the perceptions of potential consumers. Psychographics, or life style research 'uses data related to the activities, interest, beliefs and opinions of consumers as well as demographic analyses.' (Chisnall, (1985) :112 The result of such an analysis produces different consumers or end users, which are listed as topologies. For example, segments identified by Wind, (1978 : 317) (investigating electronic consumer markets) include:

*'The Buffs'*. Persons who are enthusiastic and very knowledgeable about the products.

*'The Singles'*. Persons who live alone but demand good performance from the product.

*'The Professions'*. Persons who have a higher level of education and high incomes. (Baker, (1985) : 539)

It is one of the aims of the present research to consider possible 'typologies' of students at sixteen, and attempt to describe profiles of different kinds of students in the educational market place. By defining students as market segments, or decision makers in the market place, it might be possible for example, to determine a number of segments, and in particular a cluster of individual decision makers who are most susceptible to persuasion to remain in 16-19 education, rather than seeking employment.

### **2.3.8 Market Planning and Strategy**

All educational institutions are at present under pressure to introduce new programmes and procedures based on legislation devised by the government. However in addition to implementing these changes, the institution needs to plan and implement innovative improvements based on research and forecasting in order to plan for the future. Kotler and Cox claim that a marketing strategy needs to be based on the development of new initiatives, and anticipate and keep pace with change. They claim that

no market remains stable forever; needs change and technology moves ahead. Somewhere, a company - at home or abroad - introduces a new product that represents a significant improvement over existing ones. ...It almost certainly better anticipates users' needs. And the firms that have not heeded the central role of product strategy are suddenly vulnerable. (Kotler and Cox, (1984) : 41)

'The purpose of developing a clear set of institutional goals is precisely to keep the organisation from drifting into an uncertain future. The institution needs to have a clear picture of what kind of organisation it wants to look like at the end of the planning period.' (Kotler and Murphy, (1987) : 126)

Following an in-house assessment of the current situation, market research and information gathering, it is necessary to speculate upon a market

strategy, and begin work on a marketing plan (see appendix c) which will enable managers to produce an itinerary of intentions and goals to provide a more secure future for the organisation. In order to compose a thorough marketing plan, educational marketers need to undertake and analyse market research and market auditing, (see for example, Davies and Scribbins (1985)) to establish the current position. The information provided by these activities will enable managers to forecast more effectively and speculate about the current trends and future competitive position of the organisation in the market place. The table provided in appendix c expands on this market strategy and provides a more detailed indication of the kinds of changes which management might choose to follow in future planning and marketing. On the basis of research exploring potential students' views and perceptions of the college, managers might decide to act on the basis of a number of strategies. To alter some aspects of the college courses, or the college facilities, for example, on the basis of a consensus of opinion.

Kotler and Murphy believe that educational institutions 'should pay attention primarily to those strengths in which it possesses a differential advantage.' (Kotler and Murphy, (1987) : 125) By emphasising its strengths the organisation is in a better position to compete with other similar organisations in the market place. After completing a marketing audit and marketing research, the information discerned from these exercises can be used to enable organisations to put together promotional and advertising material in order to communicate the messages to potential students.

## 2.4 The Significance of Responsiveness and Innovation

Advocates of a free market system in education promote the idea of 'responsiveness', and the need to 'increase educational options' and make colleges more 'responsive to the diversity of needs, interests and values among families and groups.' (Archbald, (1991) : 4)

Public schools of choice have been promoted as a means for enhancing the **responsiveness** of public education to the concerns of the particular students

and families the schools serve. (Murnane, (1986) in  
Sosniak and Ethington, (1992) : 35)

The decision to enhance the market culture in post sixteen education and encourage greater competition between institutions, is based on the premise that institutions which are in competition with one another are forced to be responsive to the demands of clients. Bredo is concerned about the consequences of introducing such radical change and claims that, 'when an institution appears to have lost direction, a frequent response is to call for a change in the form of control.' (Bredo, (1987) : 67) Elmore, however is not convinced that such policy decisions have been thought through carefully, he points out fundamental questions in the choice 'dilemma' arguing that,

the first might be called the 'demand side' question. It poses the issue of whether the consumers of education should be given the central role in deciding what kind of education is appropriate for them. The second is the 'supply side' question. It poses the issue of whether the providers of education should be given the autonomy and flexibility to respond to differences in the judgements of consumers about what is appropriate to education. (Elmore, (1987) : 79)

The way in which persuasion has operated in choice issues, and the way in which voter preferences are shaped, is described perceptively by Dunleavy and Ward, (1981) who point out that,

public policy making is a two-way process. Voters have views which they communicate to the politicians, who try to give them what they want. Or else they try to make voters want what they have to give. Public choice writers have sometimes been accused of making a naive (and smug) assumption of consumer sovereignty, which ignores one side of the interaction. Politicians have 'state power' and use it to shape voters' preferences. (Dunleavy and Husbands, (1985) : 49-52)

An organisation which is highly responsive, it is argued is more effective because it is considered to be more resourceful and innovative, and in a better position to respond to rapid change, which is an important attribute in the current economic and technological climate. (For characteristics of

responsive organisations, see appendix d). Kotler claims that consumer-oriented organisations, are effective because they carry out, 'extensive research on the final customer. Consumers' habits, practices, and attitudes are well understood and constantly monitored. Unfilled consumer needs drive product development efforts.' (Kotler and Cox, (1984): 31) Kotler and Cox, claim that preoccupation with products, at the expense of responding to consumer needs inhibits growth and future success. (see also Davies and Ellison, (1991) : 3)

However, one precursor which all marketers must heed, is the possibility that in undertaking a marketing stance managers might fail to recognise the importance of creative, imaginative thinking, because it is **innovation** alongside research and speculation which enhance an organisations' chances of success. Those organisations which have been studied as examples of success in the market place are likely to have taken a risk or gambled on the direction they chose to follow. McKitterick, (1968) emphasises the need for companies to approach marketing in an 'innovative way' to create new markets. (McKitterick, cited in Cox, (1968 : 9)

In short, an educational institution must learn to think of itself not as producing services but as attracting pupils and students. They should be creating new markets, and new business, that will encourage potential students to want to attend that particular establishment, often as an alternative to leaving the education system altogether at the age of sixteen. In order to do this, schools and colleges need to strive to understand their own strengths thoroughly, and gather information about the attitudes, needs and expectations of their potential applicants.

## **2.5 Excellence, Improvement and Quality**

Some political writers, including Buchanan, (1977) Bastian et al., (1985) and Leonard, (1988) have claimed that the discipline of the market is important to encourage, 'an element of competition (..) because competition can, in the right circumstances, improve 'quality'.' (Leonard, (1988) :52)

The use of the word 'quality' is now as familiar a

piece of educational jargon in mission statements and school aims as the idea of 'the caring school'. Quality control, quality assurance, performance indicators, success criteria; how quickly these expressions have become part of the language of school managers. (Cobb, in Foskett, (1992) : 37)

The claim that 'choice' and 'competition' will improve excellence and quality, should be supported or denied by research data and analysis, but politicians frequently rely on rhetoric, and are often too impatient to legislate to await research findings. Brede believes that,

with respect to the claimed benefits of 'choice' or markets, both the argument that choice will boost standardized achievement scores and that market mechanisms will assure educational efficiency and responsiveness should be viewed skeptically. (Brede, (1987) : 70)

Are consumers in the market able to verbalise their own needs sufficiently fluently to guide the organisation towards the success it needs to survive? Might we presume that if a reduction in 'quality' proves to be profitable, then this is what the market will provide? Is there any evidence to show that consumers are more satisfied with 'low quality' goods? (See Packard, 1964). How should quality and excellence be judged? Are consumers sufficiently perceptive and discriminating to determine which services offer the best quality or standard of excellence? Is there evidence to support the view that a free market will ensure that the successful companies are those producing the 'higher quality' goods?

Ramsamy and Humphreys agree that 'the concept of quality is one for which it is difficult to agree a universally acceptable definition.' (1994 :136)

They quote Attree (1993) who identifies several interpretations of quality;

excellence; ideal; fitness for purpose and conformance to standards; meeting the customer's requirements; satisfying need and customer value. (Ramsamy and Humphreys (1994) : 136)

The elements of quality which need to be focused upon by a 'responsive organisation', committed to improving quality - operating in the market place



are considered to be, 'efficiency, effectiveness, appropriateness, accessibility and acceptability.' (Ramsammy and Humphreys, (1994) ;137)

Pring defines quality as 'reflected in the standards, explicit or implicit, to which reference is made and performance is judged.' In that sense, he claims, quality and standards are linked.' (Pring, (1992) : 6) Is there any evidence to suppose that 'excellence will result from the competitive environment in which schools and colleges are expected to operate? If this is so, how does this mechanism operate?

### **2.5.1 Results and National League Tables**

The argument seems to be that, in a market system where choice is paramount, 'the content and manner of teaching and learning (...) would become distinctive as a result of policy, this distinctiveness would serve the matching of students with schools most appropriate for them.' (Sosniak and Ethington, (1992) : 48) The belief that choice and competition will somehow ensure that students will benefit through improved achievement scores however is more difficult to explain or justify. 'There is no compelling reason why achievement scores should be affected in a uniform way by a change in the degree of control.' (Bredo, (1987) : 68)

The assumption seems to be that the popular colleges, must therefore be the most 'effective' or 'better' establishments, and that these colleges are popular because they achieve greater standards of excellence, compared with 'less popular' alternatives. However, Walford speculates that,

there is little evidence for equating 'popular' with 'good' (...). but it is not clear that the sum of many such choices will automatically lead to higher educational standards. (Walford, (1991) : 74)

The preoccupation with league tables and examination results in the years since GCSE was introduced, has raised the question of whether individuals might base their choice on the examination results particular institutions achieve, and their position in the local, or national league tables. Research

based on pupils' choice of school at 11 in the compulsory sector does not support this view. Hunter however, found that, 'few parents mentioned having consulted these.' (Hunter J., (1991) : 40) Thomas and Dennison, (1991 : 246) discovered in their research that, 'only a few mentioned examination results and curriculum provision as a factor in preferring a secondary school.'

However, there are constant discussions about league tables and speculation about why some colleges appear to achieve higher results in examinations, when others find themselves near the lower end of the scale. Bredo, explains one reason why some colleges might appear to improve achievement scores under a market driven system by asserting that,

the fact that selection effects are relatively strong makes it easy to be fooled into believing a new programme produces higher achievement when it simply attracts more educationally advantaged groups of students. (Bredo, (1987) :8)

## 2.6 Summary

Chapter 2 has been concerned with the nature and dimensions of marketing, including the discipline of the free market, and basic criticisms of free market principles in relation to education. The concepts of 'competition', 'responsiveness' and 'quality' were considered. The main benefits of the introduction of choice, and the free market in education are claimed to be, to encourage :-

a greater impetus to build closer relationships between educational institutions and their potential students;

all those people who have an interest in education to support the 'providers of the service' - or schools and colleges in their endeavours;

schools and colleges to consider the needs, aspirations and expectations of young people, their parents, and members of the local community, in

order to foster better communication and partnership between provider, policy maker, and client.

The result of this process in the hands of experienced teachers, educationalists and those who care about education, is a system which everyone is more prepared to support, to promote and above all, praise.

A study of how individuals make decisions about colleges should assist the researcher and the marketing student with the questions; what do students consider to be important deciding factors when they apply for courses in post sixteen colleges? Are there different types of students in the educational market place, and how can they be identified as different target markets? How do these different groups of students vary in the way they sift and analyse the information presented to them during their process of decision making? Chapter 3 will discuss research undertaken in the compulsory sector, and the post compulsory sector on the subject of choosing schools and colleges. Factors related to choice and decision making, including motivation, rationality and the affect of coercion on decision making, will be investigated.

# Chapter 3

## CHAPTER 3

### CHOICE, RATIONALITY AND DECISION MAKING

#### 3.1 Introduction

'The question of how people choose between alternatives is at the very heart of the social sciences.' (Baker, (1985) :163) This chapter will focus on the forces which determine how students, or consumers of education, might discriminate between the competitive alternatives offered to them in the 'educational market place' Baker argues that research and analysis of consumer behaviour is vital in a competitive market environment and explains that,

Through such analysis the marketer hopes that he will be able to determine some pointers which will enable him (sic) to predict how prospective buyers will act in the future. Based upon past observation, most practitioners subscribe to the view that individuals pass through a number of stages in coming to a decision .... (Baker (1992) : 174)

This chapter examines and summarises the available research on choice of school in the compulsory sector, and choice of post sixteen college in the post compulsory sector. The concept of 'choice', and of 'equity' are considered, and choice behaviour will be explored by focusing on the decision making processes, including rational and non rational models, and decision making strategies.

Friedman, (1980) warns of some of the considerations which should be heeded when implementing freedom of choice strategy. He believes that,

freedom is a tenable objective only for responsible individuals. We do not believe in freedom for madmen or children. We must somehow draw a line between responsible individuals and others, .....

(Friedman, (1980) : 53)

'Choice' is more than a political slogan, it has become the zeitgeist which is prescribed as a cure for all political and economic ills. There is a hint that 'choice' and the right to make one's own free choices is a universally accepted, and uncontroversial concept, 'its connotations of freedom and individual responsibility may make it seem self-evidently a 'good thing' requiring no careful justification.' (Edwards and Whitty, (1992) : 101)

### 3.2 Choice in the Compulsory Sector

Before the 1988 Education Reform Act, parents were obliged by LEAs, operating within a non-choice system, to send their child to a school nominated by the local authority. Research findings reveal that, 'the distance of a school from home has a major influence on the exercise of choice.' (Adler and Raab (1988 : 154). And, 'geographical proximity, rather than curriculum content was a major determinant of parental choice.' Elmore, (1987) : 85) (see also Bridge and Blackman, (1978): 82; Rasmussen, (1981): 58) A recent substantial Scottish study of how and why parents exercise choice concluded that,

most seem to adopt a humanistic rather than a technological perspective, being less concerned with measurable criteria of product than with the criterion of an atmosphere supportive of the child's well being and of its happiness. In fact, parents made very few references to examination results, other educational outcomes, or the quality or content of what was provided at the schools in question. (Edwards and Whitty, (1992) : 106)

Edwards and Whitty are concerned that because children may have such control over the choice of school, that, 'the child's own insistence on 'being with my friends' may also have a decisive localising influence on the final decision.' (Edwards and Whitty (1992) : 106). It is possible however that, taking into account the difficulties of gaining genuine undistorted accounts from parents and children, that parents take a number of factors into account when choosing a school, depending upon the choice available in the locality. West and Varlaam found that,

the child's wishes, ease of access - the school's academic record, and state of discipline, all emerge as important reasons, for a substantial majority of parents. (West and Varlaam (1991) : 208)

Research which set out to investigate choice in education has concentrated a good deal on choices made by parents. However,

it must be remembered that the pupil's view of the process is only one of several perspectives, and may not entirely agree with those of parents. As is the case with parents, they may be reticent to put forward reasons for choice which they feel may be unacceptable to the researcher. However, the views that pupils are prepared to put forward are worthy of study, for it is they who experience the school on a day to day basis. (Walford, (1991) : 69)

A study by West and Varlaam, however, concentrated on the views of pupils, and claimed that,

from a methodological viewpoint, it is interesting to note that both parents and pupils appear to use similar criteria when judging schools and making decisions about their choice of school at secondary transfer. (West and Varlaam, (1991) : 214)

Critics of school choice proposals, are most concerned that inequality will result from parental choice of school. That, 'poor families and racial minorities are less likely to have good information and more likely to face discriminatory admissions obstacles.' (Archbald, (1991) : 2) Research by Echols revealed that,

...higher social class families and better educated families were more likely to have chosen the private sector. They were also more likely to have chosen within the state sector. However, the relationship of choice to family background is weaker within the state sector. (Echols et al., (1990) : 213)

The main concern is that for the benefit of society, social integration should be promoted, and that it is 'the side effects of social integration which justify compulsory, publicly supported schooling.' (Bredo, (1987) : 73) Echols is concerned that increased choice in education contributes to social polarisation. He quotes Smith and Tomlinson who explain that,

we use two measures of family advantage; social class, as measured by the Register General; and the amount of parental schooling. (...) High social class is also associated with more frequent involvement in educational decisions, as indicated by contacts with the school. (Smith and Tomlinson, (1989); 181)

Ranson, (1993) suggests that

the market masks its social bias. It elides, but reproduces, the inequalities which consumers bring to the market place. (Ranson, (1993) : 337)

There is a possibility that certain marketing strategies may increase social inequality. Because a selection process occurs, in order to attract and secure specialised segments of the market, it is considered by Ranson to be a 'crude mechanism of social selection.' (Ranson, (1993) : 337) Chisnall, acknowledges the link between social class and Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, (see section 3.5) and observes that,

As people ascend the social ladder, their awareness of life enlarges; they tend to broaden their horizons. The higher one is in the social scale, the more comprehensive are one's values; there is a greater sense of participation in the community, as well as an increase in self-expressive attitudes. Self-fulfilment is more valued and more pursued as a real possibility. (Chisnall, (1985) : 137)

Much of the early research and debate in the sociology of education, and the educational policy derived from it, 'was constructed around the ideas of equality of education, in particular, equality of opportunity.' The possibility that a market approach to education might lead to 'inequality', is supported by the research of Adler and Raab, (1988) and by an article which appeared in the TES by Thomas, (1988). Thomas speculated that the market system might lead to greater inequality, when the education service has previously been committed to promoting greater equality. This concern appears to be supported by the research undertaken by Adler and Raab, who concluded that

all in all the evidence in Edinburgh and Dundee suggests that the Parents' Charter is leading to the emergence of a number of magnet and sink school and thus to increased inequalities in educational



provision. (Adler and Raab, (1988) : 177)

Other writers, including for example, Lieberman, (1988), Bredo (1987) and Kerchner (1987), conclude that 'markets are particularly vulnerable to allocating services according to economic class.' Researchers undertaking studies related to educational choice of school expressed concern that the effects of selection, on the basis of social class, might be a serious drawback to the 'choice' philosophy. (See for example, the work of, Elliot, 1982; West, Varlaam and Mortimer, 1984; Alston, 1985; Stillman and Maychell, 1986; Petch, 1986; Echols et al, 1990; Hunter, 1991; West Varlaam, 1991)

### **3.3 Choice in the Post Compulsory Sector**

Studies in connection with decision making in the post sixteen market place are still relatively lacking, as the subject is still in its infancy. However, two research studies concerned with post sixteen decision making and choice are currently available, Foskett and Hesketh (1995), and Taylor, (1992) .

Foskett and Hesketh argue that, 'the decision making process engaged in by school leavers are diverse, interconnected and, over time, subject to change.' (Foskett and Hesketh (1995) : 1) Research by Foskett and Hesketh examined the supply side of the market through interviews in FE colleges with the member of staff responsible for marketing. The research concentrated on the way in which each further education institution 'interpreted local demand for their courses' and considered the 'impact of funding changes, brought about by the FEFC'. (Foskett and Hesketh, (1995) : 4)

The study is concerned firstly with, the 'motivators or catalysts of choice', and concentrate on 'parental pressure' to choose, and 'the recognition of the need to consider choices by pupils themselves.' They suggest that

correlation of the specified catalyst with social class indicated that parental pressure was a much stronger influence amongst working class children than amongst middle class children, for whom the most

frequently cited catalyst was their own individual thinking. (Foskett and Hesketh, (1995) : 5)

Foskett and Hesketh, (1995 : 6) suggest two 'conceptualisations that can assist an understanding of the decision process, specifically at 16, (...) first, the '**composite consumer**'. This suggests that decisions throughout schooling are made by parent and child, in a 'partnership', whereby the parent will dominate in the relationship in younger children, and as the child becomes older his or her views will increasingly prevail. The second concept of '**framed fields of reference**' suggests that although pupils may 'dominate in the composite consumer relationship, (...) the decisions made are 'within frames of reference defined by their parents'. Foskett and Hesketh argue that,

the pupil's decision may not coincide with the parents' perception of the optimal post 16 trajectory, but will rarely be outside the parents' perception of an acceptable post sixteen pathway. (Foskett and Hesketh (1995) : 6)

Finally, Foskett and Hesketh (1995 : 7) found a number of 'key differences between choice of academic courses and choice of vocational courses'.

They claim that,

significant differences between social classes emerge from the study, with 50% of working class pupils indicating their choice to be an academic course, while nearly 80% of middle class students have opted for such a pathway. (Foskett and Hesketh, (1995) : 7)

In their final conclusions, Foskett and Hesketh claim that,

Pupils from lower socio-economic environments, however, do not enjoy such a well informed and privileged base from which to make their decisions. Indeed, it is the choices of these very pupils which careers literature and conventions should be seeking to address. (Foskett and Hesketh, (1995) :14)

'The area of educational choice poses considerable challenges for the researcher - not least because of the fundamental problem of linking cause and effect.' (Taylor M. 1992 : 304) A major study of influences on choice

and attitudes to post sixteen options at the time of writing is provided by Taylor, (1992),

The paper is a survey of the awareness of, and attitudes to post 16 options of young people reaching minimum school leaving age as they were assessing the various local opportunities open to them in the sixth form, further education colleges and youth training. (Taylor M. 1992 : 301)

The research was limited to one LEA which provided a high percentage of students at the affluent end of the spectrum. The main issues investigated included,

How aware are young people of their options at 16?  
What are their views of the alternatives open to them,  
How do they make their choices? Who and what influences them? (Taylor M. 1992 : 301)

The main findings may be summarised as relating to; policy issues, including Department of Employment issues; and issues for the careers service and schools and for local education authorities. Research by Taylor concentrated on interviewing a substantial sample of pupils (200 in each school) in 10 schools, and summarised the reasons provided by questionnaires and through one thirty minute interview with pairs of sixteen year olds.

Firstly, in connection with policy, the research findings suggest that the 'value of continuing in full time education was shown to be "taken for granted" by the overwhelming majority of these young people.' (Taylor, (1992) : 332) That, secondly there was a 'lack of attention given to presenting alternatives to full time post sixteen academic study to students in the one or two 11-18 schools in the research.' (Taylor, (1992) : 332) Taylor also suggested that 'careers education and guidance has to look beyond the principal post sixteen routes to enable young people to make more sophisticated choices.

Many young people lacked precise awareness of what was necessary to translate their post sixteen intentions into either short or long term career prospects. (Taylor, (1992) : 332)

In connection with students' choice of post sixteen option, Taylor reveals that overall, for those saying on in education,

the specific course chosen was the major determining factor, this was linked with where to continue to study and with considerations of distance and accessibility of post-16 institutions; GCSE grades needed; friends and family influences. (Taylor, (1992) : 327)

The findings of Taylor's research have important implications for this research study. Firstly, the summary of reasons given by sixteen year olds for their choice of post 16 institution will provide a starting point for questions in interviews with sixteen year olds in this study. Secondly, the problems associated with the lack of information provided to guide students attending 11-18 schools, raises further research questions. Pupils intending to leave an 11-18 school appear to rely entirely on their own resources to collect sufficient information to make a choice other than remaining at the school. Taylor, (1992) remarks that, in 11-18 schools, 'relatively little emphasis was placed on raising awareness of post 16 opportunities in other educational institutions.' (Taylor, (1992) : 311)

### **3.4 Theories of Decision Making**

A study of how individuals make decisions should provide some insight into the strategies and processes sixteen year olds employ when making decisions about colleges. 'How are students likely to make decisions about colleges, and what processes do they employ in selecting a final outcome? How 'rational' are these decisions, and if they are not 'rational' but are decisions made within parameters or with limitations - how might the sum of these decisions affect colleges operating within a system which is market driven? Chisnall observes that,

In marketing products of many kinds the so called, non-rational factors warrant special study. Consumers may view products very differently from manufacturers, and may not necessarily articulate their needs, aspirations or fears. Study of consumer

behaviour should therefore include overt or observable factors and should also attempt to identify the covert less apparent influences which affect consumption habits. The complex interaction of both economic and non-rational factors demands a comprehensive research strategy. (Chisnall, 1985) : 52)

'The crucial fact about economic man (sic) is that he is rational. This means two things: He can weakly order the states into which he can get, and he makes his choices so as to maximise something.' (Edwards, (1954) : 15)  
Radford, (1977) claims that 'the essence of decision making is the formulation of alternatives and the subsequent choice between them.'  
(Radford, (1977) : 1)

The first requirement of making decisions, is 'rationality', which is central to the theory of making choices. The second requirement is the notion of 'maximisation', which assumes that a decision maker will optimise 'utility', or benefit. A study of choice, decision making and marketing, requires an understanding of the term 'utilities', which is defined by Whitehead as 'goods and services that have the power to satisfy the 'wants' of mankind.'  
(Whitehead, (1981) : 2) He also argues that,

since the resources available to mankind are limited, we must exercise choice. If the utilities that can be created are limited compared with the insatiable appetites of men, (sic) then we must exercise some sort of choice as to what shall be produced and in what quantities. (...) In the so-called 'free-enterprise societies choice is exercised by a wide range of individuals and groups. (Whitehead, (1981) :4)

The marketing of services however is not merely an economic activity, and selecting between courses, and colleges is an intricate process. Chisnall observes that, 'buying behaviour is complex and is influenced by many factors, some of which may conflict with so called rational decision making. An analysis of the way in which students, as 'buyers in the the market', make choices among colleges will therefore contribute substantially to our understanding of educational marketing in the post compulsory sector.

### 3.5 Motivation Theories and Choice Behaviour

Baker identifies four major motivational models that have been advanced by different social scientists to explain choice behaviour, arguing that, 'buyer decisions are the result of rational and conscious economic calculations of the satisfaction of utility which will be derived from any given purchase decision. (Baker (1992) 165) The first theory is based on the stimulus response work of Pavlov and is 'clearly too mechanistic' (Baker, (1992) :166)

The second model which stresses economic motivation, is based on the writings of Adam Smith, (1776) and argues that buyer behaviour is based on 'man's self interest' and in 'pursuing his self interest man carefully calculates the advantages and disadvantages of any given purchase.' (Baker, (1992) :165) The question is whether an economist would describe these actions as 'rational'.

A third alternative based on the work of Dichter, (1960) relies on findings from research on motivation but has come under considerable criticism. Accusations were made that sellers were manipulating buyers and persuading them to act against their own better interests. Galbraith, (1958) criticised the consumer society because it was based on the implicit assumption that buyers can be persuaded to act against their own best, and presumably economic, interests. (Reaction against this kind of approach culminated in a publication by Packard, (1957))

There is also considerable support for the view first proposed by Maslow, (1954) that needs can be classified into a simple hierarchy as follows,

- 1 Physiological needs
- 2 Safety needs
- 3 Love needs
- 4 Esteem needs
- 5 Self-actualisation needs

Usually people will seek to satisfy these needs in the order in which they appear in the hierarchy, such that the physiological needs will normally take precedence over all the others. (Baker, (1992) : 173)

This model has considerable implications for the marketing of colleges to sixteen year olds, who may have reached any of the stages in the hierarchy at the time when they are making important decisions about their future. People who have reached the stage of self actualisation for example, that is students who have achieved a measure of satisfaction in terms of the first four essential needs, are considered to be 'immune to marketing techniques and have a very clear view of what it is they want, and want to do.' (Baker, (1992) :173) Students who are struggling however, to fulfil their basic physiological, safety and love needs, may approach their decision in a way which satisfies their self esteem, for example, rather than their need for 'self actualisation' - or a need to fulfil their best potential in the future.

The fourth model of buyer behaviour is based on social psychology and was first proposed by Veblen, (1899) and relies on social class characteristics. He argued that

many purchases were not motivated by need as much as concern for one's social standing and prestige. (...) His contribution in pointing out the importance of social relationships as an influence upon choice cannot be overstated. A basic concept which has had a pervasive influence on marketing though is that of social class - a concept which has been widely used as a basis for segmenting markets. Nowadays it is generally recognised that there is considerable mobility between social classes and that in some markets social class may be a poor predictor of actual attitudes and behaviour. (Baker, (1992) : 167)

Baker argues however that, 'the most important feature of social science explanations of choice behaviour is that none of them individually provides an adequate explanation of the real world.' (Baker, (1992) :168)

### **3.6 Rationality and Maximisation Behaviour**

Downs assumes that

individuals are utility maximisers. This means that

they make use of the most appropriate of the available means to pursue their ends, and that they exhibit a well behaved preference structure. (Downs, (1957) : 49 -52)

Many writers, including for example, Hindess use the term 'rationality' to describe decision making behaviour which 'maximises the satisfaction of preferences'. (Hindess, (1988) : 24) Elster (1986) defines rationality in terms of 'maximising behaviour' (Elster, in Hindess (1988) : 24) , and the Oxford Thesaurus describes 'rational' as synonymous with, 'well balanced, logical, reasonable, discriminating, and informed.' (Oxford Thesaurus, (1990) : 378), implying that a decision which is rational should by definition be well informed and logically arrived at. Downs, however suggests that

we assume that every individual, though rational, is also selfish....whenever we speak of rational behaviour, we always mean rational behaviour directed primarily towards selfish ends. (Downs, (1957) : 27)

Thomas, believes that, 'Self interested behaviour is necessary for market success.' (Thomas, (1991) : 45) Thompson et al., (1991) expand on this claim by explaining that 'the pursuit of self interest by individually motivated and welfare-maximising individuals leads to the best outcome not just for them, but also for society. (Thompson et al., (1991) : 3) Thomas further claims that, 'By placing the individual at the centre, markets recognise and harness self interest as a motive force behind human behaviour.' (Thomas, (1994) : 45) This statement implies that if pupils and parents make rational decisions when choosing a school or college, they essentially also behave in a selfish way, considering their own needs and disregarding those of other participants in the education system. Hindess warns that although we might study the decision making behaviour of individuals, the collective decisions they make cannot be assumed to be a joint 'rational decision' based on a joint, and thorough investigation of all the possible alternatives. Even the sum of individual rational decisions does not imply that the outcome of those decisions is 'rational'. 'As for collective action, it is a mistake to suppose that rational individuals share an interest in a collective outcome'. (Hindess, (1988) : 11) Hardin, (1982) argues that  
although it can make good sense to say that an



individual is rational, there is obviously no sense in which we can typically say that a group is rational. (Hindess, (1988) : 11)

Additionally, decision makers may like to think they have made a rational choice, or made one that will be judged to have been rational in the light of future events. However, it has been observed that 'those dealing with complex problems consciously or unconsciously abandon approaches involving comprehensive models and the goal of a uniquely optimum solution.' (Radford, (1977) :16).

We should therefore be cautious in the study of pupils' choice of school or college, before we assume that individual decisions, or the sum of many individual decisions are 'rational', or well informed, thoroughly investigated decisions. There is a possibility that these decisions might be based on only a partial understanding and investigation of the issues relating to the choices available. There is little support for the belief that the decision maker reaches the most rational or optimum solution for his own benefit.

Janis and Mann say that,

we see man not as a cold fish but as a warm blooded mammal, not as a rational calculator always ready to work out the best solution, but as a reluctant decision-maker - beset by conflict, doubts, and worry, struggling with incongruous longings, antipathies and loyalties, and seeking relief by procrastinating, rationalising or denying responsibility for his own choice. (Janis and Mann, (1977) : 1)

In spite of the detailed analysis Janis and Mann (1977) provide in their discussion of rational decision making, they do not believe that decision makers always act entirely rationally in choice situations, they point out that objections have been raised against the assumption that the optimising strategy provides an accurate descriptive model of how people actually do make decisions.

### 3.7 Bounded Rationality and Satisficing Behaviour

The view that decision makers do not necessarily act rationally is supported by Downs, (1957) who claims that 'human behaviour frequently departs from the canons of rationality, so that rational choice models are not realistic.' (Hindess 1988 : 10). Further support for this view is provided by Radford, who adds that

the feature of complex decision problems that is all pervasive is that the information available to participants concerning a problem is incomplete. This is the feature that presents the most difficulty to those engaged in the resolution of such problems. (Radford, (1977) : 37)

Loasby, suggests that choice within a complex system is not fully informed, and that 'partial ignorance is intrinsic to the problems of choice which economists claim to investigate.' (Loasby,(1976) : 2) Simon, (1975) introduces the notion of 'bounded rationality' to argue that the limited cognitive capacity of decision makers implies that decisions are often less than fully rational. He goes on to point out that 'bounded rationality is a type of decision making behaviour under conditions of uncertainty in which a satisfactory rather than optimum alternative is selected.' (Simon, (1976) in Radford, (1977) : 199)

The most influential hypothesis concerning the way people arrive at new decisions has been formulated by Simon (1976). The decision maker, according to Simon, '**satisfices**' rather than maximises: that is, he looks for a course of action that is 'good enough' that meets a minimal set of requirements.' (Simon, (1972) : 170) Decision makers may confine their research to a more restricted and less thorough investigation. In Simon's view this means that, 'they economise on the collection of information and evaluation of alternatives by searching only for a course of action that achieves a satisfactory result.' (Simon, (1972) : 170)

Discussion and analysis of decision making implies that individuals make decisions by simplifying, and economising on the information gathering they undertake, in order to arrive at a conclusion which is merely good enough,

and is not achieved through a thorough investigation of all the possible alternatives. That is, they do not maximise by behaving in a rational way throughout, but 'satisfice' by working in conditions of partial ignorance and uncertainty, to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

Simon suggests that individuals are rarely in a position to make the 'optimum' choice because they are not prepared to investigate, or are not aware of all possible factors when making a choice decision. Simon justifies this by pointing out that

there are important constraints arising from limitations of the actor, considered as an information processor. Actors are subject to **bounded rationality** in the sense that they are frequently unable to take account of all the available information, compile exhaustive lists of alternative courses of action, and ascertain the value and probability of each of the possible outcomes. (Simon, (1972) : 176)

### 3.8 Decision Making Strategies

Janis and Mann, (1977) claim that 'important life decisions are sometimes incremental in nature, the end product of a series of small decisions that progressively commit the person to one particular course of action.' (Janis and Mann (1977) : 35) This type of decision making they suggest, may be applied to decisions about schools, colleges and subsequently career. The decision maker sees each decision in isolation, making life decisions in an incremental way, one leading on to the other, but s/he may not investigate all the possible outcomes when beginning the process. Hindess argues that 'preferences may well change....they may change in response to advertising, political campaigning or fashion trends.' (Hindess 1988 : 31). His view confirms that in a situation where a decision maker is not fully informed of all aspects of the choice being made, marketing may have a part to play in providing vital and much needed - though not necessarily objective or

directly relevant, information which will have a bearing on final outcomes.

Olson's, (1956) view is that even though all members of a group might benefit from achieving a common goal, it does not necessarily follow that they will act in such a way that these interests are met. Marketing aims to engineer interference with the decision making process by drawing attention to particular and relevant issues involved in the choice which an individual is called upon to make. Unless there is coercion of some kind, such as legislation, or a special group is formed to make the decision jointly, individuals 'will not make a decision which is based on their common interests'. (Hindess, (1988) : 12) They will act only on their own account.

Radford summarises decision making as

a procedure to select a course of action from those available that will transform what is judged to be a less desirable situation into a more desirable one that can be attained at some time in the future.  
(Radford, (1977) : 2)

### **3.9 Decision Making Processes**

Baker defines the stages of decision making as, 'awareness, interest, desire, and action.' (Baker (1992) : 174) The process which decision makers undertake to reach a decision was studied by Janis and Mann (1977), and the rational decision making process was divided into seven stages. In order for a decision to be considered rational, each stage it is argued, must be completed, since failure to fulfil any of the seven stages when making a fundamental decision, constitutes a weakness in the decision making process. The more mistakes or gaps, the more likely the decision maker will experience setbacks and 'post decisional regret'. The seven stages of the decision making process identified by the researchers, are summarised in figure 3.1. The model describes the characteristics of a 'vigilant decision maker'.

**Figure 3.1**

**The Major Criteria for Vigilant Decision Making**

The decision-maker, to the best of his ability and within his information-processing capabilities;

- 1 thoroughly canvasses a wide range of alternative courses of action;
  - 2 surveys the full range of objectives to be fulfilled and the values implicated by the choice;
  - 3 carefully weighs whatever he knows about the costs and risks of negative consequences, as well as positive consequences that could flow from each alternative;
  - 4 intensively searches for new information relevant to further evaluation of the alternatives;
  - 5 correctly assimilates and takes account of any new information or expert judgement to which he is exposed, even when the information of judgement does not support the course of action he initially prefers;
  - 6 re-examines the positive and negative consequences of all known alternatives, including those originally regarded as unacceptable, before making a final choice;
  - 7 makes detailed provisions for implementing or executing the chosen course of action, with special attention to contingency plans that might be required if various known risks were to materialise.
- (Janis and Mann, (1977) : 11)

Janis and Mann admit however, that they do not believe that a decision maker should thoroughly examine all the alternatives at every stage of the decision making process. Nor do they claim that poor decisions will inevitably result from a lack of adherence to the seven stages they have outlined. They admit that they

do not assume that people will always be better off in the long run, if in making every one of their decisions

they attain the highest possible scores on all seven criteria. Obsessional mulling over the uncertainties of a major decision and preoccupation with the search for an ideal choice often leads nowhere and may even be detrimental. (Janis and Mann (1977) : 13)

Janis and Mann also discuss the satisficing strategy described by Simon, and believe that when using this method the decision maker might only test each alternative once, in a fairly unsystematic way - or as each alternative comes to his attention, until s/he finds an alternative that meets minimum requirements. They compare this with their description of the 'optimising strategy' whereby the decision maker would select the best alternatives and re-examine them repeatedly, ranking them in some way, in order to make the best comparative judgements. They go on to point out that,

a high degree of selectivity may often save the decision maker from unproductive confusion, unnecessary delays and waste of his resources in a fruitless quest for an elusive, faultless alternative. (Janis and Mann (1977) :13)

One might assume that most decision makers, including students making decisions about a choice of course, school or college, would combine these two strategies, and would understandably save time and energy by excluding alternatives which did not meet basic requirements. It is not suggested therefore, that the best decisions should have been arrived at through vigilant information processing, or that in order for the decision maker to avoid the effects of regret later on, he should have thoroughly dealt with all the alternatives, at each of the seven stages of decision making outlined by Janis and Mann. However, an analysis of the stages which decision makers work through, might give some insight into the way each student collects, processes and examines information, and selects a final course of action, or chooses a college. It is not suggested however, that this should be a quantitative evaluation, there are problems attached to adopting a numerical system as a way of evaluating decisions made by others. Researchers in the field of decision making agree that

to evaluate the ultimate success of a decision one would need to take into account the negative values

of the bad consequences as well as the positive values of the good consequences. But since there is no way of obtaining quantitative scores for these values, one would have to ask decision makers to give subjective ratings of the degree of the post decisional satisfaction or regret. Such ratings however, are of doubtful validity because they are subject to a variety of errors deriving from face saving distortions and rationalisations. (Merton, (1936) in Janis and Mann (1977) : 11)

Any attempt to make judgements about the decisions of others therefore should be based on a knowledge of the processes involved in vigilant decision making, but should be acknowledged as a qualitative evaluation, rather than an attempt to quantify the quality of the decisions being analysed by using a numerical scale of assessment.

Much of the research which has been undertaken in the past, involving an analysis of decision making has been concerned with problem solving in a hypothetical situation. In these instances, behavioural scientists have attempted to draw up a numerical scale, or a model of some kind to describe the way in which the decisions were reached (see for example Edwards, and Tversky, 1967). The concern here however is with the way in which theory and research deals with what people actually do when they make personal decisions that will lead to serious consequences. This might be quite different from what people decide to do in a problem solving situation which has been contrived. In a hypothetical situation we might quite justifiably assess the decision maker on all seven stages of the model, and make judgements about how vigilant the decision maker had been at each stage, in thoroughly investigating every alternative. In these cases, an advanced calculation has often been made by researchers to determine what the 'best' decision should be. However, in life decisions,

even when facing vital choices - where his entire future career ..... is at stake the decision maker may learn from his prior experience in dealing with comparable problems that he is best off to be highly selective in his information search and deliberations, confining his attention to only a few viable alternatives he knows in advance are the only ones worth considering. (Janis and Mann (1977) : 13)

### 3.10 Dynamic Decision Making

In real life, decisions occur in sequences, and information available for later decisions is likely to be contingent on the nature and consequences of earlier ones. The study of decision processes in such changing situations might be called the study of dynamic decision making. (Edwards, (1961) : 84)

During the period when students are making choices about colleges, they are exposed to new information and attitudes to the available options, in addition to any preconceived ideas they may have held at the start of the process. The information provided by students about their preferences, and their reasons for making choices is therefore likely to change between the period when the need to make a decision becomes apparent, and the final deadline for making a choice is reached. The process of decision making undertaken by students may therefore be described as, dynamic decision making.

It might be possible to investigate whether a non-vigilant, or satisficing strategy is considered adequate when making a selection between schools or colleges on the assumption that the decision maker is able to sufficiently distinguish between the important and unimportant factors involved in the choice, from his own point of view, at each stage of the process. An analysis of the satisficing strategy employed by students in selecting colleges, might provide valuable information about the main factors involved in selecting between one college and another, and the relative importance of these factors. Merton further claims that

when testing to see if an alternative meets a given requirement, the satisficing decision maker typically limits his inquiry to seeing whether it falls above or below a minimal cut off point. If there is more than one requirement, he treats each cut off point in the same way, as equally important. (Merton, (1936) : 901)

Students who adopt a more vigilant approach to decision making however, might employ a more thorough and detailed analysis of the information they process when making the decision since,



the model used in the optimising strategy is typically a weighted additive model, which requires the decision maker to arrive at an evaluation that takes account of the magnitudes of all the pros and cons with due regard for the relative importance of each objective. (Janis and Mann (1977) :30)

It is possible that some students might eliminate alternatives on the basis of one criterion, such as whether a particular course is offered, or whether the college is close enough to travel to, and not take account of any other factors. Others, adopting a more vigilant approach, might weigh up many issues, and sort out the relative importance of each advantage and disadvantage identified, before reaching a final conclusion. In this way, for example, a student might find that a decision must be made between the relative importance of travelling distance, following close friends, and whether the facilities offered are sufficient.

There are likely to be wide individual differences among students with regard to the type of research they carry out and the criteria they use to judge whether the search is sufficiently complete to warrant making a final decision. 'The first step that participants take towards resolution is to review existing knowledge of the problem and to gather as much additional information as available time and resources allow' (Radford, (1977) : 37)

The next step might be to search, fairly superficially for information, based perhaps only on the information provided by others, or information easily available to the individual, such as from friends, teachers or family. A student applying a 'satisficing strategy' would then only consider each course of action in order, until one that 'will do' is discovered. Simon argues convincingly that

the satisficing approach fits the limited information-processing capabilities of human beings. The world is peopled by creatures of 'bounded or limited rationality', ..... and these creatures constantly resort to gross simplifications when dealing with complex decision problems. (Simon (1976), :xxix)

Miller and Starr, (1967) support this argument by pointing out

that

part of the problem is that all the feasible courses of action would require the decision maker to process so much information that impossible demands would be made on his resources and mental capabilities. In his attempts to obtain the degree of knowledge needed to anticipate alternative outcomes, the decision maker is likely to be overwhelmed by 'information inundation', which can be quite as debilitating as information scarcity. (Miller and Starr, 1967 : 62)

Decision makers 'generally censor their intake of messages in a highly biased way so as to protect their current beliefs and decisions from being attacked', (see Klapper 1949), and people tend to seek out information which will support the beliefs, opinions and attitudes they already hold, especially when negative information is provided which might affect confidence. Cox suggests that the decisions people make are dependent upon views, attitudes and opinions already held, he says 'an act of choice involves an interplay among three broad sets of variables: predispositions, influences, and product attributes.' (Cox, (1968)) This suggests that final decisions will be influenced by an individual's conscious, or unconscious prejudices, and that people typically start the decision making process with preconceived ideas about the subject in hand, rather than with an open mind, ripe to sift information in an objective way.

It is possible that some student decision makers if using the satisficing strategy, find an alternative relatively quickly and thus terminate their search, having made little effort to seek information about any of the alternatives available. Some decision makers may not provide the market researcher with much valuable information about the search they undertook, before reaching a final conclusion.

The work of the psychologist would certainly tend to confirm the assertion that human beings have a variety of diverse motivations which do not lend themselves to maximisation of utility - at least so long as utility is defined in terms of the satisfactions resulting from marketplace phenomena. (Miller and Starr, (1967) :254-25)

However, this method may serve to provide a clear indication of the main issues involved in choosing a college, and many researchers have found that even important personal decisions such as choice of college might be made using this process. Researcher supports this view, and Miller and Starr argue that,

the simplest variant of the satisficing strategy takes the form of relying upon a single formula as the sole decision rule, which comes down to using only one criterion for a tolerable choice. Paradoxically, this crude approach often characterises the decision-making behaviour of people who are facing major personal decisions that will affect their future health or welfare. (Miller and Starr, (1967) in Janis and Mann (1977) : 27)

### **3.11 Rationality and Economic Utility Models**

The claim that important decisions, made by individuals, whether within the market, or concerning careers and personal life, are not necessarily 'rational' affects public economics and the economics of public choice.

McLean defines economics as 'the study of rational decisions, whether in the market, in politics, or anywhere else.' (McLean, (1987) :3) He goes on to say that

the standard economists assumptions are; that there is no accounting for tastes, but that whatever an individual wants, he prefers more of it to less; that the more he already has of any good, the less he will want more of that good in preference to some other good, that he is procedurally rational in making consistent and transitive choices; that goods or options can be placed in order, but not normally compared cardinally. (McLean, (1987) : 182)

Economists own that their theory relies on the belief that decision makers are reaching 'rational' decisions. McLean expands on this by pointing out that,

'rational', does not mean 'self interested'. It

describes means, not ends. Economists (at least good economists) do not think a selfish individual is one who can arrange the options he faces into a coherent order of preference (or indifference) and make consistent choices among them. (McLean, (1987) : 3)

If a rational decision is one which has been made through a process of vigilant information processing, and a process which attempts to reach an optimal solution, then research by writers including Janis and Mann, (1977); Downs, (1957) Simon, (1952) and others, does not support the view that decision makers are consistently behaving 'rationally', although this appears to be an important basis of economic theory.

By applying logical, deductive reasoning, economists try to work out what a rational actor (a consumer, an entrepreneur, a trade unionist, and so on), would do to maximise his chances of getting what he wants. From this they can construct an elaborate picture of what an economy would look like if everybody acted rationally, compare it with the real world economy, and make predictions about the effects of changes in conditions or policies. (McLean, (1987) :1)

Economists hope to gain some advantage and knowledge of the market, through predicting what preferences might be made by (rational) individuals in a climate of choice, and create a situation whereby they can respond to, and provide appropriate products and services in the market place. Riker argues that, 'what the people want cannot be social policy simply because we do not, and cannot know what the people want ' (Riker, (1982) : 238), and McLean supports Riker by saying that

the only alternative is (.....) 'liberalism', which is a form of democracy with entrenched rules to prevent the 'tyranny of the majority'. Liberalism cannot claim that it chooses the 'right' outcome, because there is usually no such thing. (McLean, (1987) : 187)

How far decisions which have not been made through a 'vigilant' and 'optimising' decision making strategy might be considered 'rational' is a matter for debate. A decision which has been reached through a process of 'satisficing' rather than 'optimising' might be described strictly as 'non-

rational'. Although perhaps it might be feasible for an individual to reach a 'rational' conclusion without having gone through all the stages of 'vigilant' decision making to reach an 'optimum' solution. Decision makers vary in terms of how vigilant they are, from hypervigilance to satisficing behaviour. Although in the market place economists claim to rely on the assumption that decisions made by consumers are rational, they respond to the information the market provides about consumers, whether or not the choices being made are 'rational' in a strict sense. Perhaps the market responds to the sum of, or the consensus view of the consumers' apparent preferences as they observe and interpret them to be, through market research and analysis, whether or not those decisions are regarded as 'rational' in its strict definition.

Economists and marketers must surely be cautious about describing their consumers as 'non-rational' in choosing their product or service. Most companies wish to believe that their customers have undertaken a vigilant search for information before deciding to select their product. The alternative however, is to suggest that customers may not have had to undertake vigilant research and decision making to reach the conclusion that a particular product is the best on offer. It might be a clear leader in its field perhaps, or alternatively, an indication that the choices available are limited.

### **3.12 Factors Affecting Rationality**

The decision maker does not necessarily rely on a criterion which an observer considers to be high priority, although marketing strategies often imply that the customer will decide on the basis of 'utility'. (Downs 1957). For example, researchers have suggested that in making a decision which is considered rational, 'utility', (or appropriateness, or suitability), ought to be the main consideration when making a choice. However, Janis and Mann acknowledge that the decision maker,

also takes account of a multiplicity of intangible considerations bearing on the probable effects of

the chosen and unchosen courses of action on relatives and friends. Anticipated feelings of high or low self-esteem with regard to living up to his own personal standards of conduct also affect his preferences for one alternative rather than another. (Janis and Mann, (1977) : 24-25)

There are four associated factors which are considered to affect the rationality of decisions, firstly; 'self esteem' (Maslow, (1954)); the permanence and importance of the decision; conceptual blocks (Janis and Mann, (1977)); and post decision dissonance. (Festinger, (1967)).

Self esteem might be very important when a decision maker is choosing between alternative careers, or colleges or schools, where social class perceptions, and personal standards are being judged by onlookers, parents, and friends. These factors might not always be openly expressed by decision makers, but could be a vital, but unstated, consideration in the process of sifting information about the alternatives available. (see work on Maslow's, (1954) hierarchy of needs)

Chisnall argues that, 'motivation is subject to personal perception of needs, and until these needs have been stimulated by marketing activities, individual consumers may perceive no reason to buy a particular product.' (Chisnall, (1985) : 54) This view has important implications for those involved in marketing colleges, and educationalists aiming to increase participation in post sixteen education. Many sixteen year olds are unaware of the opportunities available to them at sixteen, they may be unaware of the complexity of the choice they are making, and they need to rely on an advisor of some kind to identify the factors which should be considered when making a choice. Decision makers however, vary in their readiness to accept or take notice of such advice,

in such instances - whenever the decision could entail serious, lifelong consequences - any friend or advisor who stimulates concern about unknown risks can serve the valuable function of preventing a premature choice by generating a felt need in the decision maker for prolonging his information search. (Janis and Mann (1977) : 242)

In some cases it might be possible for an institution or a member of a college or school to point out some of the important factors which need considering before a final choice of establishment is made. The teachers at the colleges, careers advisors and teachers in schools, are ideally qualified to raise issues for concern when making a choice, which the student had been unaware of in the initial search for information.

The permanence of the decision which is to be made, according to Janis and Mann, may also have a serious influence on how vigilant a decision maker needs to be in the information search, before reaching a final conclusion. If the decision is reversible, they claim, then the decision maker might only undertake a superficial search for information. If a person is able to accept a place at a college, (or more than one college), with the knowledge that the place can be turned down later, the search for information might be less thorough than it might have been, had no opportunity of reversing the decision been available. A more detailed information search can be stimulated through the discovery that two apparently equal alternatives present themselves. For example, if a student finds that two colleges appear to offer identical courses, and in the most important respects appear equal, then an individual would search for fresh information about the two establishments, to try and distinguish between them, in order to reach a decision. (Wicklund and Ickes, 1972)

Radford (1977) introduces the idea of 'conceptual blocks' as a further way in which decision makers may limit the information search they carry out. He warns us that this form of information blindness will lead to an individual limiting the areas in which s/he is prepared to search and sift information relating to a decision. He divides conceptual blocks into four categories. 'Perceptual blocks' he claims,

may result in stereotyping and labelling of individuals or actions, and the consequent introduction of biased information into the process of problem solving. Cultural or environmental blocks, resulting from exposure to a particular set of cultural patterns or from operation in a particular social or physical environment. Emotional blocks, such as may arise from aversion to uncertainty and risk

taking, related possibly to fear of failure or mistake. Intellectual and expressive blocks, resulting in an inability to generate ideas and to communicate them to others. (Radford, (1977) : 62)

Further theories about the conditions in which an individual might choose to pursue a non-vigilant decision making process, rather than an optimising strategy, are provided by Janis, who points out for example that

until a person is challenged by some disturbing information or event that calls his attention to a real loss soon to be expected, he will retain an attitude of complacency about whatever course of action (or inaction) he has been pursuing. (Janis 1968a)

This suggests that an individual may remain unconcerned and allow events to take their course, unless something happens to prod him into action. Many students who are in a position to remain in the school they have attended since they were eleven, may choose to take the easiest option - that is to do nothing about moving to another school at sixteen, unless some significant event occurs to prompt them into action.

### **3.13 The Significance of Coercion In Decision Making**

Further difficulties which individuals face when attempting to reach important decisions have also been documented, first by the Harris and Harvey (1975) study which 'provides evidence on the tendency to absolve oneself of responsibility for a sloppily made, ill-fated decision by denying freedom of choice.' Brehm and his associates have shown that 'when a person expects to have a free choice, an alternative foisted upon him will become extremely unattractive regardless of its intrinsic merits.' (Brehm, (1966)). In the case of students making choices about school sixth forms and colleges, it is possible that a student who later feels his/her decision was ill conceived, might blame others, such as parents, for that decision, saying that he/she did not have free choice. A student who is not given a choice of post sixteen institution by parents, but is impelled to attend a particular establishment, might later be unwilling to acknowledge any of the positive attributes of the



alternative foisted upon him/her.

Whenever a person finds himself under coercive pressure from an authority figure to choose an unsavoury course of action, he usually resents the demand even if he reluctantly gives in. (Liem, (1975) : 232 - 240)

This argument provides support for the political move to increase choice within the education system, in the compulsory sector.

We might perhaps speculate that the consequence of imposing a choice of post sixteen college on an individual is, that the individual will see only the negative attributes of the choice which has been made on his behalf. The result of being given virtually no choice of action is a cycle of negative feedback about schools and colleges. How free are students to decide upon their course of action at 16? Are parents imposing their own choice on their son or daughter in some cases? This phenomenon was studied by Worchel (1971) who showed that 'restrictions on freedom evoked considerable hostility in college students; the hostility occurred no matter which alternative, the most attractive or the least attractive, was foisted upon the subject.' (Worchel, (1971) : 294 - 304)

### **3.14 Post Decision Dissonance**

The theory of cognitive dissonance was proposed by Festinger, in 1957. It has two underlying hypotheses:

- 1 The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance.
- 2 When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would be likely to increase dissonance. (Chisnall, (1985) : 28)

These ways of coping with the conflict an individual experiences after reaching a solution which may not be ideal in all respects, forms a major part

of the process of avoiding regret after the decision is announced.

The importance of work on dissonance, by Festinger (1967) has been recognition of the fact that the act of purchase itself may create some uncertainty in the mind of the buyer, who will then seek reassurance that he has made the correct decision. (Baker (1992) : 175)

Janis and Mann studied the effect of high and low levels of stress on individuals' decision making processes, and claim that, 'when the decision maker is under no stress, he takes only a casual low level interest in messages and information bearing on the inconsequential issue.' (Janis and Mann (1977) : 205) Students who are anxious to make a decision about their post sixteen alternatives, and who see the importance attached to the decision, and some competition to gain a place of their choice, might experience more stress when making decisions, than sixteen year olds who are unconcerned about pursuing post compulsory education. A decision maker who is under stress behaves very differently in analysing and sifting information. Janis and Mann claim that

when conflict is high and the decision maker believes that a satisfactory course of action can be found before the deadline is at hand, he will be discriminatingly vigilant and therefore open to all relevant and reliable information throughout the early stages. (Janis and Mann (1977) : 213)

However, later in the decision making process as s/he discovers that a better alternative is unlikely to emerge, s/he will change from vigilance, and begin to 'bolster' the alternative which is the least objectionable. 'This change, will be reflected in an increased tendency towards selective exposure.' (Janis and Mann, (1977) : 213) Baker supports this view and observes that, 'people may select information favourable to their choice of product, and at the same time distort or dismiss unpleasant facts.' (Baker (1992) : 29) Thus in addition to the 'conceptual blocks' described by Radford, Janis and Mann describe 'defensive avoidance' mechanisms, which cause an individual to react in a biased way towards information which they are offered, when attempting to reach a decision.

Janis and Mann also describe two other forms of defensive avoidance, in

addition to 'bolstering'.

One form (of defensive avoidance) consists of procrastinating; a second involves shifting responsibility for making the decision onto someone else. The third form consists of bolstering the least objectionable alternative by exaggerating the positive consequences or minimising the negative consequences. (Janis and Mann (1977) : 87)

These forms of defensive avoidance seem to prevail in cases where the individual feels s/he has not really been able to make an entirely satisfactory decision, through lack of real choice. There does not seem to be any evidence to suggest that an individual will avoid information which does not support his/her views although Janis and Mann claim that 'when conditions making for defensive avoidance are present the individual becomes closed-minded and biased in his information preferences.' (Janis and Mann (1977) : 205) Vroom (1966) found that

students tended to bolster the attractiveness of the organisation they had selected, giving a higher attractiveness rating to the chosen organisation and lower ratings to the unchosen ones, than in their initial rating. (Vroom, (1966) : 212 - 225)

The defensive avoidance mechanisms described by writers, serve to enable the decision maker to deal with any challenges encountered later on when the decision is announced, and to boost the individual's self confidence about having made the best decision in the circumstances.

If the individual has been choosing between two alternatives which are both unsatisfactory, there seems to be little evidence of bolstering the final decision in this way. Walster and Walster, (1970) explicitly predict that 'whenever the choice alternatives are predominantly negative,' (as in their experiment on a choice between two forms of unpleasant stimulation,) 'the outcome will be prolonged regret with little or no bolstering.' (Walster and Walster (1970 : 100)

A number of researchers, (including Meichenbaum, 1975, Meichenbaum, Turk and Burstein, 1975 ) have argued that if decision makers are given an indication of the negative effects of a choice they are about to make before

the crisis arises, then the post decisional regret is eased.

The impact of a post-decisional crisis generated when the decision maker is exposed to the negative consequences of a decision can be dampened by exposure, before the crisis arises, to advance warnings or forecasts about those adverse consequences. (Janis, (1971) : 155)

Baker argues that, peer group pressure affects choice, and claims that,

Many consumers products are promoted as having attributes which will enhance one's acceptance with the group, or occasionally are sold on the basis that the lack of a possession could lead to ostracism or exclusion from the group. (Baker (1992) : 173)

Once the individual has made the decision, he/she then has to deal with the announcement of the choice to his/her social network, and for this reason it is important for the decision maker to have clearly identified all the positive advantages of the choice. This may contribute to the effects of bolstering and help commitment to the decision, and to reduce 'dissonance'. The decision maker therefore has to be quite certain that he/she can cope with the challenges he/she meets from any group of people involved in the decision. In anticipation of feedback from peers, the individual may have to provide reasons which were not necessarily crucial in the decision making process itself, but which would help to convince others that the decision was the right one.

### **3.15 Summary**

Chapter 3 has comprised a review of some of the major factors which influence decision making and choice behaviour. Central to the concept of free market economics is the conviction that individuals should be free to make their own decisions in the market place, from amongst the competing alternatives available. Various theories of motivation have been offered, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The concepts of 'rationality' and 'maximisation of utility' - upon which economic models of decision making

rely, were explored. Consideration was given to a number of decision making strategies, including the vigilant decision making model proposed by Janis and Mann, (1977) and the satisficing strategy, proposed by Simon.(1967) The possible effects of 'post decision dissonance' were explored and related to 'buyer behaviour'.

The forces which determine how students make decisions about post sixteen colleges are central to this research study. The process and strategies which students undertake in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome, will be examined. The next chapter, will focus on the research methodology, and discuss field work and collection of data.

# Chapter 4

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines issues of research methodology and focuses on, the potential for generating qualitative data through interviewing, the process of interviewing and recording data, and the central concepts of reliability, validity and generalisability. Aspects and issues relating to quantitative research methodology will follow, and consideration is given to validity, reliability and generalisability in connection with survey research.

#### **4.2 Selecting the Research Methodology**

The selection of an appropriate research methodology focused on the requirement to provide both the opportunity to; discover possible correlations between a number of interrelated variables in relation to the profiles of cohorts of students attending a sixth form college; and explore and understand the underlying meanings connected with students' decision making process, when choosing amongst post sixteen colleges.

Hammersley, explains that 'quantitative research is often believed to be committed to the discovery of scientific laws; whereas qualitative research is concerned with identifying cultural patterns.' (Hammersley, (1992) : 170).

Tesch explains that 'qualitative data' is any information the researcher gathers that is not expressed in numbers. (Tesch, (1992) : 55) Silverman begins his text on 'Interpreting Qualitative Data', by declaring the need to 'avoid making a choice between many of the polarities current in theory and methodology, eg.; structure and meaning, macro and micro, quantity or quality.' (Silverman, (1993) : vii). He supports the dispassionate view that

'some qualitative research can combine sensitivity to participants' definitions with correlations carrying direct policy implications.' (Silverman (1993) :15). This implies that there should be no pressure on the researcher to select between the extremes of using either a research method which generates qualitative data and searches for meanings, or one which produces quantitative data, that is, data which is expressed numerically, and seeks to identify relationships between variables.

Before finalising the details of a research method, the researcher needs to consider the implications and the particular strengths and weaknesses of the research methods under consideration. Brinberg and McGrath, (1985) point out that researchers always hope to maximise on all three of the following notions; 'generalisability, precision and realism,' but they argue that this goal is not achievable. They claim that 'research strategies that provide the opportunity to maximise any one of these at the same time virtually guarantee low levels of both of the other two.' (Brinberg and McGrath (1985) : 43) For example, if a study maximises on 'precision', with respect to measurement and control of behaviour variables, then the study will not show a high level of 'generalisability' across the population, and will not be very 'realistic' with respect to contexts and behaviour. The chief advantage of a survey method is 'its ability to collect a lot of information in a relatively short period.' (Wilson, in Bell, et al., (1987) : 36) The survey method allows comparisons to be made between individuals and groups of individuals, because the answers to questions are comparable. The survey in the present research is undertaken by extracting information from files kept by one institution over twelve years. Hammersley claims that, 'the gains offered by ethnographic research are bought at the expense of certain weaknesses, notably in its ability to generalise to larger populations and to identify causal relationship.' (Hammersley, (1992) : 125) However, he claims that, 'the choice of case study involves buying greater detail and likely accuracy of information about particular cases, at the cost of being less able to make effective generalisations to a larger population of cases.' (Hammersley, (1992) :186)

There has been considerable discussion among writers about the obligation



upon the field worker to establish an 'hypothesis' before generating data, or setting up the enquiry. Glaser and Strauss (1967), advise researchers to discontinue the practice of bringing theories to the field, and gathering data with the goal of verifying or disconfirming the theory. Strauss and Corbin, (1990: 27) describe 'grounded theory' as a scientific method.

Its method meets the criteria for doing 'good' science, significance; compatibility; generalisability; reproducibility; precision; rigour; and verification. (Strauss and Corbin (1991: 27)

Glaser and Strauss in connection with 'grounded theory' suggest that

while the researcher suspended all prior theoretical notions, data relevant to a particular sociological problem area would be collected, and then inspected to discover whether any theory or at least hypothesis could be developed directly from the patterns found in the data. (Tesch, (1992) :23)

Ely et al., (1991) argue against research based on the testing of hypotheses, by claiming that 'in depth research can both knock down expectations and bring about new discoveries that were not initially imagined.' (Ely et al, (1991) : 129)

To summarise, Finch, (1984) believes that ethnography is 'relatively flexible; it studies what people are doing in their natural context; it is well placed to study processes as well as outcomes; it studies meaning as well as causes.' (Silverman (1993) : 171) This view is explained and supported by Hammersley who points out that,

one of the most common rationales for the adoption of an ethnographic approach is that by entering into close and relatively long-term contact with people in their everyday lives we can come to understand their beliefs and behaviour more accurately, in a way that would not be possible by means of any other approach. (Hammersley, (1992) : 44)

The survey method of research will be undertaken alongside ethnographic research. Wilson, (1987 : 40) claims that, 'research would gain by the use of more than one method to investigate a problem because of the way in which the strengths of one method may offset the weaknesses of others.'

### 4.3 The Characteristics of Qualitative Methodology

The nature of naturalistic inquiry has its root in ethnography and phenomenology. The term was first used in psychology by Willems and Raush, (1969) and in sociology by Denzin, (1970). It was introduced into education 'as an approach which has considerable promise for evaluation in particular.' (Guba (1978) :1) Walcott says that, 'ethnography is by definition descriptive. In anthropology it means literally, "a picture of the way of life of some interacting human group".' (Walcott, (1975) : 112, in Woods, (1986) : 148)

There is however, no standard approach among qualitative researchers, although, 'each assumes that systematic inquiry must occur in a natural setting rather than an artificially constrained one such as an experiment' (Silverman (1993) : 23). Marshall and Rossman, (1989 :10) list a number of different qualitative research traditions including, 'ethnography, cognitive anthropology and symbolic interactionism. These all share a commitment to naturally occurring data.' Additionally, 'phenomenography', a type of research growing out of the work of Marton (1968), seems close in description to a research methodology appropriate to answering the current research questions. 'It aims at description, analysis and understanding of experiences' (Tesch, (1981) :180) Matza, (1964) advocates 'naturalism' arguing that 'its core is a commitment to capture the nature of social phenomena in their own terms.' (Matza, (1964) cited in Hammersley, (1992) : 44). Finch provides a strong argument supporting the case for undertaking research in a 'natural' setting. She believes that

ethnography can be more flexible than quantitative research, adjusting to changes in the situation studied and to changes in the policy making context, in that it studies social phenomena in their natural contexts, that it examines process as well as outcome, and that it provides explanations that are adequate at the level of meaning as well as at the level of cause. (Finch, (1986) : 161)

According to Bryman, the qualitative researcher seeks to 'see things in context.' (Bryman, (1988) :72)

Your overall goal is to collect the richest possible data. The term 'rich data' means, 'ideally, a wide and diverse range of information collected over a relatively prolonged period of time.' (Lofland and Lofland (1984) : 11)

Guba and Lincoln (1982: 247) use the term 'thick description' to explain the naturalistic researchers' aim of collecting rich data.

Ely et al., claim that 'a key characteristic of naturalistic research is that questions for study evolve as one is studying.' (Ely et al, (1991) : 30) The possibility that the viewpoint of the researcher, and the research questions under investigation might change, and subsequently have a bearing on the final interpretation of the findings, has been recognised by Fischer, who understands

empirical to mean that the researcher is open to all perceivable dimensions and profiles of the phenomenon that is being researched. Hence the experiences of the subjects, as well as those of the researcher, are (...) acknowledged as potentially informative.' (Fischer, (1978) in King :168)

It seems important for the ethnographer to acknowledge the perspectives and background brought to the fieldwork, and to recognise and record the experiences encountered during the process of naturalistic enquiry, in addition to recording all observations, and responses, comments and attitudes provided by the participants. The present researcher brings to the enquiry some knowledge of the colleges in the area, in particular a college which, following reorganisation, became an open access sixth form college in 1978, (it was formerly a mixed Grammar School). Hammersley argues that researchers should choose to study subjects about which they have some previous knowledge and experience, for he believes that,

practitioners have access to their own intentions and motives in a way that an observer does not, and so have a deeper understanding of their own behaviour that an outsider could ever have; (Hammersley, (1992) : 144)

The researcher acknowledges upon embarking on the research that the social phenomena being studied will be interpreted according to the

experiences, intentions, and viewpoint of the researcher; the aim will be to collect 'rich' data for description, analysis, and discovery of meanings; the method will however be flexible, and further questions will emerge during the enquiry.

#### 4.4 Selection of Sites for Case Study Research

The questions which need to be answered are, how many respondents should be selected for a case study? How should they be selected, and from how many establishments should the respondents be drawn? The possibility of achieving any degree of generalisation from a case study of a single case - or a single pupil involved in making choices for post-sixteen study, seems to be relatively slight, and therefore a case study of one child would be significantly inadequate in view of the research questions. McCall and Simmons argue that the 'test of theory comes in *comparing* .... analytical descriptions of complex cases when these are available in sufficient numbers and variety.' (McCall and Simmons, (1969) : 3)

The experience and arguments of previous researchers therefore, suggest that a number of ethnographic case studies, of sufficient variety should be studied, in order to inform, and to generate sufficient data to allow **comparison**, rigorous investigation and the testing of theories relating to decision making, and choice. The present research study was set up with 25 individuals, and 5 case study sites, with the intention that any theories written about decision making processes, emerging from the data might produce more accurate, or possibly more 'generalisable' deductions. By securing a suitable range and number of cases to study, in various schools, it is anticipated that a greater potential for generalisation to other situations might be possible, and comparison with other cases among the total population of student intake to the college, might be more feasible.

The researcher wished to avoid any situation which might imply partiality, in favour of the sixth form college in the selection of case study sites. The

present researcher has some knowledge of the local schools, and was aware that many of the pupils selected for the study would eventually choose to attend the sixth form college. Many of the staff in the schools were also aware that the researcher was involved in marketing at one of the local colleges. These factors restricted the number of sites which would be suitable for the study, since those which were considered to be 'too familiar' were excluded. (Two schools very close to the college were excluded)

Hammersley, (1992 :145) recommends a combination of 'involvement, and estrangement', as providing the best chance of findings being valid. Ely et al., clarify the situation by suggesting that when choosing a potential research setting,

we are too familiar when we know the answers ahead of time, or when we feel too close, too distressed, too disinterested or too biased to study the situation, or when we realise that the people in it do not accept us in our researcher roles. (Ely et al, (1991) : 16)

In preference to carrying out ethnographic research in too familiar a research setting, the researcher chose to approach a number of schools in the local area, which would provide sufficient variation, in terms of type of school, social mix, and ability range, to furnish a wide spread of sample cases for research.

The initial approach was made by letter, to eight schools, with a view to selecting five or six schools which would provide a sufficient spectrum of cases. The age ranges of the schools targeted included, five to sixteen, eleven to sixteen, and eleven to eighteen, and included both state and independent schools, selective and open access schools, and schools in the city and the town, and in the centre of a council housing estate. The problem of selecting sites is explained by many researchers who agree that

one approach sometimes used is to study the typical (see, Bogdan and Biklen, 1981; Goetz and LeCompte, 1984; Patton, 1980; Whyte; 1984). I would argue that choosing sites on the basis of their fit with a typical situation is far preferable to choosing on the basis of convenience. (Schofield, (1993) :99)

The schools were wide apart in geographical terms, covering the most northerly and southerly parts of the county, and were not always easy to visit, because of time-tabling arrangements. Some of the pupils involved in the research also proved to be elusive - (this was explained by the staff at the school), because the range of schools and pupils involved in the study included some 'demotivated', and 'anti-school' pupils. Schofield points out an important advantage in selecting sites on this basis, she claims that

the possibility of studying numerous heterogeneous sites makes multi-site studies one potentially useful approach to increasing the generalizability of qualitative work to *what is*. Heterogeneity can be obtained by searching out sites that will provide maximal variation or by planned comparisons along certain potentially important dimensions. Generally speaking, a finding emerging from the study of several very heterogeneous sites would be more robust and thus more likely to be useful in understanding various other sites than one emerging from the study of several similar sites. (Schofield , (1993) : 101)

In view of these arguments, the schools chosen to participate in the case study research are listed in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1**

**Schools selected for the research**

School	Type of school	Age group	location
grammar	Boys' Independent Grammar	11 - 18	city
girls'	Girls' State Comprehensive	11 - 16	city
private	Mixed non selective Independent	5 - 16	rural
town	Mixed State Comprehensive ex-Grammar	11 - 16	small town
estate	Mixed State Comprehensive ex- Modern	11 - 16	housing estate

The schools selected included, a selective school, an all girls' school, and all boys school, a non selective independent school, an estate comprehensive, and a town comprehensive near the sixth form college. These schools were chosen because they are within the geographical catchment area of a technical college, a town sixth form college, a city sixth form college, an FE college, a tertiary college, and three school sixth forms.

The schools were selected to offer a wide range of case study participants, from high academic achievers, to underachieving pupils, and to include pupils with middle class backgrounds, lower middle class backgrounds and those classified as working class.

#### **4.5 Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality**

Questions relating to confidentiality, and safeguards ensuring that the basic routine of the school would not be at risk, were settled at the first meeting. These issues were discussed with the 'gatekeeper', (Ely et al., (1991) :20) - the careers teachers, or in one case a head of year. One meeting was held in each school to discuss the 'ground rules' before embarking on the research. The teachers at all schools were anxious to ensure that the views expressed by pupils would be confidential, and not recorded in a written form which could easily be traced back either to the individual, or to the school. The careers teachers were especially sensitive that the guidance they were offering to pupils about their future would not be under detailed scrutiny, and wished to establish the emphasis of the research. Concern was also expressed that pupils should not be contacted at home without prior permission being given by the school. Reassurance was provided, and all schools, and pupils included in the research were given aliases, which are similar but aid anonymity.

There seemed to be very little pressure upon the investigator to describe in any detail the research questions, or any expected outcome of the observation of the pupils. The suggestion put forward by Woods, (1986) describing the motivation of researchers embarking on research in a naturalistic setting, is an appropriate description of the researcher's intentions, at this early stage. The present researcher found that the main considerations at this first meeting were focused on the practical arrangements; the access to individual pupils; or to taught sessions involving pupils; how regular meetings or visits might be; and how long the period of observation might continue. The researcher was able to explain

that the field of interest concerned choices being made by year ten and eleven pupils relating to further education and careers, rather than specifically mentioning the focus on marketing, and the effectiveness of the marketing of one particular college. Ely et al., succinctly describe the stance the researcher was able to take in relation to the research questions at this point. 'It might be said that one does not know what one will find until one has found it. The qualitative researcher must be able to tolerate this uncertainty.' (Ely et al, (1991) : 135)

Lofland and Lofland suggest that researchers,

give assurance that respondents will remain anonymous in any written reports growing out of the study, and that his responses will be treated in strictest confidence. (Lofland and Lofland, (1984) : 52)

Interviewees were advised that it would not be possible to change their situation in the school, anything they said would be confidential, and would not be conveyed to others in their school. Any publication would not be traceable to them as an individual. Respondents knew that the interviewer's main contact with the school was through interviewing them, and therefore they did not come to think that their immediate situation could be changed by the interviewer. Additionally, by asking the pupils for information, and not providing them with any advice or information (even though both could have been provided), they did not think of asking for any kind of support in this form. The interviewer reassured candidates individually that conversations they had with the researcher would be 'in confidence', that they would remain 'anonymous', and all interviews were held in a quiet room, on a one to one basis.

#### **4.6 Selecting the Research Instrument**

In selecting a research instrument, the main alternatives in view of the



research questions, seemed to be, a questionnaire, or a series of questionnaires, by post or face to face, a written log of interviews, or tape recordings of interviews. Stenhouse, (1987b : 216) provides considerable evidence to support the view, that 'interviewing individual pupils in their school setting,' is the most appropriate way to proceed. Ely et al., claim that 'interviews are at the heart of doing ethnography because they seek the words of the people we are studying, the richer the better, so that we can understand their situations with increasing clarity.' (Ely et al, (1991) : 58) The choice of interviewing as a technique for collecting data, has many supporters among writers concerned with educational research. The interview is, in this sense, a method or a group of techniques specific to the social and human sciences.' (Walker, (1987): 225) 'Educational researchers have adopted interviewing as an appropriate method for a wide range of investigations.....' (Powney and Watts, (1987) : 354) The major purpose of an in depth ethnographic interview is to

learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed. In striving to come closer to understanding people's meanings, the ethnographic interviewer learns from them as informants and seeks to discover how they organise their behaviour. In this approach the researcher asks those who are studied to become the teachers and to instruct her or him the the ways of life they find meaningful (Spradley and McCurdy, (1972) : 11-12)

It was hoped, that by undertaking a 'longitudinal study', through a series of interviews, the researcher would be party to the attitudes and opinions and the choices being made during this crucial stage in the pupils' school life, immediately prior to embarking on further education or training.

#### **4.7 Selection of Sample Cases**

The method employed to select a small sample of cases for the research study, became an important issue at the first meeting with 'gatekeepers' in schools. The selection process needs to fulfil a number of prerequisites, both practical, from the point of view of the school, and ethical - to ensure a

good spread of samples, from the researcher's standpoint. Although when choosing sample cases in the sites chosen for study, the first option which is offered is the possibility of simply choosing alphabetically, or by using a similar, apparently 'random;' method. This method is defined as, 'one selected by a process which gives every possible sample (of that size from that population) the same chance of selection.' (Stuart, (1968): 11). The decision was made to select, by some means, five or six pupils in each of the five schools, (although initially a list of six or seven potential pupils would be drawn up). The potential candidates for case study research should be fourteen to fifteen years old, which would provide two years of investigative study before the pupils entered their chosen further education institution, or career option. However, when such a small number, about twenty five in total, were being drawn from the total population of potential sixth form pupils in the area, the use of random sampling appears to leave too much to 'mere chance'.

One objective of selecting the sample more precisely, is to improve the possibility that some 'generalisation' to other sites and situations, might be feasible. Stuart, (See Stuart, (1968) : 85) and Hammersley explain the notion of a 'stratified sample', a more controlled method for selecting samples;

it may be possible to select cases for study that cover some of the main dimensions of the suspected heterogeneity in the population in which we are interested. For instance, in studying the degree of choice given to pupils by option choice schemes in secondary schools, if we were studying more than one school we might select these to cover dimensions which could be expected to affect this phenomenon; such as large, small number of pupils, predominantly working class/ substantially middle class catchment area etc. (Hammersley, (1992) : 190)

This view, in the opinion of the present researcher, is a more appropriate way of solving the problem of finding suitable cases for study in the range of schools, chosen as sites for research. The samples should be selected to provide heterogeneity in the population, and it is also important not to

interview a 'self selected sample', that is a sample of students who might be more likely to answer questions coherently, or more positively in favour of the subject of the study, or as Huff points out 'this bias is towards the person with more money, more education, more information and alertness, better appearance, more conventional behaviour, and more settled habits than the average of the population he is chosen to represent.' (Huff, (1954) : 27). For these reasons, the teachers at the schools, together with the researcher, drew up a list of criteria which could be used to select the candidates for interview in each school. The factors considered were those which would allow the investigator to interview a wide cross section of the pupils attending that particular institution. The ability of the child, the capacity and motivation to work hard, the social class background and family circumstances, including racial origin were used to ensure that the five interviewees presented for questioning during the two year period, might be, 'as different as possible'. The criteria applied when selecting five sample, cases in each school therefore, were as follows: five pupils to be selected from the following descriptions,

- 1 a hardworking pupil who is one of the most able
- 2 a hardworking pupil who is of average ability
- 3 a hardworking pupil who is of lower ability
- 4 an easy going pupil who is one of the most able
- 5 an easygoing pupil, who is of average ability
- 6 an easy going pupil who is of lower ability

In addition, pupils involved should be drawn from the same, mixed ability tutor group - for practical purposes. The sample should include either two girls and three boys or three girls and two boys, in mixed schools.

Finally, the teacher and the researcher together drew up a list of possible interviewees. It is worth noting that a pupil was selected as 'low ability' in **that situation**, and this resulted in a pupil of 'low ability' in a grammar school, proving to be of 'higher ability' than **the most able pupil** in the estate comprehensive school, when GCSE results were later available.

#### **4.8 The Interview Schedule**

Ely et al., (1991) discuss in some detail finer points of the interview schedule (see appendix e for more details), and suggest that some flexibility be built into the process. The researcher acknowledged that although many of the questions would be asked of all pupils, from a prescribed list, to allow for some comparison later in the investigation, some of the questions and discussion would need to be changed to allow for the individuality of each pupil. Some pupils would not be intending to embark on further education at all, whilst others would be anxious to do so, and have a very clear idea of their intentions.

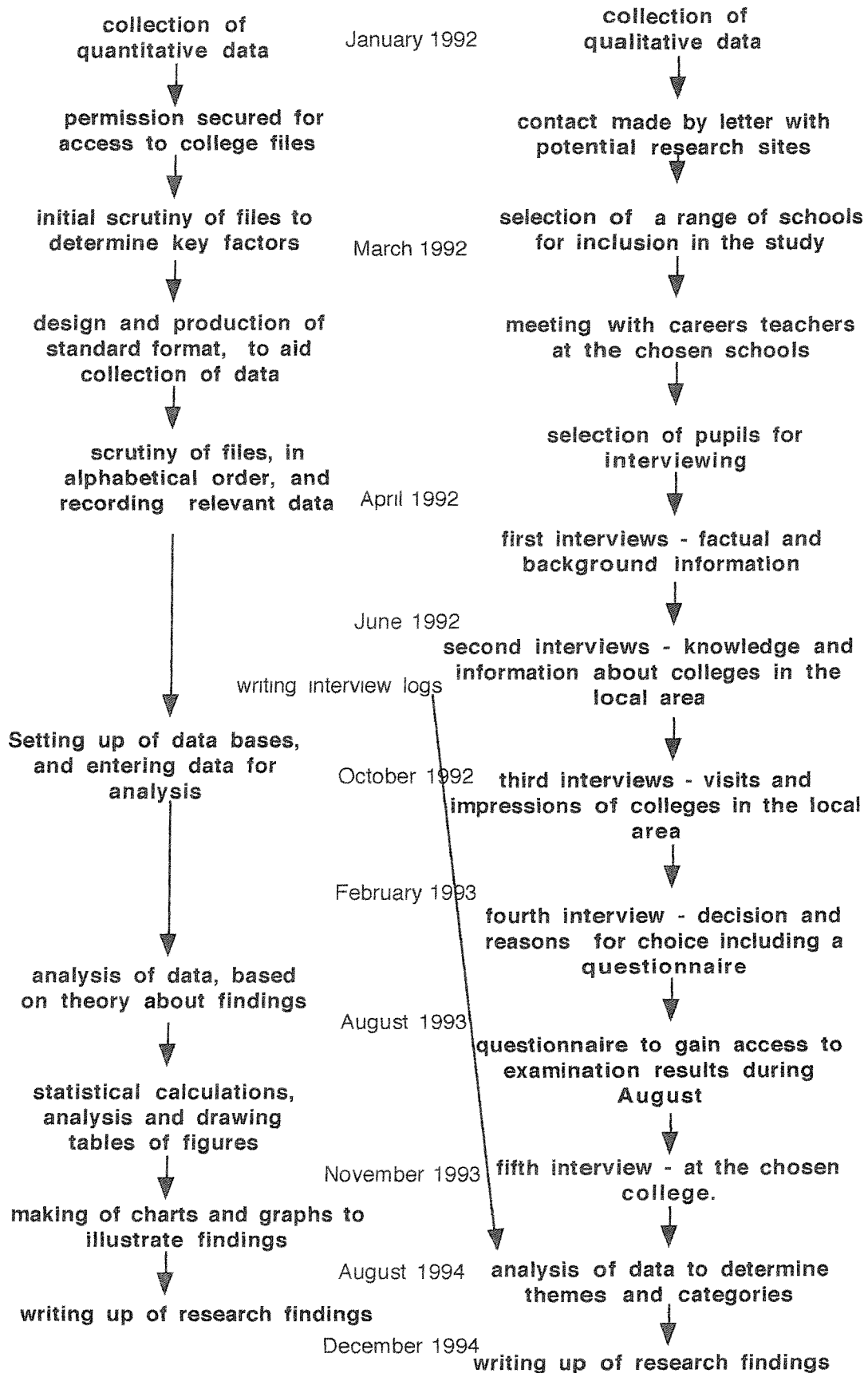
During the initial stages of the questioning, the researcher was not clear precisely what information, would be most critical to the study, or what the final choices of individuals would be. Lofland and Lofland say that 'the researcher usually does not know everything he is looking for himself when he first starts out and structures his study to some extent as he goes along.' (Lofland and Lofland (1984) : 24) The investigator believes that at this stage of the research process, it is important to keep an open mind, and to allow the respondents to provide the information themselves. Even information which, as a practitioner seemed 'common' knowledge, was put aside when possible, to allow respondents to provide their own perspective. It was considered important to be guarded in the early stages about the particular emphasis of the research questions.

#### **4.9 The Research Schedule**

A diagram summarising the research schedule including the interview period, with dates, alongside the collection of quantitative data, from college records, (see section 4.17) is provided in figure 4.2. A map of the local area, showing the geographical relationship between colleges is shown in figure 4.3.

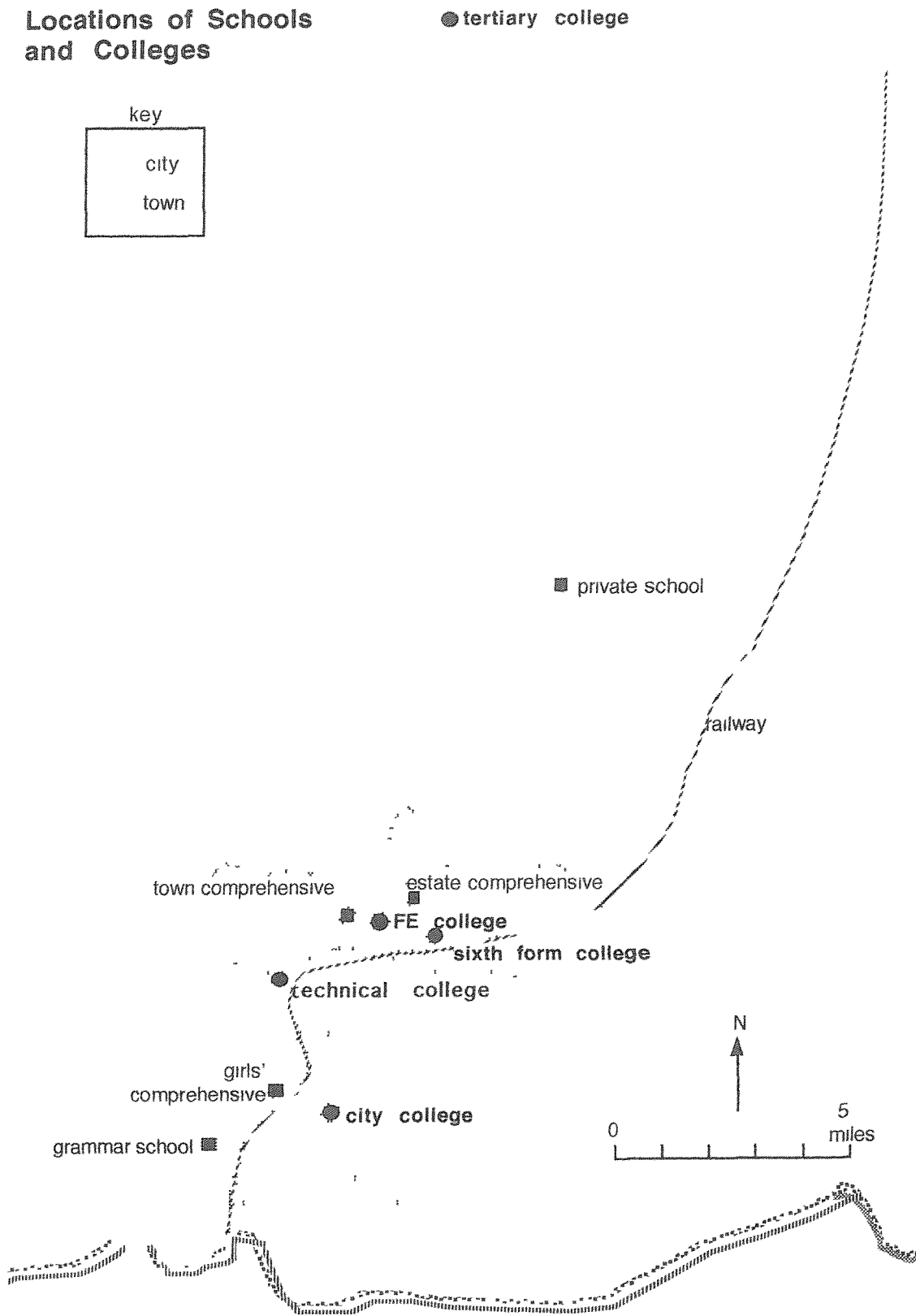
**Figure 4.2**

**Research Schedule**



**Figure 4.3.**

**Locations of Schools and Colleges**



The interviews were set up with schools to commence at a time when pupils were in the very early stages of decision making, during the year before pupils were examined at GCSE level. This timing was planned to allow a whole year of interviewing before pupils left school to attend their chosen post sixteen college. The first interview took place in the spring term, and pupils were in 'year ten', aged fourteen, at the time of selection. From each of the five schools involved in the survey, five pupils were shortlisted, with a view to interviewing each student on five or six occasions for between fifteen and twenty minutes each. A list of the research participants is provided in Figure 4.4.

**Figure 4.4**

**Research participants**

School	Pupil	Ability range	Parents' Occupations	
grammar	Neil	High achiever	Managing Director	School Teacher
grammar	James	Very able	College Bursar	German Assistant
grammar	Tim	able, works hard	Accountant	Management
grammar	Gareth	passed 11+, erratic	Dentist	Dental Assistant
grammar	Sebastian	passed 11+, wayward	Administrator	Secretary
girls' comp	Susan	High achiever	Own Business	Secretary
girls' comp	Kylie	less able, works hard	(one parent)	unemployed
girls' comp	Michelle	Less able, indolent	Manual worker	Typist
girls' comp	Pindi	less able, bi lingual	Restaurant owner	carer
girls' comp	Helen	Low ability indolent	Scrap Metal Dealer	unemployed
private	Alec	High achiever	Sales Manager	Part time clerk
private	Emily	Able, works hard	Bank Manager	Administrator
private	Dora	Average, erratic	Builder	Financial Clerk
private	Ted	Average works hard	Graphic Designer	P E Teacher
private	Stuart	Less able works hard	Quarry Worker	Factory worker
town comp	Toby	High achiever	Social worker	Teacher
town comp	Peter	Able, dislikes school	Taxi Driver	carer
town comp	Rachel	Average hard worker	Electrician	Shop assistant
town comp	Nikki	Less able hard worker	Maintenance worker	Secretary
town comp	Mandy	Less able, erratic	Car mechanic	unemployed
estate com	Wayne	Able, determined	Plant driver	unemployed
estate com	Raquel	Average, erratic	(one parent)	unemployed
estate com	Darren	Average, works hard	Factory clerk	Factory worker
estate com	Colin	Low ability, timid	Unemployed	cleaner
estate com	Carol	Very low ability	Unemployed	unemployed

Lofland and Lofland, (1984) who conducted studies utilising qualitative interviewing, tend to employ rather few interviews. They say

it is our impression that such studies are typically based on only about 20-50 interviews. Given the material management problem, numbers in that range would seem quite reasonable. (Lofland and Lofland (1984) : 62)

Over the two year period, therefore it would not be advisable to undertake more than fifty interviews possibly fewer, and in order to keep within this margin the decisions about the number of interviewees, and how often they are interviewed, could be calculated. A reasonable length of time, two or three months, would also need to pass by, before each pupil was interviewed again, to allow for events to take place, and new information to emerge. The pupils were to be interviewed approximately once each term. On the basis of these calculations, twenty five pupils in total were chosen for the present research study.

#### **4.10 The Interview Process**

Before the first interviews were set up, the researcher was under pressure make decisions about the interview process - whether to interview pupils in a small group on every occasion, or to see each child individually. Some have found it helpful to interview more than one at a time. Ginsburg et al. (1980) for example, discovered that this was 'useful in promoting discussion.' (Woods, (1986) :70) On this basis, a preliminary interview was set up with five selected pupils together in one, otherwise empty, classroom. This meeting was held as an initial introduction, but proved to be unsatisfactory. Pupils, with diverse backgrounds, intellect, motivations, intentions and social grouping, influenced one anothers' opinions constantly, by contradicting one another throughout the meeting, and therefore all further interviews were held individually.

At the first semi-formal meeting, the advice of Lofland and Lofland, (1984 :12), was followed, who suggest that interviewers should 'explain purpose



and nature of the study to the respondent, telling how or through whom he came to be selected.' It was made clear to the respondents, that they had been selected to achieve a wide range of interviewees, who were studying different subjects, and had different career aspirations. That they should try to answer as honestly as they could, based on what they knew, and that the interviewer was not trying to catch them out. The initial questions asked for factual information about the interviewees, which they would feel most comfortable with, and which they would expect to be asked. These details were similar to the list of information suggested by Silverman, who argues that, at this first meeting, facts should be dealt with, rather than opinions. The respondents were informed that they would be interviewed about once every term, at the most, and that interest would also be shown in their choice of post sixteen college, job or sixth form and that the interviewer may wish to see them once they had left, at their chosen college, or in the sixth form. By this stage however, letters had been sent to parents of candidates, requesting permission to interview the pupil, and suggesting that they write only if they were unhappy with the arrangement.

Ely et al., (1991 : 50) discuss the value of prolonged observation, and suggest that the length of the study depends on the research questions. Two years, (until pupils attended their chosen college), would appear to be long enough, in order to gain sufficient data and allow for changing views, as students gained more information and feedback on their expected examination performances. The researcher needed time to ask the interviewees similar questions on different occasions, to form cross references, and gain some insight into their changing opinions, and to observe the process of making decisions throughout this crucial period. Although the researcher arrived at interviews with a list of prescribed questions, the problem of how to ask them, and how strictly to adhere to the list, arose after the initial meeting at one school.

Because emotional responses are frequently too complex to report in a single phrase, Selltitz et al., (1964) recommend the use of open ended questions, allowing the respondents to choose their own terms. (Silverman, (1993) : 92)

In order to control the amount of information offered, or to encourage a

respondent to provide more information, the researcher believes it is necessary to be flexible in the way the questions are asked. However Powney and Watts reveal that,

the more unstructured the interview the more difficult and lengthy a process is to describe. Unstructured interviews offer the interviewer considerable flexibility and with it more responsibility. (see Watts 1983a, 1983b) (Powney and Watts, (1987) : 170)

Lofland, and Lofland, (1984), Ely et al., (1991), Hammersley (1992) and Silverman, (1993), all agree with an 'unstructured' approach to questioning claiming that the interviewer should be flexible, and that questions offered to interviewees should be open-ended in order to encourage the interviewees to respond in their own way. The interviewer drew up one list of questions some of which, were open ended, to ask all twenty five of the case study respondents. The first interview was held in order to gain biographical information, such as family circumstances, and choice of subjects for GCSE and also provided an opportunity to get to know each candidate, and to experiment with the interview technique. (A limited pilot was undertaken with four students, prior to the first series of interviews in schools.)

The interviewer believes that the process of writing down replies, would also formalise the conversation too much, and prevent a more trusting relationship developing. This proved to be wise, especially in successive interviews when more probing was required to persuade the respondent to divulge more detailed information about their perceptions. The advantage of interviewing in this way meant that detailed information could be sought when necessary, and flexibility allowed the interviewer to be more sensitive with some questions. The flexibility to cope with the very varied responses given by respondents has been described by Powney and Watts, who claim that often, 'the content and direction of the interviewer may, for instance, be largely determined by the interviewee's responses.' (Powney and Watts, (1987) : 366). However he goes on to warn that, 'successive interviews can thus be very dissimilar and therefore the description of the sessions and the responses becomes increasingly complex.' (Powney and Watts, (1987) : 356). Previous researchers discuss the problem of dealing with opinions, rather than facts. Selltiz et al., mention 'beliefs about facts', and go on to

point out that

it is always important to check first whether the respondent has any beliefs about the topic in question, otherwise the researcher may put words into his mouth. (Selltiz et al., (1964) : 245)

The questioner was interested in the opinions, and personal experiences of the pupil, and what they believe to be true. Ely et al., (1991) : 61) believe that interviewers might even sympathise, and show understanding for a respondent's views, because they claim, 'a growing trust is the basis for richer interviews.'

The interviewer used the same list of questions with each of the twenty five pupils, and these questions, together with one sample from the first interview, are provided in appendices f and g. 'The interview guide in such cases provides a checklist of sorts, a kind of inventory of things you want to talk about during the interview.' (Lofland and Lofland (1984) : 59). In view of advice offered by Silverman, (1993) : 92), who recommends asking, 'specific questions.' which 'relate to actual rather than hypothetical situations', the researcher tried to ask pupils only about their own experiences, and not encourage them to speculate about situations they had not encountered. Woods, suggests, 'there are ways of assisting the interviewee once a discussion has begun, mainly in the interests of accuracy and completeness.' (Woods, (1986) : 79) Some of these methods are listed in appendix h, and provided an invaluable, and comprehensive guide for the researcher. The 'prompt' sheet suggests ways of encouraging the interviewee to continue to provide more detailed information about a topic. These statements helped to encourage pupils to expand on their views when the crucial topics of 'choice of college', and 'attitudes to colleges', were being discussed. Many writers support the use of a tape recorder for interviewing in this situation. Stenhouse claims there are only two possibilities to consider,

so far as interviews are concerned the choice is between tape recording and taking notes. I use a tape recorder if I can, it protects the interviewee against misrepresentation, it captures the vividness of speech, it preserves a full record. (Stenhouse (1987b) : 218)

The researcher made dictaphone recordings which proved to be an accurate, and detailed way of logging the meetings with respondents. The recordings were typed in full, and it was possible to check the information at a later date, and ensure that the correct interpretation was given of the interview.

#### 4.11 Collection and Recording of Interview Data

Stenhouse believes that

all fieldwork should yield a case record - of observational field notes or of interview transcripts - which serves as an evidential base to underwrite a descriptive case study. (Stenhouse (1987a) : 79)

The researcher, in support of this suggestion, used the transcripts of the tape recordings to provide field notes, in the form of case records, for each pupil, as a basis for analysis. The typewriting of the field work notes, using the tape recordings however, provided an important opportunity to reflect on the findings, as they emerged, and enabled the researcher to formulate the next set of interview questions for all respondents. When writing up the interviews, which was undertaken immediately after the interview, or at the very latest, before the next interview took place, ideas for further questioning, and suggested interpretations, connections, and related ideas, were noted down, to help with analysis at a later stage. Lofland and Lofland, (1984) indicate that optimally 'an interview rests upon some 'puzzlements' that the researcher has teased out from thinking about what has happened.' (Lofland and Lofland, (1984) :106).

All the interviews held with each pupil were written in full, but not all transcripts included all the silences, and hesitations, as well as use of incorrect grammar, when it occurred. Interview transcripts were not all fully transcribed in this way, although they were the exact words of the respondents, because the writer does not believe it is necessary to the research. (The study of grammar, and dialect is not the subject of the

research.) Hammersley (1992, :187) observes that, 'all description is selective. Descriptions never reproduce the phenomena described.' Both Woods, (1986), and Jones, (1987), point out that time, place and impressions of interviewees should be recorded in the early stages, to help with the analysis, and the recall of important details later on in the research process. This information, together with the interview transcripts from five interviews, held with twenty five candidates, generated very rich data or thick description for analysis, in pursuit of 'meanings'.

The researcher believes that it was essential to the research, to disguise one issue being dealt with, that is the marketing information provided by the sixth form college. If such information had been made specific to those involved, then an unnecessary bias might have been introduced into the research. Ely et al., support this notion, for they say, 'a neutral stance is preferable during data collection, although it is often an effort to rise above our own non-neutrality.' (Ely et al, (1991): 121)

During the transcribing of interviews, and throughout the period of the field work, the researcher began to analyse the data, and to test out various theories, about the attitudes pupils held towards colleges, and types of course offered. Ratcliffe, supports this view arguing that,

most research methodologists are now aware that **all** data are theory - method - and measurement dependent. That is, 'facts' are determined by the theories and methods that generate their collection; indeed, theories and methods create the facts.  
(Ratcliffe, (1983 : 148)

The researcher was careful to ensure that error was not introduced into the data by suggesting ideas to the respondents, or unnecessarily influencing them by providing information during the questioning. For example, Stuart claimed that the sixth form college offered BTEC in Art and Design, which the researcher knew to be incorrect. This inaccuracy was recorded in the transcript, but no comment was made, and at a later interview the respondent had discovered that the course was not offered. In order to avoid introducing error, the researcher was often forced to claim no knowledge of a subject which was quite familiar. The interviewer allowed every

respondent to explain their subject choice independently, although the information had been provided adequately by at least one pupil. The interviewer also refrained from correcting this information if it was explained 'wrongly' by any of the interviewees. Subsequent interviews usually allowed respondents to correct the information, but it was important that the interviewer did not provide the answers. The interviewer would often ask a question again, later in a different form, in the hope of getting the respondent to reflect on an inaccurate reply - but this occasionally caused the pupil to be more emphatic. Silverman acknowledges however that,

to a certain extent, 'all data collected will be biased; (...), all research is contaminated to some extent by the values of the researcher. Only through those values do certain problems get identified and studied in particular ways. (Weber, (1946) in Silverman (1993) : 172)

The decision to ask particular questions, and the probing and pursuit of answers to these questions it is argued, will inevitably 'contaminate' the research, with the values of the researcher. The researcher acknowledges, for example, that merely asking questions about choices and attitudes to colleges, may have encouraged respondents to find out more information than they might otherwise have done. Even by asking open ended questions, this problem is not solved, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 110-111) point out, 'it is somewhat naive to assume that open ended or non directive interviewing is not in itself a form of social control which shapes what people say.' The possibility of avoiding some form of bias in the questioning of pupils appears to be unrealistic, although the researcher was constantly aware of the problem. There was however, considerable flexibility in the way the questions were asked, to take account of the different situations the pupils found themselves in. It is not imperative however, that all respondents should be asked precisely the same questions. The essential issue, is that the researcher records honestly the data which is collected, and seeks to collect the data openly. Ely et al.'s views are that,

being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means at least that the processes of the research are carried out fairly, that the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people who are studied. (Ely et al, (1991) : 93)

Denzin, lists a number of 'problems which can 'distort' interviewees' responses. Firstly, 'respondents possessing different interactional roles from the interviewer.' (Denzin: 1970: 133-138). The pupils tended to treat the interviewer as a friendly, but nevertheless 'teacher' figure, rather than a 'friend', for example, and this would influence the information provided. Secondly, 'the problems of 'volatile', 'fleeting' relationships to which respondents have little commitment and so can fabricate tales of self that belie actual facts.' (Denzin, (1970) : 133-138). The interviewer was aware that during the second interview at the estate comprehensive, the respondent tried to exaggerate his own ability, and his potential. He described himself in the best possible light, and tried to give the impression that he was capable of much higher results at GCSE, and a much more ambitious career than he was really capable of. However, because the interviewer maintained prolonged contact with the interviewees, these biases began to come to light in view of later developments, and further questioning.

The 'context' of the interview, (eg; a busy corridor or a quiet office), (Silverman, (1993) : 97) is thought to influence the results provided. For example, one pupil could not be located for a face to face interview after he had left school to go to one of the colleges - he had missed the prearranged meeting. An interview was held on the telephone, but probably generated different data from interviews held at the schools, when the respondents were mentally prepared for the meeting, and had allowed the time to answer the questions.

Silverman believes that 'where someone has actually faced a situation of the type described, his or her response is likely to be more reliable.' (Silverman (1993): 92) Interviewees were asked for example. 'What do you know about the colleges I have listed here?' If they were unable to reply, they were not provided with clues or suggestions, by the researcher. In some cases, they provided details which were not entirely 'true', about a college, but they were not corrected by the interviewer. Later, these distortions were mentioned, when the pupil had been to the college, and the interviewee was asked the same question again, and given the opportunity

to correct, or add to the information they provided. Woods, warns that, 'we interpret the past through our current mental frameworks and invariably those facts become somewhat warped.' (Woods, (1986) : 83) The interviewees were asked to answer questions which related to the stage they had reached in making decisions about colleges, and courses. They were rarely asked to reflect on choices made by others, or to think about hypothetical situations.

#### 4.12 Reliability

Cohen and Manion, (1987 : 50) claim that, 'Reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions.' The researcher attempted to ask the same list of questions of all respondents involved in the study, and as far as possible the questions were asked in the same way. However, the open endedness of some questions tended to produce very different answers from respondents. A number of external factors also affected the answers pupils were able to provide to questions. In one school for example, students were always taken out of a careers lesson to answer questions, and therefore these interviewees were always very focused on careers and choices at each meeting. Occasionally pupils were unable to make any comment on some questions, because they had no knowledge or experience of the subject. Later in the interview schedule it was not possible to ask all candidates the same questions because the choices they had already made excluded them from further questions on a subject. For example, one candidate who had avoided all information about further education was unable to comment on why she had selected a particular course of action, and explain her reasons for choosing a college.

Sapsford and Evans argue that,

field study involves an interaction between researcher, research circumstances and research subject, one can never be totally sure that the observed results would be the same as if there were





no observer; reactivity can never be totally eliminated. (Sapsford and Evans (1987 : 260)

In considering ways of increasing 'reliability' the researcher needs to reassure readers of the research that the recording of the information is 'authentic'. Silverman claims that open ended questions, which allow the respondent to express his own view, are more likely to increase the 'reliability' of the research undertaken.

'Authenticity' rather than reliability is often the issue in qualitative research. The aim is usually to gather an 'authentic' understanding of people's experiences and it is believed that 'open ended' questions are the most effective route towards this end. (Silverman (1993) : 10)

Many of the pupils contradicted themselves over a period of time. This raised questions about 'truth' and whether the pupils were speaking the 'truth' when they were interviewed.

When interviewing at the private school, the interviewer knew that some of the 'facts' being described about the college were untrue, but accepted the statement without negative comment at the time. However, the pupil believed this to be true, at the time. When interviewed and questioned in the final interview, the pupil admitted that the statement was incorrect, but that she had believed it to be true, at the time she said it. Whyte, discusses the concept of 'truth' in research and inquiry, and explains that,

in dealing with subjective material, the interviewer is, of course, not trying to discover the *true attitude or sentiment* of the informant. He should recognise that ambivalence is a fairly common condition of man - that men (sic) can and do hold conflicting sentiments at any given time. Furthermore, men (sic) hold varying sentiments according to the situations in which they find themselves. (Whyte, (1980) : 117)

Dean and Whyte, (1969) point out that throughout ethnographic research is the question, 'how do we know that the informant is telling the truth? Tesch offers researchers the concept of 'trustworthiness' (Tesch, (1992): 71), and Hammersley says that, 'in practice though, most researchers recognise that their work must also be judged in terms of its relevance.' (Hammersley,

(1992): 72) Phillips provides strong support for naturalistic styles of research, and claims that, 'neither subjectivity nor objectivity has an exclusive stranglehold on the truth.' (Phillips (1993) : 61)

#### 4.13 Validity and Validation

Sapsford and Evans, (1987 : 258) define validity as, ' the extent to which an indicator is a measure of what the researcher wishes to measure.' In discussing 'validity' Brinberg and McGrath (1985 : 19-20) suggest that 'validity means value or worth, correspondence or fit, (...) and 'generalisability' - which they call, 'external validity'. Hammersley points out the value of interviewing the same respondents on different occasions, and indeed gives some indication that this practice might increase the validity of the research. (Hammersley, (1992) : 67) The pursuit of 'truth' in research, and the 'extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomenon to which it refers, is usually referred to as 'validity'. , (Hammersley, (1990): 57).

Silverman argues that 'field researchers have sidestepped the issue of validity by stressing a concern to generate rather than test theories.' (Silverman, (1993) : 153) For example, Glaser and Strauss' concept of 'grounded theory' (1967) seeks to 'generate and develop categories in order to produce delimited theories grounded in the data.' (Silverman, (1993) : 153) Sapsford and Evans, (1987 : 259) view 'validity' as the 'soundness of logical argument; the exclusion of biases, the disproof of competing hypotheses, and the assurance that the data collected are actual measures of what they purport to measure.' What must be included is the respondent's description of his or her own perceptions, which in some cases may mean, that a view is expressed that is not strictly 'true'. In framing the descriptions of the informants' views therefore, the researcher cannot be solely concerned with the 'truth'. However, the honesty and integrity of the researcher dictates that the information should be recorded in this way. 'What is crucial for the objectivity of any inquiry - whether it is qualitative or

quantitative - is the critical spirit in which it has been carried out.' (Phillips, (1993) : 71) The researcher undertook the recording and transcription of the interviews with attention to accuracy, and honesty, and Hammersley (1992) : 67) believes that validity in qualitative research refers to the 'accuracy with which the events are described.'

Lincoln and Guba, claim that 'refutability' is an excellent way to test the validity of any research finding. They suggest that,

negative case analysis is the search for evidence that does not fit into our emergent findings that leads to a re-examination of our findings. ....Negative case analysis can be extremely helpful in guiding qualitative researchers to ...make data more credible by reducing the number of exceptional cases...(Lincoln and Guba, (1985) :312)

The researcher, in asking questions of the respondents, tried to ensure that all interviewees were given the opportunity to provide their views on the main issues involved in the study. The researcher needed to ensure that in order to analyse the data meticulously, honestly and systematically, that adequate information was provided, from all respondents, that is, those who chose not to attend any of the colleges, as well as those who did attend the colleges in the study.

Silverman, (1993): 159) suggests that 'respondent validation' is much more appropriate for qualitative researchers, and describes this form of validation as 'a method which allows the respondent to check the information he has provided.' The researcher undertook some form of 'respondent validation', by summarising briefly, details of the previous interview at the next meeting, to check that the information was correct, as well as to remind the informants of the subject of the last meeting. In the present research, respondent validation was not always appropriate, because decision making is a process, and students were redefining the situation, and changing their views during the research period, and examination of this 'continuous adjustment of perspective' was essential to the research. Therefore, in the present research, respondent validation was a limited undertaking, because the researcher was interested in the 'changing perceptions of the

respondents', and did not wish to 'correct' the information as the research progressed, but wished to record the changes in views, if they occurred, at each meeting.

In order to ensure that ethnographic research can have some claim to, 'validity', Fetterman suggests, 'triangulation' which he argues 'is at the heart of ethnographic validity, testing one source against another to strip away alternative explanations and prove a hypothesis.' (Fetterman (1989) : 89). The idea of triangulation is most often associated with the work of Campbell, (1981) (see Brinberg and McGrath, (1985): 123). Guba and Lincoln describe the way in which 'triangulation' might be undertaken, 'triangulation can be based on different reports about the same event by two or more researchers who are studying the same phenomenon.' (Guba and Lincoln, (1982) : 241) A final summary of the information pupils had provided, was listed on a questionnaire, administered by the researcher, in the interview, which was an attempt to cross check the information they had given. Questionnaires were administered on two occasions, firstly to gain a summary of the views each pupil held about the college they had chosen, and to gain immediate access to examination results of individuals, during the summer. (an example of this questionnaire is provided in appendix i.) The teachers at the schools, were also questioned, to provide clarification on some issues, including results of examinations, and issues raised by the interviewing. Pupils who went on to further education in one of the local institutions were also interviewed in their 'new' college, and the senior staff responsible for marketing in those institutions were also interviewed about the marketing undertaken within the institution. Not every log entry requires a search for triangulation, as Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest that

researchers seek only to triangulate, to cross check  
(...) specific data items of a factual nature, and to  
check insights, results, conclusions and  
presentations with the people they studied and with  
their peer support group. (Guba and Lincoln, (1982) :  
241)

#### 4.14 Internal Validity and Causal Relationships

Campbell, (1969) drew a distinction between internal and external validity.

Internal validity has to do with whether what is interpreted as the 'cause' actually produced the 'effects' in a given piece of research. External validity is concerned with whether the results of the study can be generalised. (Bell et al., (1987) : 260)

Glaser and Strauss (1967) raise the issue of identifying 'causal relationships', and this argument has a long history (eg; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Mitchell 1983; Hammersley, (1992): 192). There is now some disagreement about whether it is possible to identify 'causes of human behaviour', and whether or not human actions conform to 'law-like' patterns. 'Few ethnographers today believe that universal laws of human behaviour exist.' (Hammersley, (1992) : 92) Should the aim of this research include some attempt to find 'causes' for the behaviour of the individuals involved in the interviewing? If pupils choose to attend one educational institution rather than another, could the case study research findings reveal a 'cause' or a number of 'causes' for the choices these pupils subsequently made, and thereby even 'predict' how other pupils in similar circumstances might behave in the future? Lofland and Lofland have considered this notion in their own research, and they warn that,

it is perfectly appropriate to be curious about causes , as long as you recognise that whatever account or explanation you devise is conjecture. ....and since these will merely be stated and likely left untested, it behoves you not to allow causal conjecture portions of the report to become a large or dominant part of the total study. (Lofland and Lofland, (1984) : 102)

Strauss and Corbin, (1990) refer to 'causal conditions' and 'intervening conditions', which relate to the occurrence of a phenomenon. 'Causal conditions or 'antecedent' conditions are often pointed to in research data by terms such as 'when', 'because', 'due to', as though reasons for the occurrence of the phenomenon may be found by looking back through the data. However, they point out that, 'in reality, any single "causal condition" rarely produces a phenomenon.' Strauss and Corbin describe 'intervening

conditions' as

broad and general conditions bearing upon action/interaction strategies. These conditions include; time, space, culture, economic status, technological status, career, history, individual biography. (Strauss and Corbin, (1990 : 103)

Whilst the researcher is curious about causes, it is important to recognise that conjecture and speculation, and some attempt to make tentative suggestions about causes, and identify 'intervening conditions', is all that can be attempted. The strength of ethnography as a research method, is the emphasis on process as well as outcome, and the rigorous investigation and analysis of individual patterns of behaviour. An understanding of beliefs and behaviour is an important contribution to understanding the perceptions and intentions of others, and in the construction of 'theory'. However, 'in order for it to be theory, concepts must be systematically related, because it is simply not enough to say certain conditions exist and then require readers to figure out what the relationship to the phenomena might be.' (Strauss and Corbin, (1990) : 167)

#### **4.15 Generalisability and External Validity**

Researchers in the quantitative tradition have given considerable thought to the question of how the 'generalisability' of experimental work and studies can be enhanced. (See appendix j, for a summary by Guba and Lincoln, 1982, 1985). In the past decade, interest in the issue of 'generalisability' has increased markedly for qualitative researchers involved in the study of education. Books by Patton (1980), Guba and Lincoln (1981), and Noblit and Hare (1988), as well as papers by Stake (1978), Kennedy (1979) and others have dealt with this issue in considerable depth. Schofield however is doubtful, and contends that

there is broad agreement that generalisability in the sense of producing laws that apply universally is not a useful standard or goal for qualitative research. In fact most qualitative researchers would join Cronbach (1982) in arguing that this is not a useful or

obtainable goal for any kind of research in the social sciences. (Schofield (1993) : 97)

The researcher initially hoped to provide information which would augment, support, explore, and provide data for the ongoing marketing research carried out by the sixth form college, although the situation changes very quickly, and as Cronbach (1982) points out,

when summative evaluations are reported, no more than a fraction of the audience is interested primarily in the specific program and setting that was the object of the study. Even at the study site itself, by the time the evaluation is completed, changes may well have occurred that have important consequences for program functioning and goal achievement. (Schofield (1993) : 94)

Hammersley suggests that survey research in addition to case study might enable some generalisation across a population. (see section 4.17)

However, Schofield, (1993), writing in the qualitative research tradition, argues that 'a consensus appears to be emerging that for qualitative researchers, 'generalisability is best thought of as a matter of the 'fit' between the situation and the conclusion of the study.' (Schofield, (1993):

109) Specifically, Guba and Lincoln (1982) argue that the concept of

'fittingness', with its emphasis on analyzing the degree to which the situation studied matches other situations in which one is interested, provides a more realistic and workable way of thinking about the generalizability of research results than do more classical approaches. (Schofield, (1993) : 96)

The research was limited to one LEA, with particular attributes, including a range of colleges within a few miles of each other. The research took place during a period of considerable change in education and training, and at a time when 'A' level courses were less affected by competition with GNVQ or other equivalent courses. The location of the research however, might permit comparison with other similar towns with similar socioeconomic profiles. It appears that, although most writers on generalisability reject the strict notion of the term as defined by quantitative researchers, this is not a total repudiation of the idea that some studies might be applicable in similar situations, or that they might at least help to explain, or to form some

conclusions about what happens in similar situations. The findings of this research, might have some significance when added to the accumulation of experience, knowledge and findings from other studies. In this way, it might become possible to make some generalisations to other situations, and populations.

#### **4.16 The Characteristics of Quantitative Methodology**

Bell, (1987) argues that, 'the aim of a survey is to obtain information which can be analysed, and patterns extracted and comparisons made' (Bell, (1987) : 8) Wilson, (1984) uses the national census as an example of the survey style of research and explains that, 'The census is intended to be a complete enumeration of the entire population of Great Britain.' (Wilson in Bell et al., (1984) : 34) Bell believes that,

whichever method of information gathering is selected, the aim is to obtain answers to the same questions from a large number of individuals to enable the researcher not only to describe but also to compare, to relate one characteristic to another and to demonstrate that certain features exist in certain categories. (Bell, (1987) :9)

The survey undertaken in connection with the present research, was concerned with the whole population of the sixth form college over a period of twelve years. The information was stored in alphabetically organised record cards, which provided the names, addresses, and qualifications of students attending the college. The date of entry and the date of exit was recorded, together with details of 'O' level or GCSE qualifications and 'A' level passes with grades, alongside the names of staff teaching the student. Notes on the conduct of the student, and the post 18 destinations of some students, were also recorded by the college. The researcher collected details on 5219 cases, which comprised virtually the total population of the college during the period 1979 - 1991. (Fewer than 20 cases were excluded from the study, and were those who had partly filled in a record card, but left before selecting subjects.)



#### 4.17 Quantitative Data Collection

Davies and Scribbins, (1985 : 23) claim that, 'a great deal of useful (marketing) information can be assembled (...) by careful exploration of published data, directories and college records.' They continue by expanding on the basic information required to research the market, and list a number of categories of information which might be collected including,

- \* basic demographic information; the profile of potential consumers in terms of age, sex, income groups, occupations, and social status.
  - \* the geographical distribution of potential consumers; a local or national map of relevant population density can be constructed.
- (..) (Davies and Scribbins, (1985) : 23)

Glastonbury and MacKean, (1991 : 226) argue that, 'it is important to know exactly how you are going to handle and analyse the data before you start to collect it.' Davies and Scribbins observed that,

Ideally the student record should enable a college to know who its past and present student are, where they have come from, and how they have got there, why they did so, when they did so and their attitudes to courses studied. (Davies and Scribbins, (1985) : 23)

The data collected by the present researcher included the previous school attended, the date of entry to the college, geographical location by postcode, entry qualifications listed as a total, and exit qualifications. Details of parental occupations which might have given an indication of social status, had not been recorded on record cards, and notes on post 18 destinations were not recorded in many cases. Before the data was collected, the researcher had made a decision to analyse the information using a computer data base and a compatible spreadsheet package. The data was therefore collected on a simple chart which would enable easy translation into data base 'fields', or categories, these categories became the variables. Social trends reports, by HMSO, and Government Statistical Service Publications provided statistics relating to trends in staying on rates, changes in the 15-16 year old population during the period, and 'A' level

qualifications.

Glastonbury and MacKean, (1991 : 244) define a variable as 'an item of information collected about cases.' They explain that variables can be either 'numeric', or 'alphanumeric'. All numeric variables however, in the present research were actual values. Numerical values were used for the number of 'GCSE' equivalents, the number of 'A' levels, the year of entry, and the length of time spent at the college.

#### **4.18 Reliability, Validity and Generalisability**

If reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. The survey method employed to collect market research data is considered very reliable. The information on record cards was very consistent, recorded in an identical fashion on every card, and transferred to a data base record methodically. The data which required interpretation of some kind, included the total number of GCSE grade 'C' equivalents, and the post code. A decision had to be made to exclude certain subjects considered to be duplicates, where a student had been entered for both 'O' level and CSE. A decision also had to be reached to determine the post codes of some students from the addresses given. The assignment of information to categories however, was straightforward and relatively uncontroversial, and reliable. All data collection and interpretation of figures was carried out by the researcher, without administrative assistance.

Validity determines 'whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to describe.' (Bell, (1984) : 51) Bracht and Glass (1968) define three kinds of validity as follows,

populations validity has to do with generalisations to populations of persons (...) ecological validity has to do with generalisation to other conditions (ie; settings, causal factors, researchers, measures of effect) (Sapsford and Evans, (1987) : 260)

Sapsford and Evans, (1987) provide a summary of the advantages and shortcomings of survey style research and claim that, surveys have an 'emphasis on reliability' but that surveys are 'low on content validity, and ecological validity, but high on population validity.' (Sapsford and Evans, (1987) : 264) They explain that surveys are most appropriate for establishing 'a statistical association between variables, and offer a 'commitment to generalisation.' (Sapsford and Evans, (1987) : 265) They finally remark that,

Survey styles of research place great emphasis on reliability of measurement - hence their great concern with measurable behaviour and standardised measuring instruments, (...) a claim to generalisability of results depends on establishing that the right and relevant variables were measured. (Sapsford and Evans, (1987) : 263)

The survey research undertaken in connection with the present study, emphasises the reliable measurement of a selected range of variables, by focusing on data relating to students attending one college, over a period of twelve years.

#### **4.19 Summary**

The research methodology employed relies on two distinct styles of research which both have a long tradition in educational research, a quantitative survey style of research, and multiple site case studies, employing qualitative interviewing. Findings of qualitative and quantitative research should result in speculative suggestions being made which when added to the findings of other researchers, and to existing knowledge, will contribute to the accumulation of experience in the field, and shed a little more light on our understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny.

This chapter has summarised the characteristics of both quantitative and qualitative research traditions, and outlined the present research schedule.

Issues relating to reliability, validity and the potential for generalisability have been discussed for both research methods. Consideration was given to access, ethical issues and confidentiality in connection with the collection of qualitative data. The selection process employed to identify sample cases was outlined, and a list of sites, and case study participants was provided in chart form.

Chapter 5 provides description and presentation of the findings of the study in relation to the 'supply' side of the market. The data collected from college records is presented in the form of charts and graphs to illustrate patterns and trends in the data.

# Chapter 5

## CHAPTER 5

### THE SUPPLY SIDE OF MARKETING

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on numerical data collected from college records, and concentrates on the summary and presentation of data in the form of charts, and graphs. Firstly, a chronological summary of the marketing activities undertaken by the college is provided; the total number of students in each year cohort, listed by type of course followed is described; secondly data relating to students' previous schools and geographical catchment areas are presented. Following a summary of GCSE and 'A' level qualifications for each year group, comparisons are made between exit and entrance qualifications of year cohorts of students, to explore the emergence of trends and patterns in the data. Finally a summary of data collected through interviews with the Vice Principals of three colleges is provided.

On the 'supply' side of the market, using statistical analysis of database material, the research aims to;

- a) examine the changes in the descriptive profiles of students attending the college during the period of study;
- b) determine whether the catchment area has changed significantly;
- c) examine the affects of marketing strategy on any increases in social inequality in post sixteen education.
- d) examine the entrance and exit qualifications of individuals to determine any significant relationship between the marketing strategy undertaken by the college, and changes in the entrance qualifications of subsequent year cohorts. (i.e.; has marketing the college in a particular way changed the student intake in terms of their entry qualifications?)

The quantitative survey is essentially concerned with whether better

qualified students, or students from more advantaged backgrounds, were enrolled at the college following the years when target marketing strategies were implemented, and whether the geographical catchment area around the college has changed substantially as a result of the marketing activity during the period.

## **5.2 The Historical Context of the Quantitative Survey**

The sixth form college and a newly built FE college were set up as part of the new comprehensive system, after substantial reorganisation of secondary modern and grammar 11-18 schools during the late 1970s. The sixth form college is sited on the fringe of a substantial local authority housing estate, and was designated a sixth form college in 1978 when six local schools were reduced from 11-18 to 11-16 schools. The period of the study includes students who left between 1979 and 1991 inclusively. The staff turnover at the college was slow during the period of the survey, and the Vice Principals at the college remained in their posts, but new Principals were appointed in 1983, and 1990. This section describes the four main stages of development in a gradually emerging 'market orientated', more 'responsive' orientation undertaken by the college. The main developments during the twelve year period of the study included production of a prospectus, changes in the liaison arrangements with local schools, the introduction of open evenings, and a gradual increase in emphasis on 'A' level courses in all marketing and promotional efforts.

### **5.2.1 Phase 1 - Marketing and Promotion between 1979 and 1982**

The first Principal was the ex-headmaster of the grammar school. He operated in an essential executive style and involved few staff in his decision making. In 1980 a prospectus was produced 'in-house', and liaison was set up and maintained with the six official LEA feeder schools.

Students were enrolled from non-feeder schools but no promotion was undertaken to secure applications from sixteen year olds outside the local area. The sixth form college had been set up on the assumption that, the fifteen year olds intending to 'stay on' after 16, living in the area, would automatically apply to join the college. The number of fifteen year olds in each year cohort was scrutinised, on the assumption that those who decided to stay in education beyond sixteen would transfer to the sixth form college.

### **5.2.2 Phase II - Marketing and Promotion between 1983 and 1986**

The second Principal worked in a consultative and negotiative style, and was committed to comprehensive education. Promotion was aimed at all sixteen year olds living locally. One year courses for students with fewer than 4 'O' levels, and a CPVE course were included in the promotional literature. There was great concern among senior staff that the number of potential students was declining, especially because staffing was based on the total intake each year. It became clear during this period that the FE college and sixth form college were competitors and that students were choosing between them. During this phase, the college offered courses for all sixteen year olds, and attempted to adjust the courses to accommodate the demands of students who applied for courses. New courses were introduced by subject departments, rather than as part of future planning and development. Open evenings and staff liaison with official feeder schools continued. Concern about the decline in the number of local fifteen year olds began to dominate the forward planning process during this period. In spite of the efforts of the Principal, the number of applications from local state schools declined. No visits were made to independent schools, but literature was sent to careers departments.

### **5.2.3 Phase III - Marketing and Promotion between 1986 and 1989**

During 1986 a survey was carried out by the mathematics department to find



out the views of students attending the college, and provide a list of the main strengths of the college from the students' point of view. (see Hemsley-Brown 1991) The emphasis was transferred to 'A' level courses to maintain the numbers taking each subject, and the pass rate from 1987 onwards was used prominently all promotional literature. One year courses were given less emphasis, and CPVE which had attracted only 12 students a year, was discontinued. Open evenings continued, and liaison with feeder schools continued. In August 1988, 89, and 90, news articles were placed in the local newspaper announcing the high pass rate at 'A' level, and later displayed in promotional literature. Public relations visits were arranged with local independent 11-16 schools to talk to sixteen year olds about further education. A third Principal was appointed to start in January 1990.

#### **5.2.4 Phase IV - Marketing and Promotion between 1990 and 1994**

The second new college Principal discontinued the practice of promoting overtly the pass rate at 'A' level. A Vice Principal was given responsibility for marketing, including collection of data relating to the local population of fifteen year olds, statistics relating to examination results of local schools, and issuing questionnaires to each year cohort to determine views on their experience of studying at the college. The prospectus provides reasons why students might wish to enrol including; 'consistently the best results', and 'a specialist general education college'. The emphasis in the promotional literature concentrated on the 'balance of support, advice and independence' (college prospectus, (1992) : 1) Emphasis on 'A' level courses increased and virtually no promotional activity was assigned to one year courses. New markets quite different from existing markets, were explored and planned, (based on the results of a market audit), which could operate alongside the post sixteen full time courses, under the heading of 'Business School Management' Courses.

The next section describes the collection of data, from historical records.

### 5.3 Collection of Data from College Records

This section is concerned with the presentation of numerical data relating to the intake of students to the college during the period of the study. The data were collected by recording information provided on students' record cards retained by the college. These cards were hand written documents, which summarised details of each student attending the college over twelve years, filed alphabetically. The information was entered into an Apple Macintosh Claris Works database for analysis, and the figures were transferred directly to Claris Works spreadsheets for calculation and statistical analysis. The search for information to provide some insight into the phenomena does not assume that within the filing system, the so called 'facts' are simply waiting to be collected. To discover a 'fact' relevant to the enquiry, requires a decision to be made about what counts as relevant. The search for factual data, relies on some theory about the data. (adapted from Powney & Watts, 1987)

The data were collected under headings, which could provide some insight into the changing qualifications, and backgrounds of the pupils taking up places at the college during the period studied. The database record for each pupil listed the year of leaving, geographical area of home address by postcode, entry qualifications, exit qualifications, the previous school, and the type of course the student followed, including how many years the student attended the college. Addresses which were known to be within a local authority housing estate, (the locality in which the college is sited), were recorded as such. The data search did not include the grades obtained by pupils at either GCSE / 'O' level, or 'A' level, although the total number of examination passes for each candidate was recorded for statistical calculation. The researcher has not made a judgement about any data and allocated a numerical value, all data recorded in numerical form is taken directly from the raw figures provided by college records.

### 5.3.1 Total student intake between 1979 and 1991

The total number of student records collected for the study is 5,219. Figure 5.1 shows that girls form a slightly larger proportion of the overall intake, 2,707 (52%), whilst 2,512 boys make up 48% of the total number, and 56.6% of students during the period, enrolled for 2 year 'A' level courses. The drop-out rate has remained fairly constant and accounts for an average of 11.2% of the intake overall. (see appendix k). There is only a marginal fluctuation in the drop-out rate for GCSE courses, compared with 'A' level courses, and the change over the whole research period of between 9.1% and 13.4% - 36 to 55 students, is considered relatively inconsequential.

**Figure 5.1**

#### Breakdown of total intake between 1979 and 1991

Course	girls	boys	all	% of sample
1 yr. (GCSE Course)	604	602	1206	23.1%
2 yr. (A Level Course)	1557	1396	2953	56.6%
3yr (GCSE & A Levels)	101	155	256	4.9%
CPVE	14	11	25	0.5%
2yr (G)	104	38	142	2.7%
Drop out (GCSE)	148	139	287	5.5%
Drop out (A Level)	153	143	296	5.7%
Drop out (CPVE)	4	1	5	0.1%
3 yr. (A Level)	11	8	19	0.4%
1 yr. (A Level)	8	15	23	0.4%
2 yr. (GCSE & A Level)	1	0	1	0.0%
1 yr. (GCSE & A Level)	1	1	2	0.0%
2yr (CPVE)	1	0	1	0.0%
3yr (GCSE)	0	3	3	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2707</b>	<b>2512</b>	<b>5219</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The proportion of male and female students entering the college during the period studied varied slightly. Between 1977 and 1980, and 1982 and 1984, (by year of intake) there were more girls than boys, (the highest percentage of girls was 56% with 43% of boys) whereas in the last three years of the study, from 1988, boys are in the majority.

The database catalogues students by the year of leaving, but to determine the fluctuation in the student population at the college over the period, a list was also made of the intake **by year of entry**, and type of course studied, and these totals are shown in Figure 5.2. A more detailed breakdown of the intake is provided in appendix m.

**Figure 5.2**

**Intake totals between 1979 & 1990**

Year	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84
Girls	117	200	262	203	221	235	184	215
Boys	107	169	185	169	229	222	178	201
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>416</b>

Year	85	86	87	88	89	90	by year of enrolment
Girls	196	188	240	198	201	47	
Boys	202	189	184	210	210	57	
<b>Total</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>104</b>	

Figure 5.3 shows the decline in the total number of fifteen year old pupils in schools nationally, for the period, 1979 - 1991.

**Figure 5.3**

**Number of fifteen year olds in schools**

Year	79	80	*80	81	82	83	84
boys^	497	492	483	481	472	462	453
girls^	458	468	461	459	452	440	433

Year	85	86	87	88	89	90	91
boys	446	433	443	420	393	373	355
girls	425	412	421	397	372	354	336

\*Age at 31 August from 1980 onwards    ^all numbers in thousands  
 Department of Education and Science Regional Trends 27, 1992

A Pearson r correlation coefficient score was calculated to determine whether the college intake figures fluctuated at the same or a similar rate to the national figures, (allowing for a one year 'time lag') showing the number of fifteen year olds in schools. The score was calculated to be 0.7, which

shows a positive relationship - whereby 49% of the variance would be common. It might therefore be argued that **the college experienced a decline in intake during a period when the total population of fifteen year olds was also declining.**

Figure 5.4 shows the number of students nationally on full time courses in further education. The figures are in thousands, and show that participation in further education nationally increased during the period of the study. The Pearson r correlation coefficient score was calculated to determine the relationship between the participation rate nationally, and the student population at the college. The score of -0.1 indicates a negative relationship, suggesting that figures at the college do not change in a similar pattern to the national figures for participation. **The college experienced a decline in intake during the period, although nationally participation rates were increasing steadily.**

**Figure 5.4**

**Participation in Further Education in Great Britain**

<b>Year</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>85</b>
Total <sup>^</sup>	495	510	564	603	595	594	608
<b>Year</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>88</b>	figures in thousands			
Total	624	633	646				

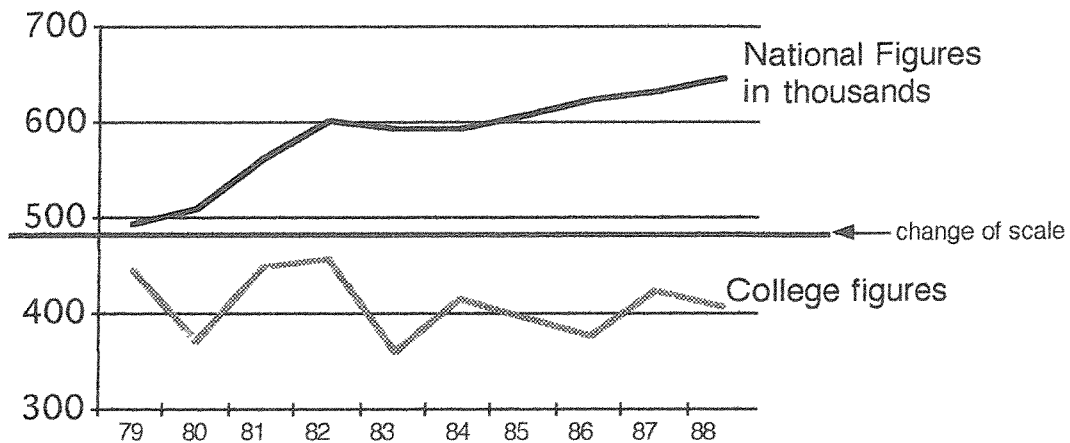
\*Age at 31 August from 1980 onwards      ^all numbers in thousands  
 Department of Education and Science Regional Trends 27. 1992

'Overall participation in education by 16 to 18 year olds increased 15 percentage points from 1987/88 to 1993/94. Full time participation by 16 to 18 year olds is increasing in all institutions.' (Further Education Statistical records, (1994) cited in The Times Higher Education Supplement (1995) : vi)  
 In Hampshire for example, in 1991, 51% of year eleven leavers in the maintained sector, continued in education beyond the age of 16 - 5% entered the sixth form of a school, 15 % enrolled at a sixth form college and 31% at FE or Tertiary Colleges. (HCC Careers Service (1991) :6)  
 The graph shown in figure 5.5 illustrates that whilst the national participation rate rose steadily between 1979 and 1989, the college intake shows a

strong pattern of highs and lows. However, until 1990 the college numbers were restricted by an upper limit. After 1990 controlled growth was initiated, and the overall intake at the college increased.

**Figure 5.5**

**Comparison of National Participation Rates and the intake at the college 1979 - 1989**



To summarise, the majority of students enrolled at the college during the period were studying for 'A' levels over two years, (56.6%). Nationally there was a decline in the number of fifteen year olds, but an increase in participation beyond sixteen. The college experienced a decline in intake at a time when the total population of fifteen year olds was also declining and although nationally participation rates were increasing. The college experienced a rapid growth in enrolments between 1987 and 1990, at a time when the number of fifteen year olds was declining, but participation rates were increasing.

### 5.3.2 Courses

The Further Education Funding Council Official Statistics, in agreement with these findings show that, 'the majority of students in sixth form colleges are enrolled on full time full year programmes.' (Synthesis, Further Education, The Times Higher Education Supplement (1995) : vi) The data show that throughout the twelve year period, the total number of students attending the

college in each year cohort fluctuated, but during the last three years of the study, (and to date), the numbers increased slightly each year. Figure 5.6 shows the number of students in each year group, listed according to the course followed, by year of enrolment and excludes pupils who dropped out of courses.

The figures show a change in the composition of the student intake in terms of the courses followed. The GCSE (or 'O' level) retake course uptake has declined since 1985. The number of students enrolling for 'A' level courses has increased each year since 1987, but fluctuated during the earlier years.

**Figure 5.6**

**Number of enrolments in each year cohort, showing course followed**

Year	79	80	81	82	83	84
1yr	136	106	133	119	97	111
2yr(A)	229	175	221	251	186	232
3yr	21	23	30	32	29	23
2yr(G)	9	28	12	12	12	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>371</b>

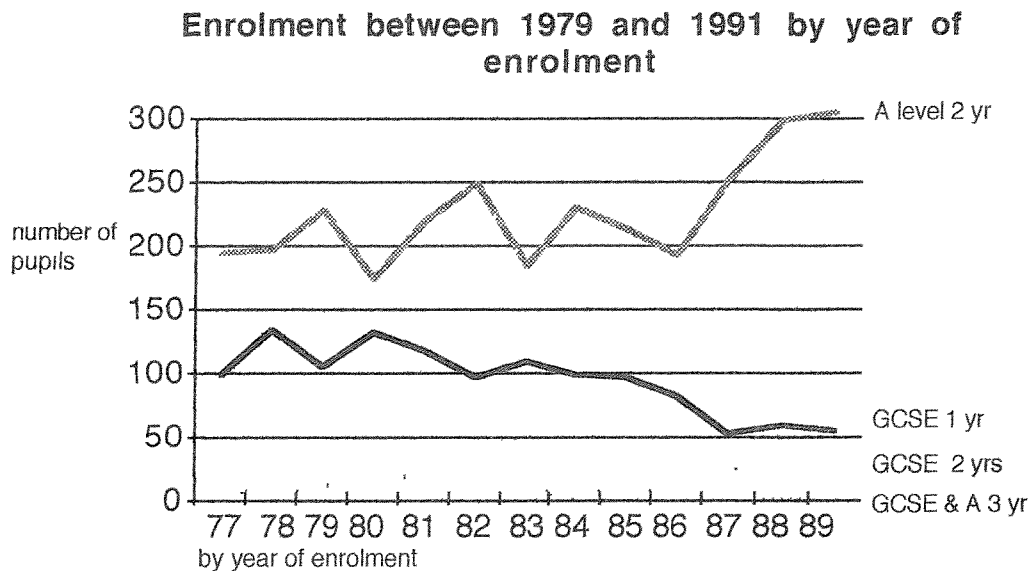
Year	85	86	87	88	89
1yr	100	98	84	54	61
2yr(A)	214	193	252	300	308
3yr	30	24	27	10	
2yr(G)	14	7	6	5	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>375</b>

by year of enrolment

In 1985 and 1986 the one year courses including CPVE, were emphasised in the promotional literature, but from 1987 onwards information about these courses was reduced in favour of 'A' Level courses. The senior managers at the college initiated a marketing strategy which specifically targeted potential 'A' level students. The 1987 and 1988 figures show the effect of this change in promotional emphasis and marketing policy during this period. Figure 5.7 compares the uptake of 'A' level courses, with the uptake of GCSE courses, combined GCSE / 'A' level, (3 year) courses, and

2 year, GCSE retake courses In the first year of the research period 1977, (1979 leavers) 35% of pupils had pursued one year courses, and 57% were enrolled on two year 'A' level courses. (The majority of students in this cohort were ex-grammar school pupils, who moved into the sixth form from senior school.) By 1989, (1991 leavers) the uptake of one year courses had dropped to 16%, whilst the enrolment on 'A' level courses had risen to 82%. During the same period, the enrolment of students on 2 year GCSE courses, and three year combined retake and 'A' level courses declined in percentage terms, but the total number of students embarking on these courses remained below 5% of the total, throughout the period. (see appendix n for a detailed chart showing percentages)

**Figure 5.7**



The promotional activities undertaken from 1986 onwards, and a gradual change in the marketing strategy at the college targeted potential 'A' level students **From 1985-86 onwards enrolments on 'A' level courses increased, enrolments on one year courses declined sharply.**



### 5.3.3 Previous Schools

The college was designated a sixth form college in 1978 to serve the local comprehensive schools, and initially the intake reflected this arrangement. Between 1982 and 1985 however the number of pupils applying to enrol at the college from state sector schools declined, and the senior staff became aware that target figures for enrolments would not be achieved. The choice at this stage seemed to be either to change the emphasis of the college towards one year courses, to meet the needs of more local feeder school pupils, or to secure a larger proportion of the 'A' level market in the locality. A decision was made by the Vice Principal, and the new Principal, to promote the college further afield in 1985-86 in an attempt to secure more enrolments for existing courses, - 'A' level courses. This period was an important turning point in the future of the college.

**During the twelve year period the number of schools represented in the list of feeder schools grew substantially.** In 1979 the students leaving the institution, who had attended an independent sector school, represented 15.2% of the population of the college, and this figure increased until 1988, when the proportion had reached 38.7%. (see appendix o) Figure 5.8 shows raw figures, giving totals for each year of entry, and showing how many pupils enrolled on 'A' level courses from the state sector, compared with the private sector.

**Figure 5.8**

**Figures showing 'A' level enrolment by type of school previously attended**

<b>Year</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>
Independent	32	29	62	46	50	79	50
State	163	169	167	129	171	172	136
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>Year</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>89</b>	
Independent	79	83	90	95	116	102	
State	153	131	103	157	184	206	
<b>Total</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>308</b>	

by year of enrolment

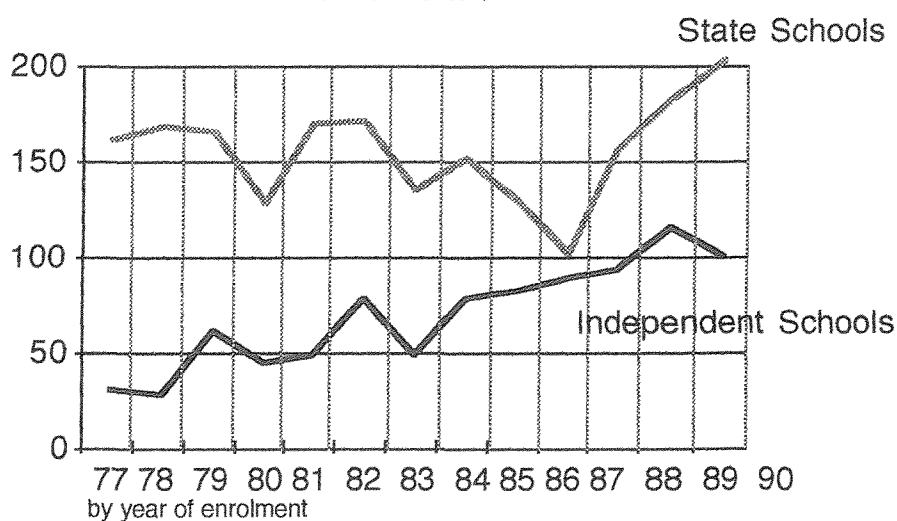
In 1979 there were 14 state feeder institutions serving the college, and 7 independent schools, listed as previous schools by pupils applying to the college. By 1991, this list had increased to over 35 local state schools and 25 or more independent schools. (Not including convents, private and foreign schools sending one pupil, and not named separately.)

Figure 5.9 illustrates the steady increase in the number of students attending the college from independent sector schools, by showing the total number of students on 'A' level courses during the period.

In 1986 in particular, the number of pupils from independent sector schools almost matched the number of pupils from state sector schools, on 'A' level course programmes. During the early 1980s the number of pupils from the independent sector steadily grew, and helped to maintain numbers overall, when the number of pupils from the state sector was falling.

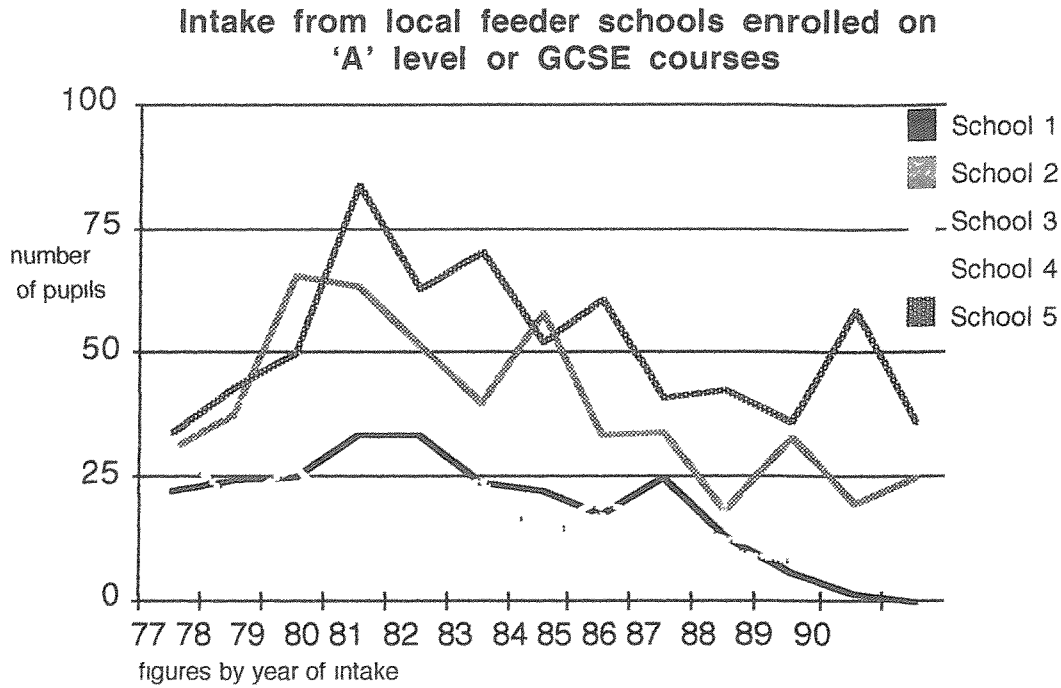
**Figure 5.9**

**Number of students on 2 year A level courses - by year of enrolment**



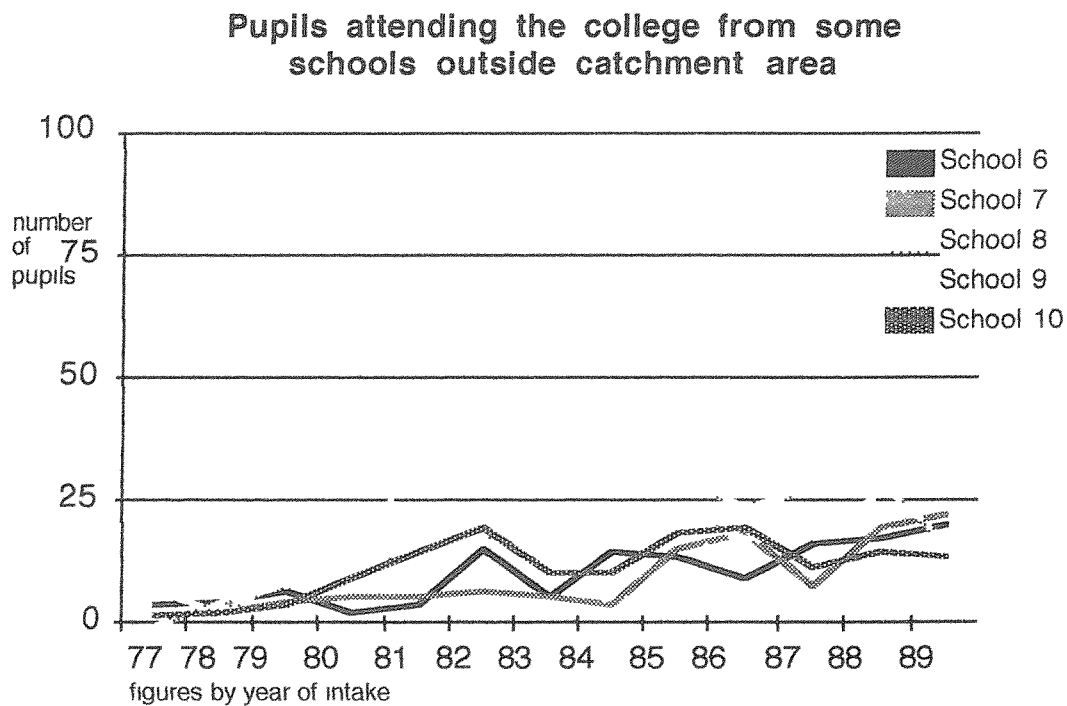
The graph in figure 5.10 shows the change in intake from local feeder schools. A steady decline in the number of students enrolled at the college is apparent from 1983-4 onwards.

**Figure 5.10**



However, Figure 5.11 shows that the uptake of places by pupils from schools further afield, outside the local postal district, began to rise. (A full list of feeder schools figures is provided in appendix p)

**Figure 5.11**

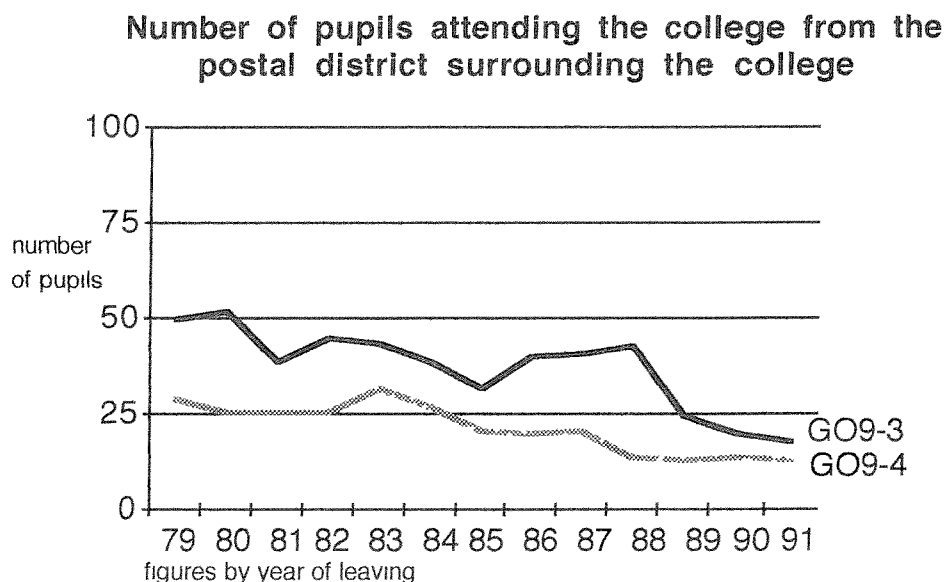


The number of students enrolled from nominated feeder schools declined, between 1981 and 1986 and the number of students enrolling from non feeder schools increased, between 1983 and 1990. More schools were represented on the list of feeder schools and more enrolments were secured from the independent sector, between 1983 and 1988.

### 5.3.4 Catchment area by postal district

The database records show each students' address by the postcode and an analysis of these locations indicates that over the period of the study, the catchment area has widened, to include postal districts further away from the college. The postal district in which the college is located was subdivided into smaller districts, but the final graphs and charts deal only with the main postal districts. The post codes have been modified to facilitate anonymity. (A full list of the number of students, attending the college, by year of leaving and by postcode, is provided in appendix q) Figure 5.12 graphically shows the decline in the number of students attending the college who lived in the post code areas which identify the large local authority housing estate adjacent to the college.

**Figure 5.12**

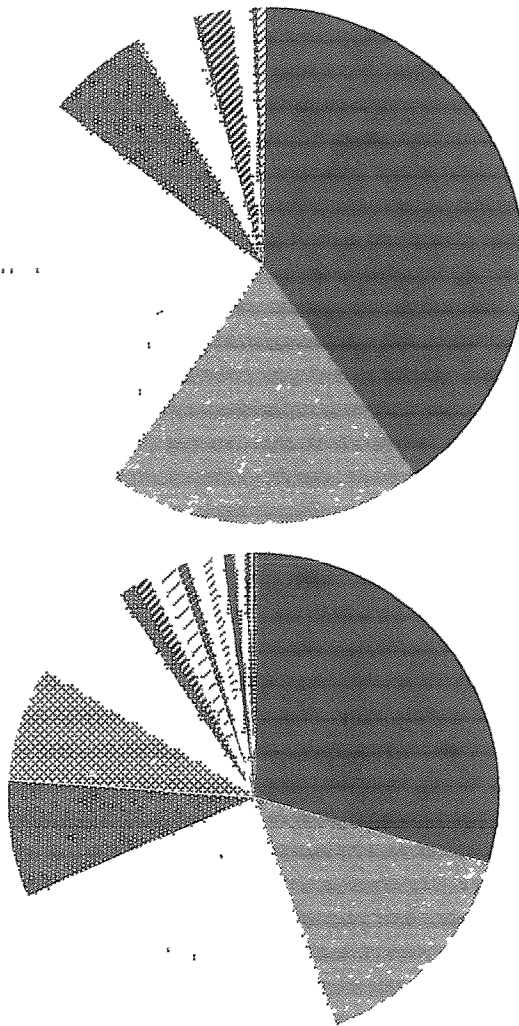


(The smaller sections within the post code were identified originally by the local place names, and are districts within the town.) In 1979, 40.1 % of pupils at the college lived in the postal district adjacent to the college, but by 1991, this figure had reduced to 29.5%.

Pupils who lived in local authority housing at the time of applying to the college were identified, and the information was recorded on the database. The researcher acknowledges that some pupils, especially in later years, were reluctant to record their address as being in the local authority housing area. (They named the whole town and not the district). But all addresses which were known to be located in any local authority housing district, or proved to be in this area by checking maps of the town, were recorded as such, whilst other addresses were recorded as private housing. These findings show a fall in the number of pupils attending the college who were known to be living in local authority housing during the period they attended the college, from 16.2 % of leavers in 1979, to 4.9% by 1991. The fall is consistent with the decline in the number of pupils attending the college from postal districts GO9-3 and GO9-4, which comprise substantial local authority housing.

The pie charts (figure 5.13) show the change in the proportion of students, by postal district, and figures 5.14 and 5.15 show the widening of the catchment area by comparing addresses of 1979 and 1991 leavers. The figures show that between 1979 and 1991, there was an increase in the number of postal districts represented, and the proportion of pupils attending the college from GO9, closest to the college, reduced by 10.6 percentage points. **The catchment area around the college widened substantially during the period, showing that the college had successfully attracted students from further afield to attend the college. There is a decline in the number of sixteen year olds enrolling for courses at the college, who live within the same postal district as the college however.**

**Figure 5.13**  
**Catchment**  
**Areas**



**1979**

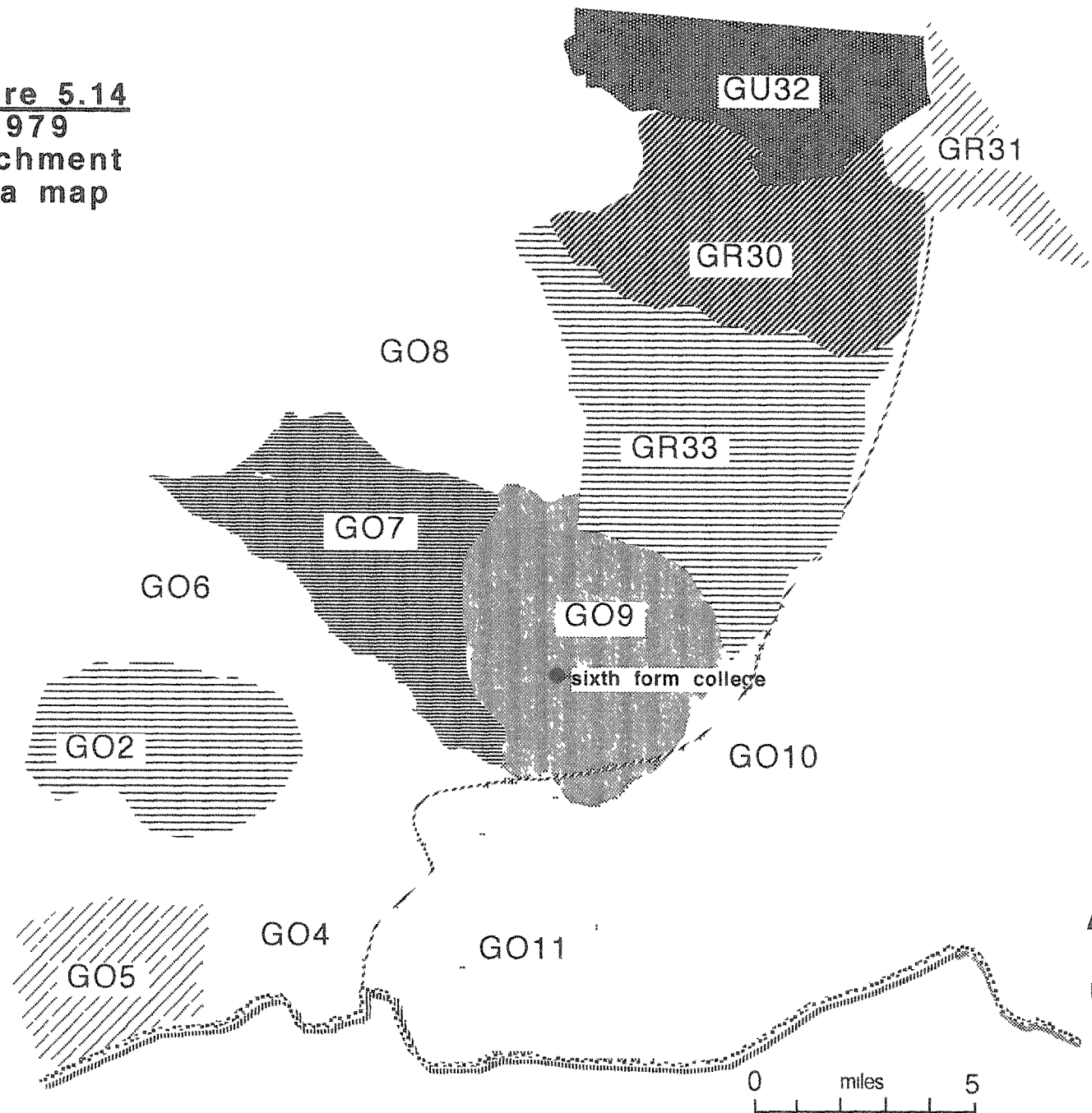
GO9	■	40.1%
GO11	■	19.2%
GO7	□	15.3%
GO10	□	10.9%
GO8	■	6.1%
GR31	□	3.3%
GR30	▨	1.9%
GR33	□	1.4%
GO2	▨	0.6%
GR32	■	0.3%
GO5	□	0.3%
GO6	▩	0.3%
GO4	▨	0.3%

**1991**

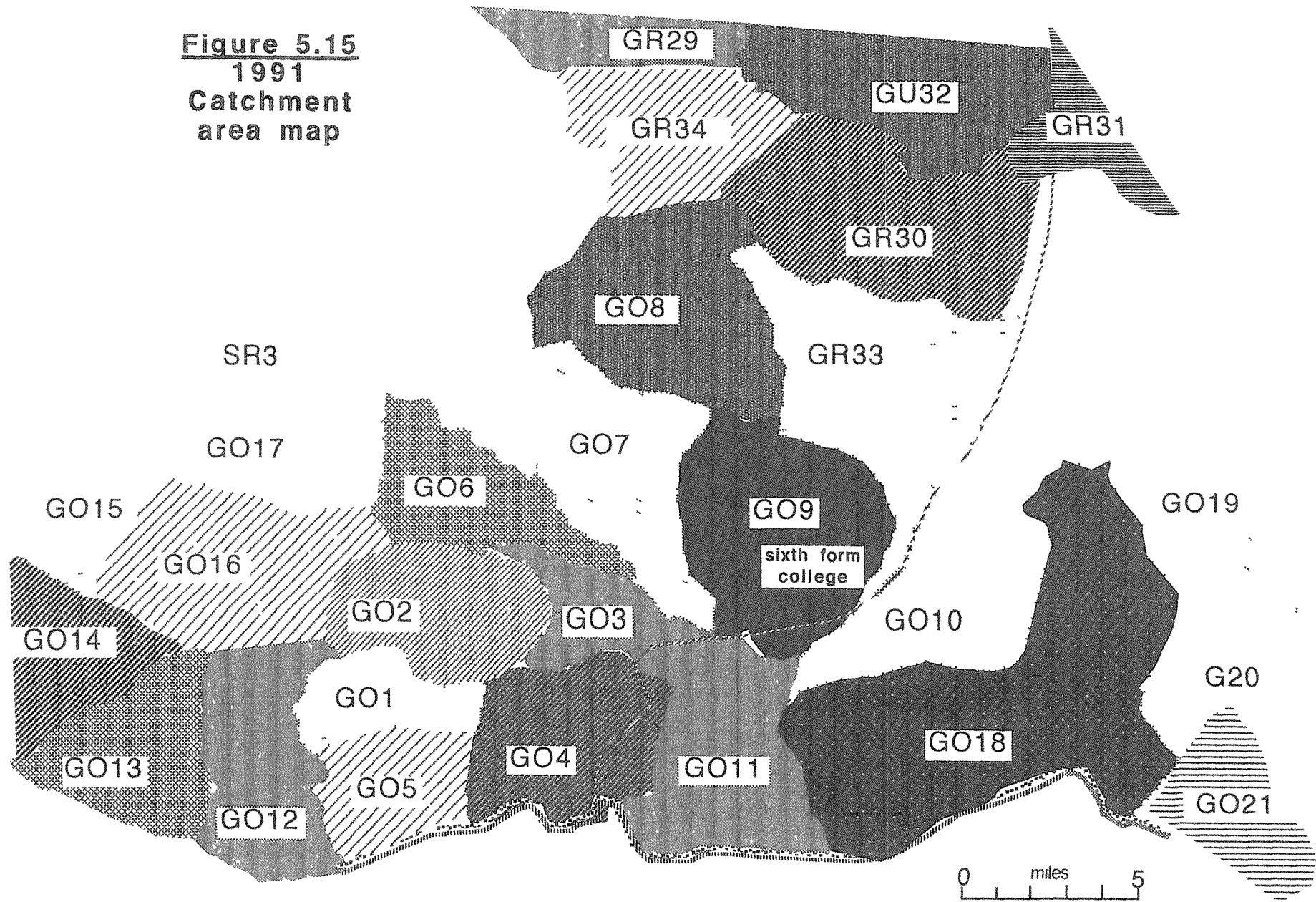
GO9	■	29.5%
GO11	■	14.9%
GO7	□	13.6%
GO10	□	10.4%
GO8	■	7.8%
GO6	▩	7.4%
GR31	□	4.2%
GO5	□	2.8%
GR32	■	1.1%
GR30	▨	1.1%
GR33	□	1.0%
GO16	▨	0.9%
GO4	▨	0.9%

GO1	□	0.8%
GO2	▨	0.7%
GO19	□	0.6%
GO18	■	0.6%
GO3	■	0.5%
GO20	□	0.3%
SR3	□	0.2%
GO12	■	0.2%
GO13	▩	0.1%
GO21	□	0.1%
GO17	□	0.1%
GR29	■	0.1%
GO14	▨	0.1%
GO15	□	0.1%
GR34	▨	0.0%

**Figure 5.14**  
**1979**  
**Catchment**  
**area map**



**Figure 5.15**  
**1991**  
**Catchment**  
**area map**





### 5.3.5 Entry qualifications

There is an improvement in the mean number of GCSE grade 'C' equivalents achieved by pupils attending the college during the period of research. The database listed the number of GCSEs or 'O' levels each candidate had achieved before entering the college. The grades were not recorded, but for each subject gained at GCE 'O' level grade 'C' or above, and for each CSE grade 1, the researcher recorded a 'pass' at a GCSE grade 'C' or above equivalent. Some pupils in the earlier years had studied for both CSE and GCE in similar subjects, and this explains why some students gained up to thirteen equivalent GCSE grade 'C's. A spreadsheet showing the total number of GCSE or 'O' level passes, is provided in appendix r, and the summary of the mean number of equivalent GCSE grade 'C's is shown in figure 5.16

**Figure 5.16**

**Mean average number of 'O' levels or GCSEs (grade C or above) achieved between 1979 and 1991**

<b>Year</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Girls</b>	4.48	4.26	5.14	4.04	4.92	5.62	4.86
<b>Boys</b>	5.54	5.68	5.55	5.02	5.73	5.68	4.98
<b>Year</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>	
<b>Girls</b>	5.37	5.45	5.12	6.42	7.1	6.82	
<b>Boys</b>	5.96	5.62	5.72	6.16	6.61	6.73	

by year of leaving

In 1979 the mean number of GCSE grade 'C' equivalents for boys is 5.54 and by 1991, this has improved to 6.73 equivalent passes. Girls' mean average scores are generally lower than boys' scores, however, in the years since GCSE was introduced, (1987 intake) the scores for girls has overtaken the boys. The improvement for girls is therefore from 4.48, to 6.82 GCSE equivalent grade 'C's or above. (To assist comparison with 'A' levels, figures appear by year of leaving.)

**Results nationally however, have also improved during this period.** Figure 5.17 shows the number of pupils in thousands, leaving school between 1979 and 1988 who gained 5 or more grades A-C GCE 'O' levels, or CSE grade 1

**Figure 5.17**

**Total number of sixteen year old school leavers gaining 5 or more 'O' levels or GCSE passes between 1979-1991**

<b>Year</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>	figures in thousands
Girls	45	45	44	49	49	
Boys	38	39	37	41	42	
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>88</b>	
Girls	50	50	51	50	55	
Boys	44	43	44	42	42	
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>97</b>	

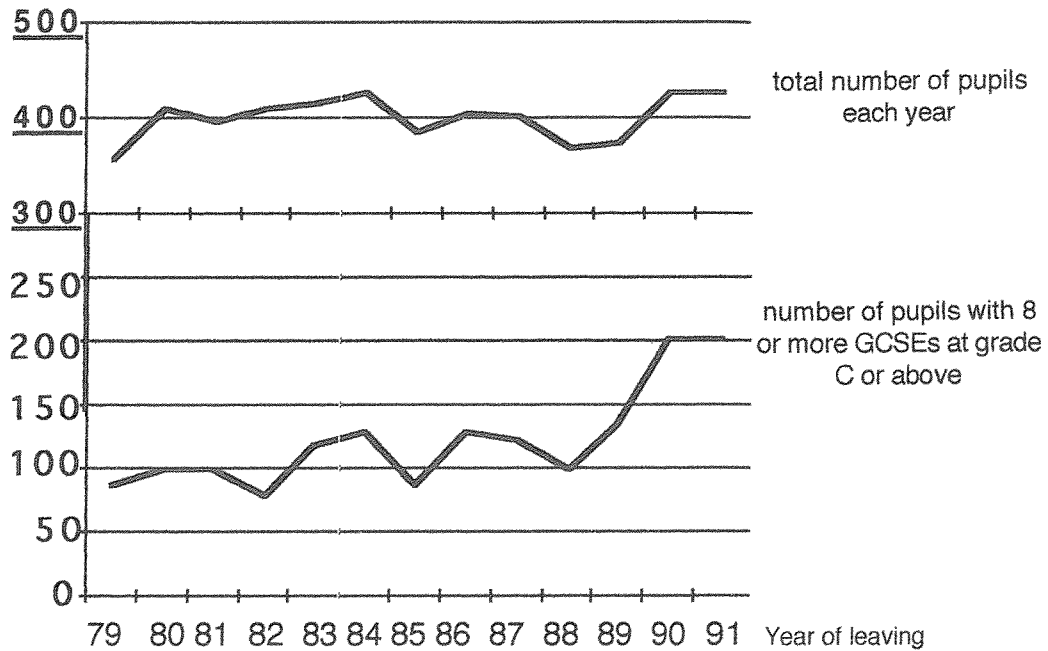
(Source - Department of Education and Science Social Trends 21, 1991-95)

An increase in the national pass rates at GCSE and 'O' level is likely to have partly contributed to the rise in the mean average scores of individuals entering the college. In 1979, 9.47% of applicants had achieved 9 'O' level equivalent passes, and by 1991, 23.5% of applicants had achieved the equivalent of 9 GCSE grade 'C' or above passes. Charts showing the total number of applicants to the college who had achieved 8 or more GCSE grade 'C' equivalent grades, alongside the total number of students on the roll each year, shows a similar pattern of highs and lows in later years. **As the number of students applying to the college increased, the entry qualifications of students at the college also increased, especially after 1984.** (figure 5.18)

Charts, (figures 5.19, 5.20 & 5.21) were drawn to show that the entry qualifications of the students attending the college have changed considerably during the period studied. All numerical data is provided in appendix r)

**Figure 5.18**

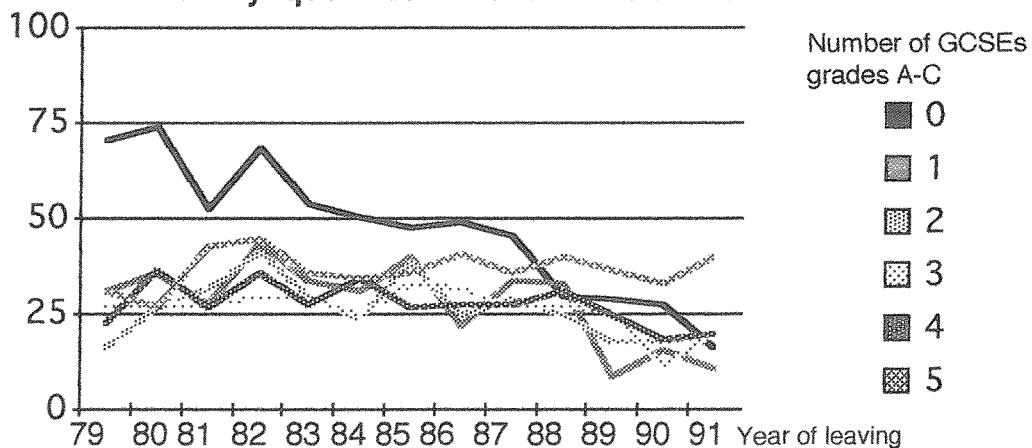
**Comparison of total intake figures and the number of students with more than 8 GCSE grades A-C**



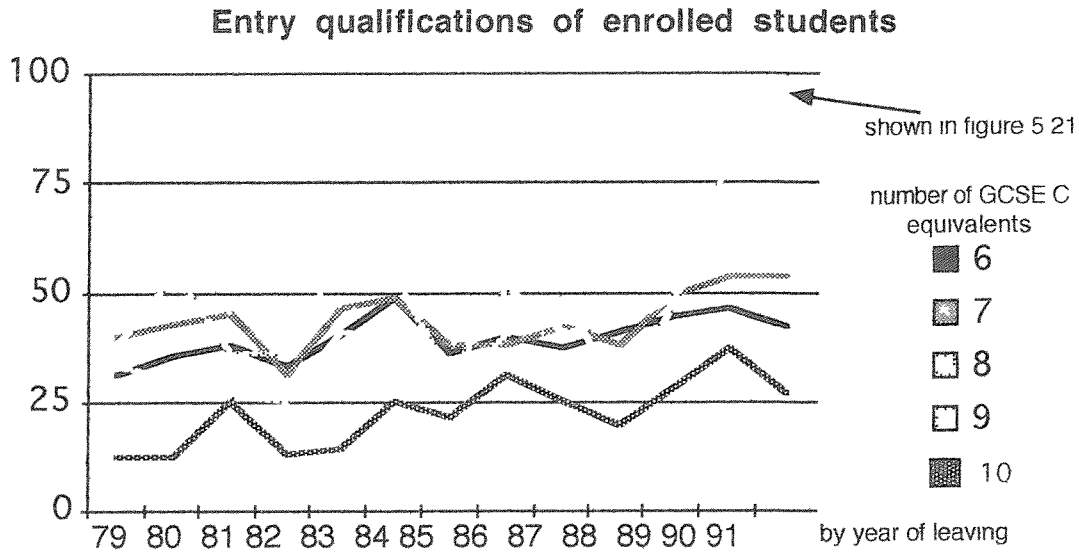
Figures 5.19 and 5.20 show the changing pattern of entry qualifications of applicants to the college during the research period. The number of students with five or fewer GCSE grades A-C declined during the period. The number of applicants with six or more GCSE grades A-C increased, and the graph (figure 5.21) illustrates the steep rise in the percentage of candidates achieving 9 GCSE grades A-C equivalents, between 1979 and 1991.

**Figure 5.19**

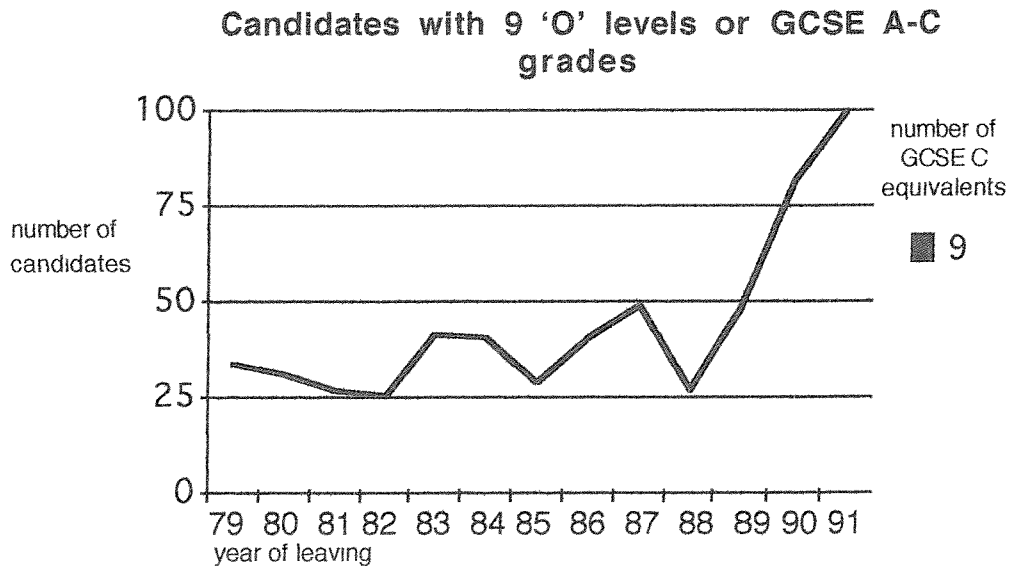
**Entry qualifications of enrolled students**



**Figure 5.20**



**Figure 5.21**



Following the promotional activities and marketing strategy undertaken from 1986 - 1989 there was a steep rise in the number of students enrolling at the college with very high entry qualifications. **The figures suggest that the promotional activities, and marketing strategies during the years 1986 onwards, encouraged students with high entry qualifications, in particular 8 or 9 GCSEs, to enrol the college to join 'A' level courses.**

### 5.3.6 Exit Qualifications - Achievement at 'A' Level

Hemsley Brown (1990 : 102) reported the overall 'A' level pass rate between 1979 and 1991 at the sixth form college, and a chart recording these figures, (and more recent figures), is provided figure 5.22, and national figures are shown for comparison in 5.23.

**Figure 5.22**

**'A' level percentage pass rates at the sixth form college**

<b>Year</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>86</b>
% pass	79	78	82	76	79	79	78	84
<b>Year</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>92</b>		
% pass	87.5	86.4	84.6	87.2	88.4	85		

(Source - College Governors' Meeting Minutes 1979-1991)

**Figure 5.23**

**National 'A' level percentage pass rates**

<b>Year</b>	<b>79*</b>	<b>80*</b>	<b>81*</b>	<b>82*</b>	<b>83*</b>	<b>84*</b>	<b>85*</b>	<b>86*</b>
% pass	67.9	68.8	69.7	69.4	70.9	71.2	71.6	71.9
<b>Year</b>	<b>87*</b>	<b>88*</b>	<b>89*</b>	<b>90*</b>	<b>91*</b>	<b>92^</b>	<b>93^</b>	<b>94^</b>
% pass	71.9	73.6	75.3	76.5	78.7	80	81	83

\* UCLES - London Examinations pass rate - all subjects    ^ all boards all subjects  
Source - UCLES - University of London Examinations & Assessment Council Statistics Office

The figures show that the college remained between 6.6% and 15.6% above the national pass rate throughout the period, showing the highest gain over the national rate during 1987 and 1988. **The college pass rate remained, on average, 9.7% above the national pass rate during the period of the study.**

The mean average achievement of sixth form college students at 'A' level shows a steady increase over the whole period, between 1979 and 1991, by year of leaving and is shown in 5.24.

**Figure 5.24****Mean average 'A' level Scores**

<b>Year</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>85</b>
Mean	2.06	2.22	2.25	2.35	2.48	2.41	2.44
<b>Year</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>	Year of leaving
Mean	2.52	2.63	2.59	2.57	2.67	2.73	

Department of Education and Science statistics for the years 1979 - 1991 show that nationally there was a slight increase in the number of leavers with 2 or more GCE 'A' level passes, although the total population of 16-19 year olds during the same period, was falling. (figure 5.25) Department of Education and Science Statistics for the same period show a decline in the number of pupils who left school with no GCSE / GCE / CSE qualifications, from 135 thousand pupils in 1979, to 81 thousand in 1988, (from 29.2% in 1979, to 19.8% in 1988) The percentage figure for the number of leavers with 2 or more 'A' levels, for the whole LEA is between 2% and 4% below the national average. (appendix s provides a detailed summary of 'A' level scores by year of exit.)

**Figure 5.25****Pupils leaving school with two or more 'A' levels**

<b>National figures</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>84</b>
leavers 2+ 'A' levels	118	122	122	133	131	135
% leavers 2+ 'A' levels	<b>13.1</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>14.7</b>
Total leavers	900	915	865	913	902	914
<b>National figures</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>90</b>
leavers 2+ 'A' levels	127	127	128	131	137	146
% leavers 2+ 'A' levels	<b>14.6</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>20.6</b>
Total leavers	866	871	867	797	753	706
LEA - % 2+ 'A' Levels		<b>12.5</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>16.7</b>

(Source - Department of Education and Science Statistics Key Data 1994 and HCC Report (1991) : 3) ^figures in thousands

There was a yearly improvement in pass rates nationally, and the college pass rate remained on average 9.7 % above the national rate, with the highest pass rate 15.6% above the national pass rate in 1987.

#### 5.4 The Relationship Between Examination Results and Enrolment

The possibility that the college increased the proportion of well qualified students in each year cohort, by promoting the college in a particular way between 1983 and 1986, and 1986 and 1991, is the subject of this section. The college in promotional literature tended to rely on the summer results in a given year, for example, 1986 results, to attract students for the next year - 1987 entry (These applicants left the college in 1989 after a two year course). The pass rate achieved by candidates on 'A' level courses was used in the marketing and promotional literature to encourage students to join the 'A' level courses. Two year 'A' level courses were promoted exclusively from 1986 onwards.

A correlation coefficient score has been calculated to determine whether there is a correlation between **the 'A' level pass rates** (variable x) and **the mean average GCSE** ('C' equivalent) (variable y) of each the new intake - **the following year**. The Pearson r correlation is calculated as, **.86** which is a significant, positive correlation. This appears to indicate that 74% of the variance would be common. Bryant and Jones (1995: 27) comment that, correlations over .85 are rarely obtained in educational studies but could be used with confidence to make group predictions. The figures shown in figure 5.26 show the figures used for calculations for the later years only, (although all figures were used in the correlation calculation.)

**Table 5.26**

**Relationship between 'A' level pass rate and entry qualifications**

Year	85	86	87	88
pass rate	78.0%	84.0%	87.5%	86.4%
Year enrolled	86	87	88	89
mean av. GCSE	5.72	6.16	6.61	6.73

A high and significant, positive correlation coefficient (Pearson r **.88**) was also found by measuring the relationship between the pass rate, and the

number of **students enrolling with 9 GCSE passes** the following year. (The variance would be common in 81% of cases) However, in the final year for which figures are available, (1988-89) the percentage of students with 9 GCSEs increased, even though the pass rate prior to enrolment, was slightly lower. Additional data was provided by making two further calculations, nominating the pass rate of the year before enrolment, as variable x in each case. The Pearson r scores were calculated by correlating, **total intake figures**, (variable x) and the **enrolment on 'A' level courses**, (variable y). The figures for the later years only are shown in figure 5.27, but all the available figures were used for the statistical calculations.

**Figure 5.27**

**'A' level pass rate, enrolment figures and percentage of students enrolled on 'A' level courses the following year**

Year	86	87	88
pass rate	84.0%	87.5%	86.4%
Year enrolled	87	88	89
% on 'A' courses	68.3%	81.3%	82.1%
Total intake	424	408	411

Pearson r correlation coefficient calculations using integral data relating to the percentage 'A' level pass rate, and the percentage of students enrolled on 'A' level courses, yielded a high positive correlation, of .9 (+.908). However, Pearson r correlation coefficient calculations resulted in a score of .34 using data relating to the 'A' level pass rate and the **total number of students enrolled** the following year. There is a weak correlation between the total number of students enrolled, and the pass rate, (and for cohorts two years later), but a significantly high correlation between the pass rate at 'A' level and the percentage of students **enrolled for the 'A' level course** the following year. Students with improved entry qualifications enrolled for places on the 'A' level courses one year after the promotion of high pass rates at 'A' level. **The promotion of high pass rates attracted better qualified students to courses the following year.**



## 5.5 Local 'A' Level Pass Rates

The (town) sixth form college was in competition with an FE college, (opened in 1974, which is located one mile from the sixth form college), a sixth form college in the city 5 miles away, a technical college 3 miles away in the city suburbs, and the sixth forms of 3 local schools, including the local independent grammar school in the city 5 miles away.

Figure 5.28 provides details of the 'A' level pass rates achieved by each institution (offering 'A' levels) in 1992. Students applying for entry in September 1993, were provided with the results achieved in 1992 examinations.

**Figure 5.28**

### 'A' level pass rates 1992

Grammar school	City (sixth form) college	(town) sixth form college	FE college
93%	86%	85%	84.5%

National average 'A' level pass rate in all subjects in 1992 - 80.9 % (UCLES)

Vice Principals at the city college and the FE college were asked about the 'A' level pass rates, and the city college Vice Principal pointed out that,

for the last two years, our pass rate has been the same as the town sixth form college. This year, it was one percent higher than the town sixth form college, but people would not believe that that is the case. The street news is that the town sixth form college's pass rate is high. But it's not strictly true. (Vice Principal, city sixth form college)

The three main colleges in the local area, the sixth form college, the FE college and city college all achieved an 'A' level pass rate - above the national average. The promotion undertaken by the sixth form college since 1986 gradually built up and reinforced this claim based on evidence that the pass rate was consistently above the national average. **Although in 1992 there was only between 1% and 2% difference in the pass rates between institutions, the sixth form college has achieved a reputation for gaining a very high pass rate each year.**

## 5.6 Summary of Results Emerging from Quantitative Data

The marketing and promotion undertaken by the college during the years from 1986-7 onwards, targeted potential 'A' level students exclusively. The descriptive profiles of students attending the college changed during the twelve year study, especially during the period 1986 to 1990, when the marketing strategy to promote 'A' level exclusively was implemented.

The college experienced a decline in uptake of places during the early 1980s, when the grammar school cohorts had left the college, and the full effects of 'open access' began to take hold. Figures support the notion that a decline was experienced in a number of areas, during the period between 1979 and 1984. The college experienced, an overall decline in intake when the total population of fifteen year olds was also declining, at a time when nationally participation rates were increasing. There was a reduction in the number of enrolments from nominated feeder schools, and from those who lived within the same postal district as the college. During the years following the niche marketing strategy initiated in 1986 there were a number of changes to the profiles of student cohorts enrolling at the college. The figures show that, the list of feeder schools grew substantially as enrolments from non feeder schools and independent schools increased. The geographical catchment area expanded as the college attracted students from further afield. A higher percentage of students with 8 or more GCSEs, (A-C) enrolled for places on the 'A' level courses, after the promotion of high pass rates at 'A' level - suggesting that, the promotion of high pass rates attracted better qualified students to 'A' level courses the following year. Enrolments on 'A' level courses increased, during the period, and enrolments on one year courses declined.

The next section considers the climate in which the college was operating during the period of the study, and summarises the views of a Vice Principal responsible for marketing in each of the local colleges.

## 5.7 The Marketing Strategies of Local Colleges

During the research period, the Vice Principals of city college, the sixth form college, and the FE college, were interviewed to gain a better understanding of the kind of students attending the colleges, and to verify, and clarify the data collected, and to determine policy and practice in operation at competing institutions. The Vice Principals of city college, the FE college and the Sixth form college were interviewed with a view to discovering the main emphasis of their marketing strategy, and to determine their view of the 'key markets' targeted by each college. The Vice Principals were encouraged to give a view based on their experience, of the kinds of students enrolling on courses, including qualifications, and social background, and to summarise the characteristics of their main target market.

The Vice Principal of city college explained the importance of dealing with each potential student 'as an individual', by finding out 'what their needs' might be, and emphasised the obligation the college had towards the nominated feeder schools, to provide courses at the appropriate level. She explained their market position by saying.

If we lose those people for whom the college was first established, then we will never get them back. What's going wrong? Why are we not attracting them here? That's what I would ask, and set up courses to address their needs. We had to do that to a certain extent,.....  
(Vice Principal, city college, see appendix t)

When questioned about the GCSE results in the local area she explained that,

If you look at the school records of schools in this city they will not be the same as those in nice middle class areas a few of miles north of here. To put it in those crude terms. If you look at those in the A-C GCSE pass rate, in the city you will see that they are not very high. (Vice Principal, city college)

The sixth form college and the FE college were targeting different segments of the 16-18 market. The sixth form college had reduced the emphasis on

non 'A' level 16-19 year olds, and the FE college offered a wide range of vocational and non vocational courses for these students. The Vice Principal at the sixth form college confirmed this when he was asked about the courses for students who were not able to achieve the necessary qualifications to join 'A' level courses. He pointed out that at the sixth form college,

the course portfolio is heavily geared towards 'A' level, and therefore, these people are our target market. The GCSE retake course people are residual. We have decided on our niche market, we have our course portfolio, and they fall outside that. There is no attempt to market the one year courses. From a strict marketing point of view, I am not concerned about them. (Vice Principal, sixth form college, see appendix u)

The numerical data however, suggests that during the early 1980s the sixth form college had failed to attract students from the local feeder schools and it is likely that these sixteen year olds were enrolling at competitor institutions. The Vice Principal of the FE college was asked whether the college catered for students who cannot get their five 'C's at GCSE? Do you need to have a conscience about everyone - at every level of ability? He claimed that, 'We will give virtually everybody a chance.' (Vice Principal at the FE college) The FE college Vice Principal was asked about the social mix of students attending the colleges, including the FE college, and he observed that, 'there is also an idea that the sixth form college has a lot of more affluent students than we do. Some of our students feel more comfortable here than they would there.' He was asked to confirm whether there was a social class difference between the FE college and the sixth form college.

Yes. Yes, I am sure there is. I have a link with the estate schools. S....., and P..... school especially. The sixth form college make virtually no effort to attract pupils from there. (Vice Principal, FE college)

**The FE college relied on a substantial intake of students from the schools originally nominated as the feeder institutions of the sixth form college.** The FE college appeared to have been very successful in terms of attracting local sixteen year olds without the

qualifications for 'A' level. However, the Vice Principal expressed concern about the market position of the FE college, and the difficulty the college has competing with the sixth form college, for 'A' level students.

We are torn a little bit between pushing ourselves as an 'A' level college, and a sort of comprehensive college, and perhaps in previous years we have emphasised the vocational courses a bit too much, this affects 'A' level. We are redressing this balance a little bit and pushing the 'A' level. (Vice Principal, FE college)

The Vice Principal of the FE college, when asked whether the college was in competition with the technical college explained that, 'many students who go to the technical college are there because that is where the course is offered, the course which the job requires. They do not choose this college on the same basis.' (Vice Principal, FE college) The FE college is positioned between the extremes of academic education - exclusively 'A' level, in which it would compete with the sixth form colleges, and entirely vocational training, in which it might compete with the technical college.

**The FE college relies on sixteen year olds with fewer than 5 GCSE passes as an identified 'target market', to maintain and increase enrolments each year.**

The Vice Principal of the sixth form college, (appendix v) was very confident about the market position of the college, and claimed,

The college has developed a successful market position in 'A' level and equivalent qualifications. Currently it is not in our interests both financially, and from a recruitment point of view to do anything other than what we are doing at the moment. As far as the core customers are concerned. If we were to go 'down market'. *You see catering for the lower grade GCSE people as 'going down market'?* Yes. We would have a conflict between our existing established 'core' and new business, and our market positioning would be under threat. (Vice Principal, sixth form college)

The Vice Principal at the sixth form college argued that parents have some influence over pupils who choose to go to the college. He explained,

Parents have found that the pastoral care at the sixth

form college is better than other colleges and they need that. - Parents don't have that much influence on children at that age, although some do - especially ones from the private sector where they have often chosen the school for the pupil. Although we are directing marketing to parents as well, they do not have that much influence. (Vice Principal, sixth form college)

The Vice Principal finally summarised the marketing ideas and intentions of the college by arguing that,

There has to be a multiplicity of messages going out. They are not conflicting messages, but they are actually being received by different people - people who are opinion formers in the future about the college. .... We need to be more directed in our marketing, more specific. The essence of good marketing is not being the same as others but being different. (Vice Principal, sixth form college)

The three colleges overlap in their provision of 'A' level courses, but each college was aware of the competition between them to attract 'A' level students to courses. The sixth form college has developed a successful market position in 'A' level and equivalent qualifications. The FE college and city college were aware that the sixth form college, through specialisation, attracted a very large segment of the market, and both the FE college and city college concentrated on non 'A' level courses in addition to 'A' level, including GCSE retakes, and GNVQ.

## 5.8 Summary of Findings

The data relating to the supply side of marketing provides a number of indicators which might shed light on the changing pattern of enrolments and results of year cohorts during the research period, and the way in which marketing might have influenced enrolment, and results. The research data indicates that during the research period,

there was a reduction in enrolments on one year courses at the sixth form college, but the FE college relies on sixteen year olds with fewer than 5 GCSE passes as an identified 'target market', to maintain and increase enrolments each

year.

At the sixth form college, there was an increase in the proportion of students from independent schools and a decline in the proportion of students who lived in the council housing districts. The FE college confirm there is a social class difference between the FE college and the sixth form college.

There was a reduction in applications for places from pupils in local feeder schools located in the council district close to the college. By 1994 the sixth form college made virtually no effort to attract pupils from nominated feeder schools.

The FE college and the city college had adopted a geographical niche marketing strategy which did not emphasise results, and were successfully targeting a wider range of students to attend a wide range of courses, with an emphasis on the students living locally. **The niche marketing strategy which the sixth form college adopted, has resulted in the college gaining a local 'reputation' as the best college for 'A' levels. The students are attracted to the college from a wide geographical area.**

Chapter 6 is concerned with analysis and discussion of the numerical findings, the issues and factors mentioned by Vice Principals in interviews. The chapter will examine the affects of marketing strategy on any increase in social inequality in post sixteen education, and contribute to an understanding of 'responsiveness' by examining ways in which colleges respond to competition in the educational market place.

# Chapter 6



## CHAPTER 6

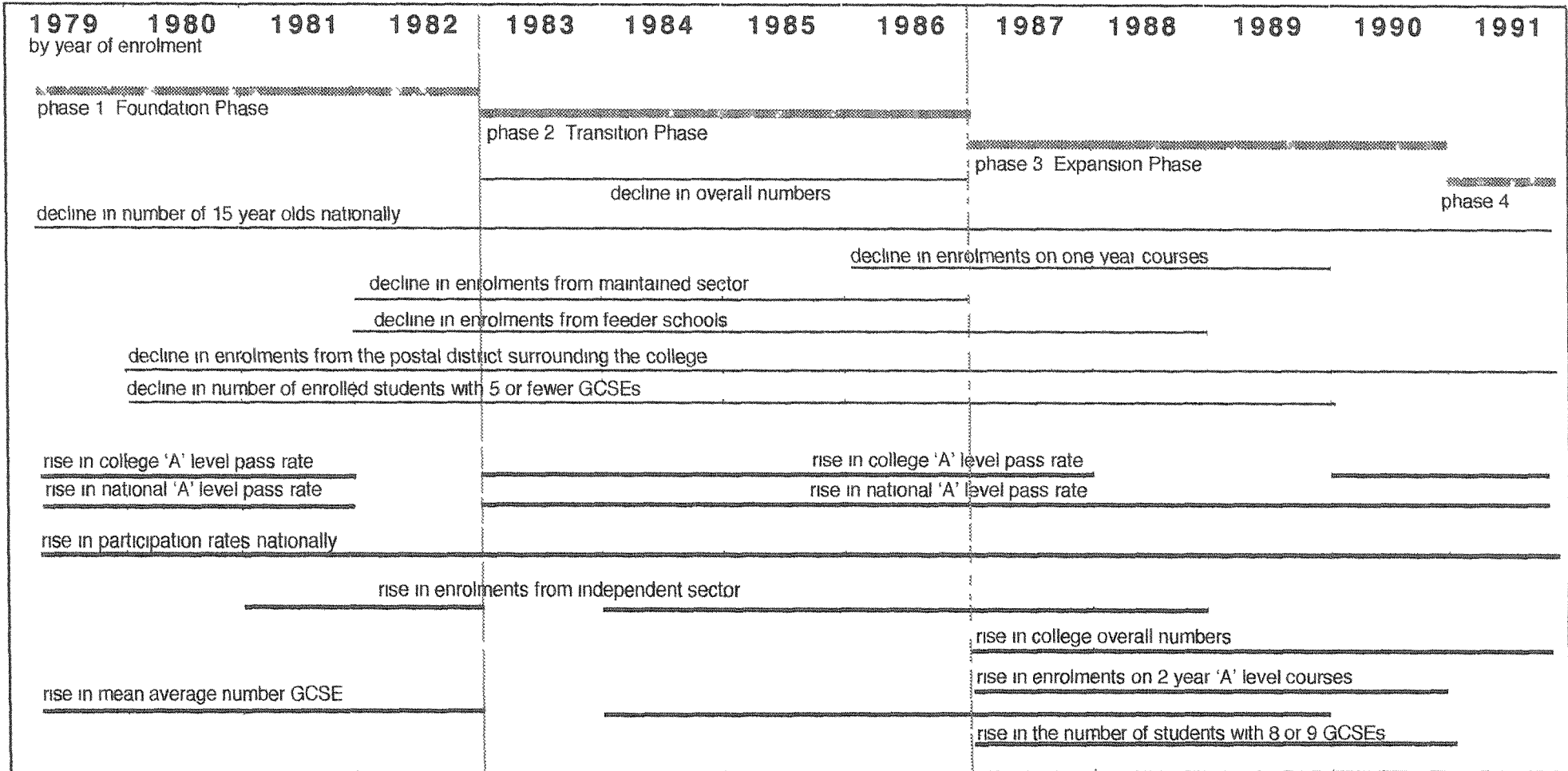
### ANALYSIS OF SUPPLY SIDE ISSUES

#### 6.1 Introduction

'The funding arrangements under the aegis of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) have openly encouraged a competitive culture within which FE institutions compete with neighbouring institutions in an attempt to gain a larger share of the market place.' (Foskett and Hesketh (1995) : 1) Post sixteen colleges have been more actively involved in marketing since 1992, to recruit more students each year in a bid to retain their funding. This chapter will examine ways in which the sixth form college responded to competition in the educational market place, between 1979 and 1991, and analyse the affects of a competitive market in post sixteen education.

The chapter is divided into four sections, which form an analysis of the development of a 'niche' marketing strategy at the sixth form college. The first stage, is the **Foundation Phase**, 1979 -1982, when the sixth form college was established as a more economic alternative to sixth forms in schools. The second stage, is the **Transition Phase**, 1983 - 1986, when the sixth form college initiated a substantial change of strategy in response to a falling rolls situation, to secure a large identifiable target market, and become more specialised. The third stage is the **Expansion Phase**, 1987 - 1990, when the sixth form college promotion emphasised the 'A' level courses as the main core market, and the intake changed more rapidly. The final section analyses the changes occurring during the whole twelve year period. The changes indicated by numerical data analysed in Chapter 5, coincide with changes in approach to external relations management, occurring at the college during the period of the study. The phases are represented on a plan, shown in figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1 Timeline of Changes in the Profiles of Students Enrolling at the Sixth Form College**



The main areas showing an increase are shown as bold lines, and the areas showing a decline, are shown as fine lines. The phases have been marked as thick grey lines, to provide a visual comparison with the data, for each year of the study. (The final stage, beginning at the end of the present study in 1991 is a phase of diversification in which the college began to draw up plans to develop new courses outside the 'A' level market.) A description of each phase follows a short introduction to the development of a market orientation at the college.

## **6.2 The Development of a Market Orientation**

The decisions made by senior staff during the 1980s were made sequentially, based primarily on government policy, environmental and social issues, and economic considerations. Baker, identifies five major categories which an organisation must take into account when formulating a marketing strategy. These environmental factors are identified as;

- Demographic
- Social and cultural
- Political
- Economic
- Technological (Baker, (1992))

The first four factors were the main influences on decision making by senior staff responsible for marketing the college during the period of the study. The factors are interrelated and interdependent, but one factor tended to dominate each phase of development. Each phase will be discussed separately, and the influential factors will be considered in view of the way they shaped the decision making during each phase of the college's development.

## **6.3 The Foundation Phase**

The first stage in the development of a market orientation at the sixth form college is described as the Foundation Phase, and lasted from 1979 to

1982. During this first phase, major influences on enrolments at the college were,

- \* demographic changes,
- \* social and cultural factors
- \* organisational framework

Major influences on change were demographic trends locally and nationally, but social and cultural factors, and the organisational framework of the college contributed to fluctuations in intake during the first phase. Firstly, the college was affected by demographic change, and in 1980, and 1983, experienced a **decline in overall intake**, when the total **population of fifteen year olds was also declining**, and although nationally **participation rates were increasing**.

There were a number of changes to the profiles of student cohorts enrolling at the college suggesting that the college secured a declining number of students from the local nominated feeder schools - especially on 'A' level courses, once the ex-grammar school pupils left in 1980. In 1979, 72.9% of the intake were from local maintained sector schools. By 1985 the percentage had fallen, to 53.4% of the intake - a fall of 19.5% in the number of maintained sector school applicants applying for 'A' level courses. The college numbers fluctuated during this period, and senior staff were concerned that they were unable to exercise much control over the intake from year to year. (appendix m)

Secondly, social and cultural influences contributed to the change in student intake between 1979 and 1982. Throughout the Foundation Phase, the college experienced a **decline in the number of pupils from the maintained sector; from nominated feeder schools**, applying to attend the college; and **the number of sixteen year olds enrolling for courses at the college who lived within the same postal district as the college**, including the **local authority housing estate**.

The college is sited in an area which is populated by a high percentage of working class families. Research suggests that working class pupils are less likely to remain in education beyond sixteen, and those who choose to remain, are more likely to choose vocational education, compared with academic education. Foskett and Hesketh confirm, 'significant differences

between social classes (...) with 50% of working class pupils indicating their choice to be an academic course, while nearly 80% of middle class students have opted for such a pathway.' (Foskett and Hesketh (1995) : 5)

Thirdly, the organisational framework during the first phase, was predominantly a 'bureaucratic model', (Bush, (1992) : 23)) which is described as 'less responsive' and more reliant upon the 'formal framework of the local education authority'. The senior staff at the college were guided more by LEA policy than by responding to local need. During this period the college was operating under the system whereby all sixteen year olds attending local schools, who intended to pursue post sixteen education, transferred to the local sixth form college, as an alternative to staying in the sixth form of a school.

Initially the college attracted students from local schools in the area, and many of these pupils applied for one year courses to re-take 'O' levels. Eighty four percent of leavers in 1979 had attended maintained sector schools, including the (ex) grammar school, and the remaining 16% were from independent schools. Once the college became open access, a small number of pupils applied to the college from local independent selective schools, and this number increased each year, but the main intake was expected to be from nominated feeder schools. By 1982, however, staff became concerned about sustaining existing courses and staffing at the college, especially in view of fierce competition from the FE college, which offered both academic and vocational courses. An increasing number of sixteen year olds attending the feeder schools appeared to be rejecting the sixth form college as an option. Combined figures from two feeder schools, for example, show that 70 students enrolled from these schools in 1979, but 26 enrolled from these two schools jointly in 1983.

In 1983, the intake at the college was a cause for concern, because enrolments on all courses were down, from 251, to 186 students on 'A' level courses, and from 119, to 97 students on one year 'O' level retake courses - a total of 90 students fewer compared with 1982 enrolments. The decline in the intake, and the fluctuation in numbers each year prompted a review in 1983, when the second Principal was appointed, and was the beginning of the transition phase, which is the subject of the next section.

#### 6.4 The Transition Phase

The period between 1983 and 1986 is described as the Transition Phase, and essentially, during this period, the main schools supporting the college, changed from the nominated schools to a combination of new 'unofficial feeder' institutions, and independent schools. The main influence on change during this period, was economic - because in order to retain existing staffing, and courses, especially 'A' level, a larger number of students would need to be enrolled in future years. The outcome of the economic decision however, had social and cultural implications. During the Transition Phase, there was an **increase** in enrolments from the **independent sector**; enrolments from **non feeder schools**; and the **number of schools** represented in the **list of feeder schools**

A gradual increase in applications from pupils attending independent schools is recorded from 1984 onwards, (reaching a peak in 1988, of 38.7%,). In 1986 the total number on roll at the college especially on 'A' level courses, was maintained because of the high proportion of ex-independent school pupils enrolled, at a time when state sector applications were declining. By targeting ex-independent school pupils, as well as maintained sector school pupils and inevitably causing the catchment area to widen geographically, the college attracted sufficient numbers of well qualified individuals to secure the future success of the 'A' level course. A move towards greater specialisation was made during the second phase. The specialisation was arguably a form of 'selection' which targeted more able, middle class students, because these sixteen year olds were most likely to apply for, and qualify for an 'A' level course, and more likely to stay in education beyond sixteen.

The college marketing strategy however, further alienated students living close to the college who were largely, unqualified for 'A' level courses, and were more likely to live in local authority housing, and attend a local comprehensive school - but these students had already shown an increasing reluctance to apply to the college, during the Foundation Phase. The college chose not to attempt to develop courses for these pupils, and allowed numbers to reduce considerably over the research period, although open access was in operation, and overt selection was not undertaken. The

local FE college, (opened in 1974) was in direct competition with the sixth form college, and secured a large target market of sixteen year olds living locally, by offering vocational courses, as well as academic courses.

The decisions during this period were essentially economic decisions, to secure the future of the organisation, by ensuring that sufficient numbers of students enrolled on courses to maintain staffing levels. The college secured a large cohort of students for the 'A' level course by promoting the college in the independent sector, where a large number of middle class potential 'A' level students could be found. The external relations model during this period was more responsive, but action was prompted by a decline in the overall intake at the college, during the first phase of development. The result of pursuing this strategy was a socially and academically selective college. The next section describes the expansion phase, which further contributed towards social and academic selection over the next three years.

## 6.5 The Expansion Phase of Development

The Expansion Phase of development (1987-1990) involved an increase in specialisation, an improvement in the entry qualifications of students, and an overall increase in student enrolments. During the Expansion Phase the profiles of the student intake indicate changes in three areas;

- \* **catchment area**
- \* **type of course**
- \* **entry qualifications**

The predominant emphasis during this phase was political as well as economic. The Expansion Phase of development relied on attracting students from local 11-18 schools, maintained sector schools outside the local area, and independent schools.

Firstly, the catchment area continued to expand. Whilst the number of applications from local maintained sector comprehensive schools declined, the number of applications from maintained sector and independent schools further away from the college increased. The independent sector intake

increased from 50 students in the 1983 intake, to a total of 116 students in the 1988 intake. The enrolments from one maintained sector school (a non feeder school) increased from 7 students in 1986 to 22 students in 1988. (see appendix p)

Secondly, during the Expansion Phase when the 'A' level course was promoted intensively, there was a **decline** in enrolments on **one year courses** at the sixth form college. The intake on one year courses had remained fairly stable at 30% of the intake until 1987, when the percentage fell to 22.8% of the intake, and in 1988 dropped again, to 14.6 (appendix n) The proportion of applicants for 2 year 'A' level courses increased from 60.4% in 1978, to 82.1% in 1989, an increase of 21.7 percentage points. A substantial change in the proportion of students applying for each type of course offered at the college is illustrated the 1988 figures, when the percentage of 2 year 'A' level applications increased 13 percentage points, and the applications for 1 year declined 8.2 percentage points. The promotional activities and literature had emphasised the 2 year 'A' level course exclusively during the previous year, especially because the 1987 pass rate was the highest ever achieved, 87.5%.

Thirdly, the entry qualifications of year cohorts improved after 1987. There was an **increase** in the number of **students with high entry qualifications, in particular 8 or 9 GCSEs, enrolling on 'A' level courses**. Students with **improved entry qualifications enrolled** for places on the 'A' level courses one year **after the promotion of high pass rates at 'A' level**.

The college continued to attract highly qualified students, with 8 or more GCSEs, to reach 67.3% of 'A' level leavers by 1990, (1988 entrants) and 65.9% in 1991, (1989 entrants). The figures for 1987 leavers show that the intake were better qualified compared with previous cohorts, (57.4% had gained 8 or more GCSE grades A-C); the year group included a high proportion of ex-independent school pupils, (33%); and they achieved the highest pass rate at 'A' level, (87.5%) and the highest percentage of students with three or more 'A' levels, (72%). The number of applications from students with lower qualifications, fewer than 4 GCSE (grades A-C) passes declined after 1987. (appendix r)



The 'A' level pass rates were given high priority, and claimed to be excellent from 1986 onwards, (figures were an average of 9.7% above the national rate, and improved at a similar rate to the national figures.) The pass rate achieved by each year group was promoted to secure a new intake, (e.g. the 1987 pass rate was used in October 1987 to secure the 1988 September intake) creating a spiralling cycle of success to begin at the college. The reputation the college gained for success at 'A' level was secured, and applications from well qualified students continued to rise. The mean average achievement at both GCSE and 'A' level at the college, shows a steady increase over the whole period. The major changes occurring during the Expansion Phase were; the expansion of the geographical catchment area; continuing increase in applications from the independent sector up to 1988, when enrolments from sixteen year olds in the maintained sector began to increase; a greater emphasis on 'A' level, with declining enrolments on one year courses, (requiring lower entry qualifications); and an increase in the entry qualifications of students enrolling on 'A' level courses. The college became more specialised during this phase, socially, and academically, through specialising in 'A' levels, and targeting students with more than five GCSEs. A summary of the move towards increasing specialisation during this phase, and throughout the whole period will be explored in the following section.

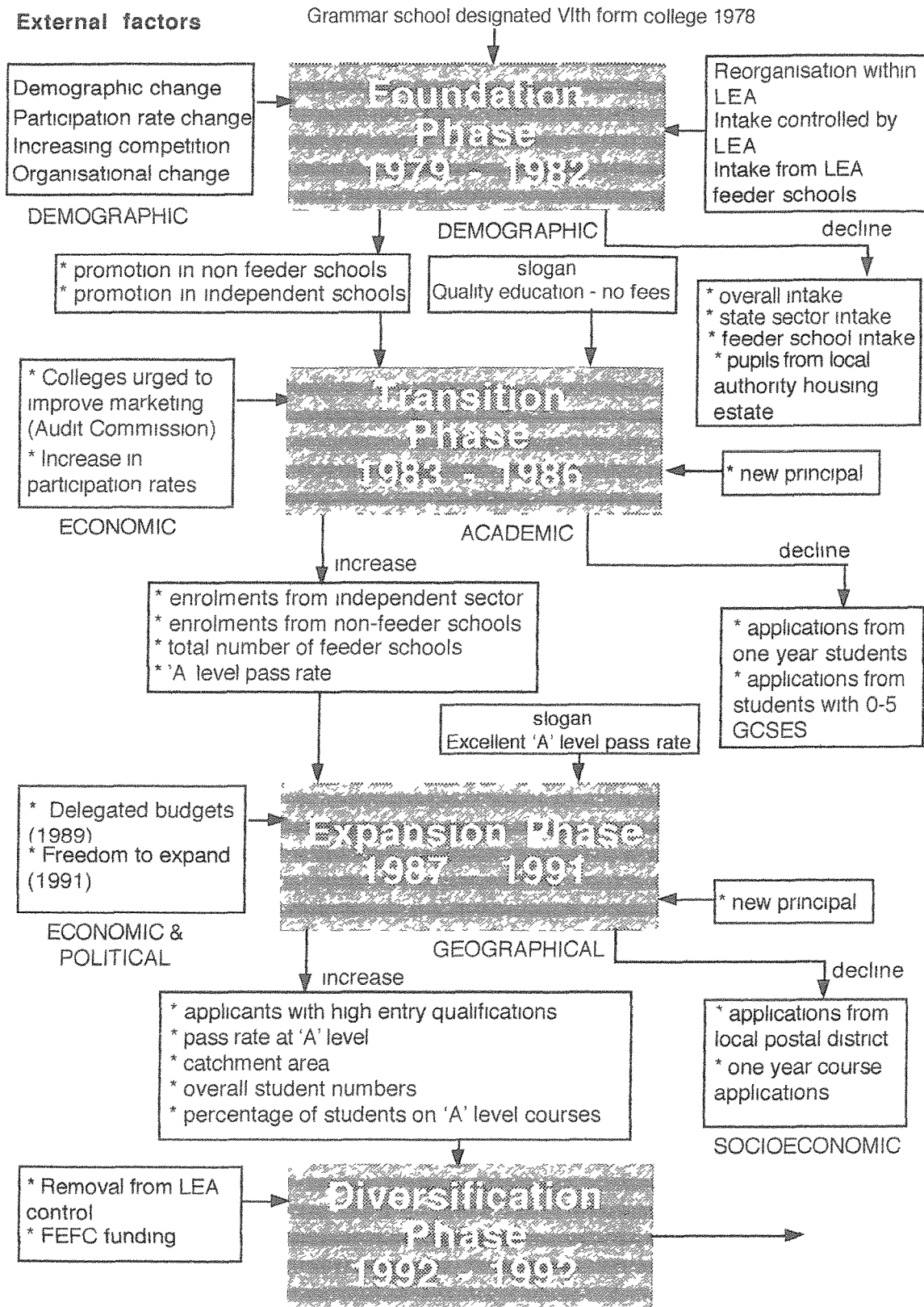
## 6.6 Developments during the whole period

A chart illustrating and summarising the changes during the period is provided in figure 6.2. The changes throughout the whole period of the study, fall into four categories,

- \* demographic
- \* geographical
- \* socio-economic
- \* academic

**Firstly, the growth in applications to the college coincided with growth in participation in FE nationally, and with an increase in performance at GCSE and 'A' level, nationally.**

**Figure 6.2** The Developmental Stages of a Niche Market



During the first phase, the college experienced a decline in enrolments, when the number of fifteen year olds nationally was decreasing, although participation rates were increasing. During the same period however, there was a substantial increase in participation in further education nationally. 'Overall participation increased fifteen percentage points between 1988 and 1994.' (FE Statistical Records (1994) cited in THES 1995 :vi) Although there was an increase in the number of students enrolled at the college, during the Expansion Phase, there was also a considerable increase nationally in participation in FE during the same period.

However, research also suggests that middle class pupils are more likely to choose an academic pathway, and middle class pupils are more likely to remain in education beyond the age of 16. Therefore, it is plausible to suppose that the college was successfully competing with other institutions to attract sixteen year olds to enrol for 'A' level courses at the college, as an alternative to remaining at school or applying elsewhere. The college may not have contributed directly to the increase in participation rates. The niche market, focused on sixteen year olds who historically, were most likely to remain in further education beyond compulsory schooling.

Secondly, **the geographical catchment area expanded during the period of the research.** By 1991 the college was serving more than 25 state schools and 14 independent schools over a wide geographical area. The postal codes listed as home addresses by students increased in number from 13 to 28 different postal districts during this period. In 1979, 40.1% of pupils lived near the college, and by 1991 this figure had reduced to 29.5%. The figures show that there was a **reduction in applications for places from pupils in local feeder schools** close to the college. The sixth form college made **virtually no effort to attract pupils from nominated feeder schools.** The total percentage intake from the nominated feeder schools fell from 66.8% of the intake in 1980, to 24.5% of the intake in 1989. By becoming more specialised, the college was forced to widen the catchment area to maintain and increase the total intake overall.

Thirdly, the quantitative data collected suggested that, **the socioeconomic profiles of students attending the college narrowed during the period.** The sixth form college no longer attracted people from the

immediate area - many of the pupils living closest to the college travelled elsewhere, whilst pupils attending the sixth form college travelled from outside the area. The two postal districts surrounding the college encompass a large local authority housing estate. At the sixth form college, there was an **increase** in the proportion of **students from independent schools** and a decline in the proportion of students who lived in the **local authority housing districts**. The FE college confirm there is a **social class difference between the FE college and the sixth form college**. The number of pupils who claimed to live in local authority housing reduced from 16.2% of leavers in 1979 - to 4.9% of leavers by 1991 when the college was fully open access. A larger proportion of the intake were from local authority housing areas during the Foundation Phase, when the ex-grammar school pupils were on roll.

Finally, **there was an improvement in the academic entry qualifications of students during the period**. The college increased the proportion of well qualified students participating in 2 year 'A' level courses, by attracting a larger proportion of students with 8 or more GCSE (grades A-C) in the later years of the study. In 1979 there were 87 students with 8 or more 'O' levels, and in 1991, there were 203 students with 8 or more GCSE grades A-C, on 'A' level courses. There was an increase of 21.3 percentage points over the period of the study relating to this factor. (see appendix w) An analysis of entry qualifications showed that the mean number of GCSE (grade A-C) passes achieved by college applicants increased from 4.48 to 6.82 GCSE (grades A-C) passes for girls, and from 5.54 to 6.73 GCSE (grades A-C) passes for boys between 1979, and 1991. The achievement at GCSE level had improved nationally during this period and fewer pupils had left school without qualifications. In 1979, 18.12% of sixteen year olds left school with 5 or more 'O' levels, and by 1988 this figure had increased to 24.43% of sixteen year olds. (see figures 5.3 and 5.17)

The figures suggest however, that the college secured an increasing number of applications from well qualified students during the later years of the study. (An increase from 22.8% of applicants in 1986 to 39.8% of entrants in 1989 gaining 8 or 9 GCSE grade C equivalents) The promotion of **high pass rates attracted better qualified students** to courses the following year. The rapid rise in the number of one year students during the

early part of the study, and the rapid decline in one year course students after 1987, shows the 'selection effect' of promoting the 'A' level course exclusively. As the number of students on 'A' level courses increased, the qualifications of students enrolling on the 'A' level course increased. The larger cohorts included a higher percentage of very well qualified students. The improved pass rates at 'A' level were initially achieved partly because the entry qualifications of year cohorts also improved, and partly because the pass rate nationally improved. The strategy however, excluded pupils with fewer qualifications, and alienated those living in the local authority housing close to the college. Social class inequality was the result of promoting the 'A' level course exclusively, rather than attempting to compete directly with the FE college and develop courses requiring fewer entry qualifications, to serve the needs of pupils from local feeder institutions living in the immediate local area. The reputation gained by the college thus became more middle class, especially because of the ex-independent sector intake, and fewer students from local authority housing districts were prepared to apply to the college, whether or not they gained appropriate qualifications to join an 'A' level course.

Enhanced competition in the post sixteen education market prompted the college to search further afield, thus competing with colleges and sixth forms further away, to woo a larger number of middle class, academically qualified sixteen year olds away from other institutions, to attend the sixth form college. As the college became more specialised, the entry qualifications of applicants improved.

## **6.7 Summary of Findings**

The findings of the present research identified four stages in the development of a market orientation, and move towards specialisation at the sixth form college. The Foundation Phase, the Transition Phase and the Expansion Phase. The major influences prompting the development of a marketing orientation were identified as, demographic - in the Foundation Phase, economic, in the Transition Phase, and political in the Expansion Stage. The 'Diversification Phase', was only in the very early stages of

development in 1992, and there is insufficient data to provide an analysis of this phase.

During the period of the study, a change was observed in the profiles of student cohorts enrolling at the college in each phase of the college's history. These changes were categorised under four headings, demographic, socioeconomic, geographical, and academic. The findings suggest that the sixth form college, in response to a failure to secure the enrolment of local sixteen year olds (living in the same postal district as the college, and attending the nominated feeder schools,) embarked on a cycle of marketing and promotion which emphasised 'A' level, and the pass rates at 'A' level. The sixth form college promoted the pass rate openly in publicity material and made it clear that the results at the college were high. The result of this strategy had been,

\* **a narrowing of the socioeconomic profiles of students** attending the college, through a decline in applications from those living in the local authority housing districts; and an increase in the number of students from independent schools; resulting in an expansion of the geographical catchment area.

\* **a narrowing of the academic profiles of students** applying to the college, through, an increase in enrolments on 'A' level courses, especially of more highly qualified applicants; and a decline in applications from students qualified for one year courses.

The 'niche' marketing strategy implemented at the sixth form college during the Transition and Expansion Phases resulted in a more specialised institution, with a narrow social and academic mix of students, drawn from a wide geographical area. The findings suggest that by operating in a competitive way, the college, although open access, became selective, socially and academically.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the qualitative data collected through interviewing twenty five fifteen to sixteen year olds. The interviews are reported under headings relating to different styles of decision making. The influence of marketing and promotional activities of colleges, on decisions made by fifteen to sixteen year olds in the local area close to the sixth form college, city college and the FE college, is described and explored.

# Chapter 7

## CHAPTER 7

### THE DEMAND SIDE OF MARKETING

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the decision making processes of pupils involved in the study, and summarises their views on the issues involved in making a choice between colleges in the local area. The data are presented under broad headings relating to 'decision making style', as quotations from transcripts of tape recorded interviews. Powney and Watts support the view that,

Interview data lends itself very easily to being reported as individuals' quotes, by extracts from transcripts. Using quotes is a useful way of bringing the text alive, of allowing the participants to make cogent points, and to make the 'story' more believable. (Powney & Watts, (1987) : 170)

The selection of appropriate extracts from the transcripts has been based on headings which emerged during the analysis stage of the research study, and on thorough sifting and synthesising of the data collected. The headings are; the reputation of the colleges; discipline and independence; results and league tables; class size; facilities and buildings; travel; peer groups and how they influence choice; type of course - with academic or vocational emphasis; work ethic - how hard students are expected to work; and staff and teachers. These themes were identified in research studies on parental choice of school - in particular, Elliot, 1982; West, Varlaam and Mortimer, 1984; Alston 1985; Stillman and Maychell, 1986; Petch, 1986; Hunter, 1991; West and Varlaam, 1991.

Selecting pertinent extracts from the interview data is the responsibility of the researcher, and it is therefore 'unavoidably his or her own perception of the data. And every perception of data is a perception through some idea about the data, some 'previous' theory of it.' (Powney & Watts, (1987) : 181) Each



transcript citation has been chosen to summarise concisely particular and relevant issues, observed and identified by the researcher in connection with the research questions, and corroborate the point being made by the respondent. Categories attempt to encapsulate what the interviewees were saying, however there were many extracts which made substantially the same point and explained an interesting and individual point of view, but which could not be recorded individually. The quotations have therefore been chosen to give a balanced, and representative description of the interview data collected from twenty five interviewees, and have been grouped together under themes which emerged from the data. Powney and Watts assert that,

the reporting of interviews could be seen as the construction of a 'story' around the events that have taken place and around the perceived outcomes of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. (Powney and Watts, (1987) : 169)

A summary of pupils involved in the study, will be followed by a description of decision making categories.

## **7.2 Pupils involved in the Study**

There were twenty five pupils involved in the study, and they have been listed according to their examination results in Figure 7.1. The pupils attending the selective independent grammar school are at the top of the list, together with some pupils from the private school, and one town comprehensive school pupil. Those attending the council estate mixed eleven to sixteen comprehensive are at the bottom, with pupils from the city girls' comprehensive. Three students at the bottom of the list are those who were unavailable before the end of the study, and who did not take examinations, and/or did not send their results. This denouement was not unexpected, (because the staff at the school had warned that some pupils might truant towards the end of the research period,) but these pupils were included to provide a full range of sample cases.

Pupils were selecting between, the technical college, the sixth form college, the city college, three school sixth forms in state schools, one independent school sixth form, an FE college, and a tertiary college, (and possibly others - but none was mentioned by pupils). With the exception of the tertiary college (which is over twenty miles from the town), the remaining named schools and colleges are within an eight mile radius of the town. The FE college and the sixth form college are one mile apart, and within easy travelling distance of the estate comprehensive and the town comprehensive.

**Figure 7.1****Listing by rank order of GCSE success**

School	Pupil	Ability range	results	destination
the grammar	Neil	High achiever	11 GCSE all A grade	the grammar
the grammar	James	Very able	10 GCSE C or above	the grammar
the grammar	Tim	able, works hard	10 GCSE C or above	the grammar
The girls' comp	Susan	High achiever	10 GCSE all grade A	city college
the grammar	Sebastian	passed 11+, wayward	10 GCSE C or above	Vlth form college
the grammar	Gareth	passed 11+, erratic	9 GCSE C or above	Vlth form college
town comp	Toby	High achiever	9 GCSE C or above	Vlth form college
private school	Alec	High achiever	9 GCSE C or above	Vlth form college
private school	Emily	Able, works hard	9 GCSE C or above	Vlth form college
private school	Ted	Average works hard	9 GCSE C or above	tertiary college
town comp	Peter	Able, dislikes school	7 GCSE C or above	mechanic
town comp	Rachel	Average hard worker	7 GCSE C or above	technical college
private school	Dora	Average, erratic	5 GCSE C or above	Vlth form college
estate comp	Wayne	Able, determined	5 GCSE C or above	FE college
girls' comp	Kylie	less able, works hard	2 GCSE C or above	unknown
private school	Stuart	Less able works hard	1 GCSE C or above	Vlth form college
girls' comp	Michelle	Less able, indolent	1 GCSE C or above	unknown
girls' comp	Pindi	less able, bi lingual	1 GCSE C or above	city college
town comp	Mandy	Less able, erratic	1 GCSE C or above	FE College
town comp	Nikki	Less able hard worker	1 GCSE C or above	technical college
estate comp	Colin	Low ability, timid	GCSE all below C (8)	apprentice
girls' comp	Helen	Low ability indolent	GCSE below C (2)	unknown
estate comp	Raquel	Average, erratic	not taken	unknown
estate comp	Darren	Average, works hard	not known (below C)	technical college?
estate comp	Carol	Very low ability	not entered	unemployed

The research participants fall into **two broad categories**, those who gained five or more GCSEs, and those who gained fewer than five GCSEs. Fourteen pupils (56%) of the twenty five students in the sample, gained five or more GCSEs at grades 'C' and above. Amongst the eight pupils (32%)

who gained fewer than five GCSEs at grade 'C', one pupil from the private school chose to attend the sixth form college, one attended the city college, one attended the FE college and one began a motor vehicle apprenticeship. One girl who joined city college to re-take GCSEs, dropped out of the college in the first term. Three pupils (12%) did not continue their education, and did not submit their results - they were seeking employment, but their whereabouts are unknown.

A series of charts was compiled, summarising the responses to questionnaires administered in the final interview, before sixteen year olds left school to attend their chosen college. The charts are provided in figures 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4, and facilitate comparison between the interviewees, and provided clear, concise information upon which to base a classification of decision makers. (A typology of decision makers is provided in Chapter 9)

The three charts are a summary of important decision making issues, with a column for each factor mentioned in interviews, and by pupils when selecting between colleges. In figure 7.2, a tick (✓) indicates that the factor was mentioned by the student in interviews, and was agreed as 'important' in the final decision, when the summary questionnaire was completed. (An example of a summary questionnaire is provided in appendix x) The first chart provides a summary of decision making factors connected with college attributes; size of college, travel considerations, reputation of college, ethos, results at the college, class sizes, facilities, type of course offered, how hard the students are expected to work, and teaching staff. The total number of factors the student considered important indicated how 'well informed' the information search had been. The highest number of factors considered by any one pupil was six factors, and the lowest was zero. Hence, those considering six (or more) factors were considered 'well informed', those with 4-5 factors were considered, 'informed', with 2-3 factors 'limited', and 1 or zero factors, 'uninformed'.

In figure 7.3, students were listed according to their social class, based on the occupation of their parents. Parents' occupations were provided by pupils in the first interview, and categorised according to a five point scale.

**Figure 7.2****Factors affecting students' choice of post sixteen destination**

Pupil	size	travel	reputation	ethos	results	classes	facilities	staff	work	total
Neil			√	√	√	√		√	√	6
James			√	√	√	√		√	√	6
Tim			√	√	√		√	√	√	6
Sebastian			√	√	√	√				4
Gareth			√	√	√	√				4
Toby			√	√	√	√				4
Ted			√				√	√		3
Alec			√	√	√	√		√		5
Emily	√		√	√	√	√		√		6
Dora	√		√	√	√	√		√		6
Stuart			√	√	√	√				4
Wayne	√		√	√						3
Mandy	√		√							2
Susan		√	√	√				√	√	5
Pindi		√								1
Kyle		√								1
Rachel	√			√						2
Nikki	√			√			√	√		4
Darren	√			√			√	√		4
Peter	√			√			√			3
Colin	√						√			2
Michelle		√								1
Helen		√								1
Raquel		√								1
Carol										0

√ positive response indicating that the factor was considered important  
 negative response indicating the student did not consider this factor

**Figure 7.3****Factors affecting students' choice of post sixteen destination**

Pupil	course	reason	information	visits	colleges	acad/voc	father	Mother	s class
Neil	A	Parents	grapevine	0	0	Acad.	p	p	5
James	A	Parents	grapevine	0	0	Acad.	p	p	5
Tim	A	Parents	grapevine	0	0	Acad.	p	p	5
Sebastian	A	Freedom	Friends	1	1	Acad.	p	s	4
Gareth	A	Subjects	Friends	1	1	Acad.	p	s	4
Toby	A	Selective	Family	2	1	Acad.	p	p	5
Ted	A	Family	Family	2	3	Acad.	s	p	4
Alec	A	age limit	School	2	2	Acad.	p	s	4
Emily	A	Subjects	School	2	2	Acad.	p	s	4
Dora	A	age limit	School	2	2	Acad.	s	s	3
Stuart	GCSE	Friends	School	2	2	Acad.	u	u	1
Wayne	NVQ	Friends	Friends	2	2	Voc	s	u	2
Mandy	NVQ	Friends	School	2	2	Voc	s	u	2
Susan	A	Travel	School	1	1	Acad.	p	s	4
Pindi	GCSE	Travel	School	1	1	Acad.	s	u	2
Kylie	GCSE	Travel	School	1	1	Acad.	-	u	1
Rachel	NVQ	Job*	School	2	2	Voc	-	u	1
Nikki	NVQ	Facilities	School	2	2	Voc	u	s	2
Darren	NVQ	Job*	School	2	2	Voc	u	u	1
Peter	Appren	Job^	Family	0	0	Voc	s	u	2
Colin	Appren	Job^	Family	0	0	Voc	u	u	1
Michelle		Job^	Family	0	0	job?	u	u	1
Helen		Job^	Family	0	0	job?	u	u	1
Raquel		Family	Family	0	0	job?	u	u	1
Carol		Family	Family	0	0	job?	u	u	1

\* - to improve job prospects

^ - anxious to begin working at 16

Occupations - p = professional or managerial; s = skilled or 'qualified' work; u = unskilled or labouring;  
 Social class - Professional / Professional = 5 : Professional / Skilled = 4 : Skilled / skilled = 3 : Skilled / Unskilled = 2 : Unskilled / Unskilled = 1 ( both parents taken into account)

**Figure 7.4****Factors affecting students' choice of post sixteen destination**

<b>Pupil</b>	informed	self deceit	bolstered	marketing	friends	GCSEs	characteristics
Neil	Very (6)		✓	✓		11	Self assured
James	Very (6)		✓	✓		10	Self assured
Tim	Very (6)		✓	✓	✓	10	Self assured
Sebastian	Yes (4)	✓	✓	✓	✓	10	Self assured
Gareth	Yes (4)	✓	✓	✓	✓	9	Self assured
Toby	Yes (4)			✓		9	Self assured
Ted	Yes (4)			✓		9	Self assured
Alec	Very (5)	✓	✓	✓	✓	9	Idealistic
Emily	Very (6)	✓	✓	✓	✓	9	Idealistic
Dora	Very (6)	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	Idealistic
Stuart	Yes (4)	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	Determined
Wayne	Yes (3)	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	Determined
Mandy	Partly (2)	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	Determined
Susan	Very (5)		✓	✓		10	Persuadable
Pindi	No (1)			✓	✓	1	Persuadable
Kylie	No (1)			✓		2	Persuadable
Rachel	Partly (2)			✓		7	Persuadable
Nikki	Yes (4)		✓	✓	✓	1	Persuadable
Darren	Yes (4)			✓		0	Persuadable
Peter	Yes (3)					7	Stubborn
Colin	Partly (2)					0	Stubborn
Michelle	No (1)					1	Preoccupied
Helen	No (1)					0	Preoccupied
Raquel	No (1)					0	Preoccupied
Carol	No (0)					0	Preoccupied

The occupations of both parents were taken into account, and parents who were currently unemployed were categorised according to their previous employment, when possible. The categories were, professional and managerial, skilled - including administrative and secretarial, and unskilled. All sets of parents were classified in either the same category, or the next category up, or down. (i.e. there were no 'professional' mothers or fathers with unskilled spouses) A summary chart has been provided in figure 7.5, to show how the numerical scale, 1-5 was achieved.

**Figure 7.5**

**Social Class Classification**

professional	professional	5	Upper Middle
professional	Skilled	4	Middle
Skilled	Skilled	3	Lower Middle
Skilled	Unskilled	2	Upper working
Unskilled	Unskilled	1	Working

The students have been grouped according to the style they adopted when collecting information about colleges. (see Hemsley-Brown (1994) : II & III) During the interview period, students were described under a number of headings, according to their personality and their approach to the problem of choosing between colleges. The initial labels are listed in figure 7.4, and comprise; 'self assured'; 'stubborn'; 'preoccupied'; 'determined'; 'idealistic'; and 'persuadable'. The labels emerged entirely from the data, and after two years contact with the students involved in the study. 'Self reliant' emerged as a label which combined 'self assured', 'stubborn' and 'complacent'.

'Self reliant' pupils were determined to find out information for themselves, and were influenced primarily by family, rather than by schools and teachers. 'Independent' students were well informed, and were divided into those in 11-16 schools, and those in 11-18 schools - further classified as 'stayers' and 'leavers'. 'Resolute', pupils were unwilling to take advice, and relied on family or their own resources, although they were very limited in their knowledge of the options. 'Complacent' pupils were unable to give attention to choices at 16 because of domestic problems, and failed to find out information, resisted help and advice, and 'drifted' into unemployment.

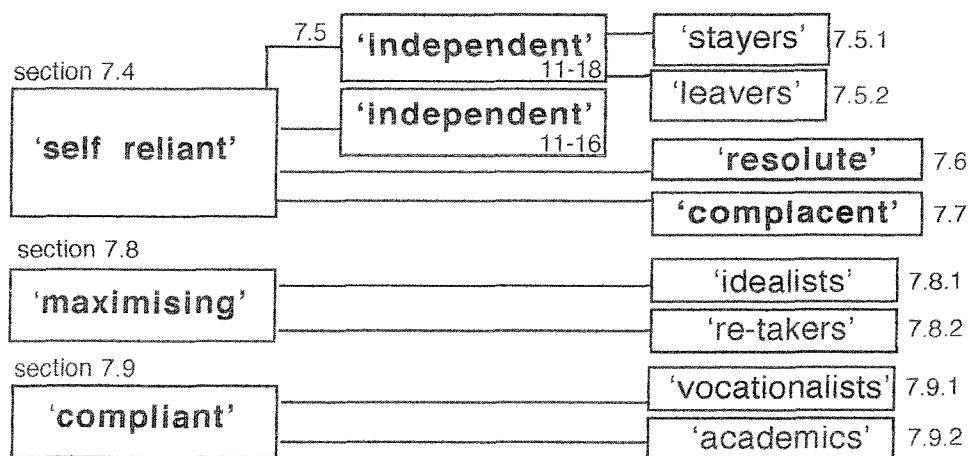
'Determined' (or 'maximising') pupils undertook a thorough search and visited at least two colleges, but 'retakers' failed to gain the required GCSE results for their choice. 'Idealistic' pupils were very thorough in their information search, and tried to secure a choice based on the best combination of factors. 'Persuadable' or 'compliant' pupils were very docile and prepared to listen to all the advice offered, relying heavily on the school or colleges for information. Nine groups of decision maker were identified. The next section provides a summary of decision making styles, and a description of each group of decision makers follows.

### 7.3 Decision Maker Styles

The decision maker groups are compatible with the behaviour exhibited by the range of students involved in the present study, and have been used in this chapter to organise the students under headings, to provide a more concise description of the data. Student decision maker groups are labelled according to the style of decision making, and information search undertaken by each student. The grouping system used in the present study is shown graphically in figure 7.6. and has been relied upon to organise the description of interview conversations in the next section.

**Figure 7.6**

**Grouping of students according to decision maker style**





#### **7.4 Self Reliant Decision Makers**

'Self reliant' indicated that the students were very determined to find out any information they needed themselves without help, but were biased in their search and chose a particular option in the early stages without pursuing all the alternatives. 'Independent' decision makers were well informed, even about options they were not considering, and were very outspoken in their views. 'Resolute' decision makers were reluctant to seek information, and only partly informed about a narrow range of options. 'Complacent' decision makers were reluctant to accept advice and relied on their own resources, but were ill-equipped for the task.

#### **7.5 Independent Decision Makers**

Both Ted and Toby had already decided which college they would attend before they reached 14, based on advice from their families before the research began, and were attending a school without a sixth form. However they went through the process of visiting colleges and searching for the best option. Toby and Ted were well informed about all the colleges, and outspoken in their views. Both boys were middle class and gained GCSE qualifications appropriate for an 'A' level course. Both boys made a choice which was different from their peer group. Both boys had already made a choice at 11 to reject their neighbourhood school in favour of a school further from home.

Toby was the only maintained sector interviewee who chose the sixth form college. Toby was a very confident outspoken individual, who talked at great length about the colleges in the area, in particular the sixth form college. His main attitude towards the sixth form college is summed up in the following statement, which he made early in the interviewing process.

The FE college has a good reputation - but not as good as the sixth form college. It's the best in the area because it's selective. They don't just take anyone. The sixth form college used to be a

grammar school - so it's better there for 'A' levels - because it started as a grammar school. The sixth form college is more academic than the FE college, that's why I chose it. (Toby, second interview, town comprehensive)

All pupils in the state sector schools received some information by direct mail, from three of the colleges in the local area. 'I got some information sent through the post, but I went to the open evening as well.' (Toby, second interview, town comprehensive) When asked about the way he would be treated at the colleges in the area, he assumed that his only alternative to the sixth form college was the FE college, and strongly defended his choice of the sixth form college throughout the interviewing.

At the FE college they just expect you to do the work, they don't check up on you. But at the sixth form college they make you do the work. So its like a school really. (Toby, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

Toby was concerned about the class size at the sixth form college, and had tried to find out what he could from staff at the college.

The classes are large in Psychology - she said there were about twenty in a class. In some other subjects there's only thirteen, so I might change to a subject with smaller classes. There are only about ten in Maths. (Toby, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

During the first term when Toby had started his course at the college he was questioned about the size of classes again, and claimed optimistically,

The Maths is what they said - its about fifteen, but not any bigger than they said - well maybe a few more. The Media Studies is more than twenty - they said there would be less (sic) - but its OK because so many people skive that there's never that many there. (Toby, fifth interview, sixth form college)

Once he attended the college he tried to explain why there had been a distortion in the figures, 'they said the class sizes were different in different subjects, and that they couldn't tell me how many would be in a class.' (Toby, fifth interview, town comprehensive) When asked about facilities,

Toby argued, 'I don't need any facilities for my subjects so I didn't think about it' (Toby, third interview, town comprehensive)

Toby was asked whether he was following his friends in choosing to go to the sixth form college, or whether he had made the decision independently. He claimed with self assurance, that

I have friends going to the sixth form college and the FE college. I wouldn't go to the FE college just because my friends are going there. The cleverer ones go to the sixth form college though. So that's why the results are better. .... Its better to be able to say I'm going there. (Toby, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

He raised the question of attending the sixth form college several times in the interviews, and when asked about the results at the college claimed,

they encourage people to do Maths if they can get an 'A' - you have to have an 'A' at GCSE to do it. So that's why the results are good. (Toby, third interview, town comprehensive)

When choosing subjects, Toby believed the results of past pupils would have some effect on his own future success. Without any prompting he claimed,

I had trouble choosing subjects because the results were not very good in Psychology and Sociology, (..) Media studies wasn't very good either, but that doesn't matter I suppose. (Toby, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

Toby was unprepared to consider a vocational course and treated the FE college as unsuitable even though he was aware that 'A' levels were also offered at the FE college. 'I won't go to the FE college. They do too many BTECS and I want to do 'A' levels.' (Toby, third interview, town comprehensive) Toby never mentioned how hard he would have to work during the early interviews, but did say, in the final telephone interview, 'They make me work hard in Maths here, and its a high level. I like doing Maths, that's why I came here.' (Toby, sixth form college) In the final interview Toby was asked if he had been misled about anything connected with the college, and he raised the question of the size of classes. 'They said

there's only fourteen in a class. There are over twenty in Psychology and Sociology. In my English class there are over twenty.' Referring to the results, which he had checked at the open evening, he said, 'the results in Psychology and Sociology were bad, - only about half of them passed.'  
(Toby, fifth interview, town comprehensive)

Ted was the only pupil who chose the tertiary college, he lived only a few miles from the college and claimed that the sixth form college, FE college and grammar school were too far away. He did visit other FE colleges and tertiary colleges within his own local area, with his brother. He knew very little about the reputations of colleges but claimed that, 'the tertiary college has a good reputation for Art and that's what I want to do.' (Ted, third interview, private school) Although Ted visited a number of colleges he was not concerned about how much freedom and independence he might experience at various different colleges. He replied, 'Didn't ask about that. But my brother went there and it's OK. That's a good reason for going.'  
(Ted, fourth interview, private school) This factor had however been a very important issue to the four other pupils from the private school, who attended the sixth form college. Ted was asked if he knew anything about the results at any of the colleges, and he said, 'Yes - the results were good, but they were good at all the colleges I went to.' (Ted, third interview, private school)

Although Ted was relatively unconcerned about the general facilities at the college, he claimed that he had checked the art departments in all the colleges he visited, and had used this to help him decide. He also claimed, along with most other pupils, that the buildings are generally unimportant. Ted had underestimated his own ability, since he gained seven GCSE passes above 'C' grade, including Mathematics, which he was convinced he would need to retake. Ted finally chose the tertiary college where his brother had studied, because of the art department, and the fact that he would not have to travel very far. (He would have to travel more than 20 miles to attend the other colleges).

Both Toby and Ted were very secure in their choice from the very beginning, and seemed very confident about information gathering, and certain about

the decisions they made at each stage. They were unlikely to acknowledge any influence from their peers, but relied on the view of members of their family gained over a long period. They were both able to penetrate the promotional information provided to discover detailed and realistic information about the choices available, especially the choice they eventually made.

### 7.5.1 'Stayers'

Neil, Tim, and James were middle class boys attending a selective 11-18 school. They were able to express their opinions clearly and eloquently. They were influenced directly by their parents who favoured the grammar school sixth form as a post sixteen option, but they also were able to gather all the information they needed about the options and were well informed. They achieved high academic qualifications and were hostile towards vocational training at sixteen, favouring academic education without question. They were intending to work in a profession after attending university. Their parents were graduates, and worked in the professions or managerial occupations.

Neil, James and Tim, who achieved mainly 'A' grades at GCSE, remained at the grammar school in the sixth form, and failed to give any attention to the possibility of going elsewhere. Tim, admitted that, 'I haven't looked at any colleges.' (James, second interview, grammar school) Neil, Tim and James, claimed that their parents wanted them to stay at the grammar school, and they acknowledge that the sixth form college had a 'good reputation'. All three boys volunteered information about the sixth form college without prompting, but were less able to give information about other colleges. James said that he had heard that the sixth form college was 'possibly better than here, but I've also heard that it isn't.' (James, second interview, grammar school) Neil in his last interview implied that the college is selective saying, 'the sixth form college has a good reputation for grades, but not just anyone can go there.' (Neil, fifth interview, grammar school) Tim

contradicts this belief by explaining that,

It's a step 'down' to go to the sixth form college from here. It's got a better reputation than the comprehensives though. You have to be clever to go to this school. It has the best academic reputation. But you don't have to be clever to go there. (Tim, fourth interview, grammar school)

When asked about the reputation of the city, FE and technical colleges, these boys had very little knowledge of the courses offered. 'The FE college - I wouldn't consider it. My friend's sister goes there and it's not very good.' (James, second interview, grammar school) Early interviews provided very little information on the reputations of local colleges, with the exception of the sixth form college. When asked about the nearest college - city college, Tim said,

The city college is very rough. *What do you mean 'rough'?* Well...the people are rough. Its just an impression I get. Whereas the sixth form college is better. People from here go there year after year. (Tim, third interview, Grammar school)

Both Tim and Neil argued that they would gain good results wherever they went to school but claimed that results at the sixth form college were 'very good' - without quoting figures.

Tim admitted in the second interview that he did not know how large or small the classes were at any other schools or colleges, but Neil was prepared to give an opinion. He was not able to give any views until he had entered the sixth form himself, when he said,

classes are smaller in the sixth form, there were 24 in the history class in fifth form, now there are 5 of us. The atmosphere is much better. (Neil, fifth interview, grammar school)

When asked about reasons for choosing a college, Neil acknowledged that the facilities at the grammar were good, but believed they would be the 'same anywhere else for what I want to do.' (Neil, grammar school).

All three boys were already travelling some distance to school, and in each case the whole journey took about an hour. Neil sums up the views of these

three boys by saying,

I could consider anywhere really, because I already travel down on the train. R.....college is nearer, but I - and my parents, wouldn't consider anywhere else. (Neil, grammar school)

The researcher asked the boys about the teachers at their own school, and attempted to discover whether they had influenced the boys' choice to stay. James claimed that, 'teachers try to get us to stay here. They don't tell us about anywhere else.' (James, second interview, grammar school). Tim claimed additionally that, 'the ones who leave are the ones who don't get on with the staff here.' (Tim, grammar school)

All three boys considered 'A' levels to be the only route to the career they had in mind. They were hostile towards vocational courses, claiming that, 'Job training is out of the question.' (Neil, second interview, grammar school)

I need a degree for the kind of job I want. I want to be a chemist, or a doctor, I need 'A' levels for that. (James, second interview, grammar school)

When the boys were asked to comment on vocational courses, or colleges which offered such courses, the response was, 'The technical college does different courses from the ones we want to do. They do BTEC and hairdressing. It's a bit the same at the FE college.' (Neil, second interview, grammar school). Tim also believed in the traditional outlook conveyed by the ethos of the grammar, and explained why he thought some boys were persuaded to study for 'A' levels elsewhere.

They do all the traditional 'A' levels here..... They don't have the reputation that some subjects have. For example, other colleges do 'Media Studies, but you can do just as well with English. (Tim, second interview, grammar school)

The boys were especially passionate about the subject of how hard they would have to work at the grammar school compared with the sixth form college. This subject was raised many times by them, and they used this argument to criticise the boys who left the school. James' view is typical.

The general impression I get is the ones who

want to have a good time prefer it at the sixth form college. They are not working very hard compared with us. They'll not do so well because they'll enjoy themselves and no-one will make them work. (James, fifth interview, grammar school)

The boys were asked in the later interviews about their own friends, and Neil claimed that, 'some boys have left, but some friends have stayed here.'  
(Neil, fifth interview, grammar school).

Finally the boys were asked in the fourth interview to describe their own views on staying in the sixth form compared with leaving to go to college. Neil summarised the views of these three boys by explaining,

I have no intention of looking anywhere else. It is very easy for me to achieve the results I need to continue in the sixth form here. My parents would never consider anywhere else, they expect me to stay and like it. (...) They go to the sixth form college because it's mainly 'A' levels, there are no adults, and they don't want to be here. (Neil, fourth interview, grammar school)

### **7.5.2 'Leavers'**

Sebastian and Gareth were middle class boys attending a selective 11-18 boys school, who decided to leave to attend the sixth form college. They were only interested in 'A' level courses and were intending to go to university. They were interested both in the social life at the college, and the subjects offered at 'A' level. They did not want to be viewed as 'swots' or hard workers, and were concerned about their 'image'. The main impetus for choosing the sixth form college was their determination to leave the school.

Gareth and Sebastian, chose to leave the grammar school to study 'A' levels at the sixth form college and confirmed the existence of a 'grapevine' of information saying, 'a friend was talking about it last term, he got some forms



and then I went to the open evening.' (Gareth, third interview, grammar school) Both boys gained the information they needed by going to the college open evening, in November before taking GCSEs. Both boys eventually gained nine GCSEs at 'A', 'B', or 'C' grades, and both travelled some distance to school from outside the city. Sebastian confirmed that he, 'did not like, the grammar school', and that,

the people who don't do extra homework leave and go to the sixth form college. I don't know why. I just don't wanna be here. I'm not a swot. I don't fit in.  
(Sebastian, third interview, grammar school)

When asked to describe the discipline at school, Gareth admitted, 'I muck about in lessons. There's too many in the class, about twenty five. It's more fun not to work.' (Gareth, second interview, grammar school) Sebastian said he believed that

the discipline at the sixth form college seems about the same as here - I have to be there all day. But, I can grow my hair long. (Sebastian, June 1992, grammar school)

Before these boys had visited the sixth form college however, they had already formed an impression of the college.

At the sixth form college they treat you more like adults - and that will help me later on. They control your free time here. At the sixth form college they let you do what you like in your free time. (Gareth, second interview, grammar school)

Both boys had looked at the results achieved by the sixth form college at 'A' level, and the college had drawn their attention to the results at the open evening. Neither boy was able to quote definite figures, but described them in a favourable light.

I looked at the pass rates at the sixth form college. They were very good in all subjects. Fifty percent or more in all subjects. The overall pass rate is important. They said they were in a league table or something in the newspapers. Quite high up I think.....The results at the sixth form college helped to persuade my mum to agree to let me go. (Sebastian, third interview, grammar school)

Both boys also reinforced the belief that they would not have to work as hard at the college. However, when they arrived it was clear that they would be expected to work harder than they anticipated, and the courses which Gareth claimed were optional, were compulsory.

There is more work than I thought there was. (.....)  
I didn't think we'd have to work on our own so much, - I don't find it too taxing at the moment.  
(Gareth, fifth interview, the sixth form college)

Both boys quoted the same information when asked about the size of classes at the college. Sebastian claimed,

they have smaller classes at the sixth form college than they do here. They said there are only twelve in the German class. That's good.  
(Sebastian, second interview, grammar school)

When asked again at the final interview, to confirm that classes were small however, both boys claimed, that classes were 'reasonably small. (...) Well - there are 22 in one of my classes - Business Studies.' (Gareth, fifth interview, sixth form college) When asked if he should have been told about the larger classes, Gareth provided 'post hoc justification' to support his choice by arguing that, 'they couldn't really because they wouldn't have known then who was going to do the subject.' (Gareth, fifth interview, at the sixth form college)

The boys both acknowledged when challenged about their friendship groups, that their own friends had also chosen to go to the sixth form college. Sebastian claimed that, 'there are more of us leaving than staying this year. It's friendlier at the sixth form college.' (Sebastian, fourth interview, grammar school) Gareth compared the college with the grammar school saying 'There aren't so many posh wealthy ones at the sixth form college as there are here.' (Gareth, fourth interview, grammar school) Both boys claimed, when they joined the college, that they met students they could get on with from other independent schools.

There are a few rich ones here. I was surprised at that. Quite a lot of them went to private school - there's a lot from St. ...., and C..... (Gareth, fifth interview, at the sixth form college)

In common with the boys who stayed at the school Sebastian and Gareth were quite determined to study for 'A' levels, and were unprepared to consider vocational courses - their ambitions were focused on university. Sebastian claimed that, 'there's a wider range of subjects at the sixth form college - but I'm doing traditional subjects anyway - I could do them here.' (Sebastian, fourth interview, grammar school) Although Gareth did not eventually study Law for 'A' level, in his fourth interview, he claimed that ,

subject choice is the only reason I am going to the sixth form college. The course there suits me better than the one at the grammar school. It's not to do with the teaching. ....They do Law at the sixth form college and not here. (Gareth, grammar school)

The boys were asked why they had chosen to go to the sixth form college, rather than any other alternative, and Sebastian admitted, 'I wanted a change. I've been here for eight years, I'm bored with it. I'm not a swot, I don't fit in here.' (Sebastian, fourth interview, grammar school) Whereas Gareth claimed,

I prefer the sixth form college because you work for yourself, not for the reputation of the school, like you do here. (Gareth, fourth interview grammar school)

These boys considered the sixth form of the school, and the sixth form college to be their only choices. The boys were asked whether, with hindsight, they needed to adjust their views about the college. They themselves had been unaware of providing biased information in favour of the college however. These claims had included the belief that, 'You don't have to work hard at the sixth form college, but the results are really good.' (Sebastian, second interview, grammar school) The boys employed self persuasion to convince themselves that they had made a good decision to go to the college, and relied on the promotion provided by the sixth form college to persuade their parents to support their choice. They made an early decision to attend the college in November before their GCSEs.

## **7.6 Resolute Decision Makers**

Peter from town comprehensive, and Colin, from estate comprehensive.

avoided applying to colleges, and both intended to find an apprenticeship in automotive engineering. They resisted all suggestions by the school that they should consider remaining in education. Although Peter gained seven GCSEs at grade 'C' and above, and Colin's grades were all below 'D', they were both successful in securing apprenticeships. These boys were frightened of being 'trapped' in education, and very concerned that teachers in particular were trying to persuade them to take a college place, which they could not escape from. They valued work and getting a job very highly, and were anxious to give up school life. Their parents were working class, and had not pursued further education themselves. They believed that they should gain experience in a trade as soon as possible, and did not believe that further education would lead towards a better job, only towards a different job.

Earlier in the interviewing they went through the process of selecting an appropriate college, and their views were similar on many issues. Peter's parents both left school before examinations, and his father was a taxi driver. Colin's father was an unemployed motor mechanic and his mother a part time cleaner. Colin relied a good deal on his father, and claimed 'My Dad tells me what I need to know.' (Colin, second interview, estate comprehensive) Both boys gained their information about colleges entirely through the school, but listened seriously to advice given by their parents, and quoted these comments regularly. Peter's view of the colleges was summarised as, 'the FE college is where you go for a bit of a laugh, the technical college is more serious. They are both good though.' (Peter, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

Colin spent only a short time looking at colleges but claimed,  
the technical college is better - its bigger. A man  
came into school, an' he told us about BTEC. I was  
going to the open evening, but I forgot. I could go if I  
wanted. (Colin, fourth interview, estate  
comprehensive)

When asked about results gained by colleges Peter's comment explains both boys' views.

They said not many people got jobs in the end.

They say if someone's successful then they get a job Both the colleges are the same though  
(Peter, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

Although these boys knew nothing about the size of classes, or of colleges, and had never given the subject consideration, Colin decided that, 'I'd want somewhere large, if I went, the technical college is large ' (Colin, fourth interview, estate comprehensive) Both boys were also able to give some information about facilities at the technical college which, because of the workshops for motor mechanics, was favoured Peter, who was more aware of other colleges in the area, and had learnt more from careers lessons, gave a fuller account

I prefer the surroundings of the FE college to the sixth form college - its more modern The technical college is OK, it's the sixth form I don't like Also although I'd go anywhere where they had the facilities for motor mechanics - they don't have anything at the sixth form college (Peter, third interview, town comprehensive)

Although both boys walked to school, they claimed that travel would not be a problem once they left school Colin was also unconcerned about friends, and was a very quiet boy indeed, speaking slowly and quietly to the interviewer - who was forced to show great patience Peter, who was more outspoken and confident, claimed,

most people are going to college, but it doesn't bother me My parents both want me to get a job, or an apprenticeship I'll go to the college where they send me for the apprenticeship  
(Peter, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

At one stage during interviewing, both boys were concerned that they might be unable to secure an apprenticeship, and each took a different course of action to secure an alternative Peter decided that he would rather join the Marines than go to college Briefly, Colin considered the technical college, but began to delay applying as long as he could Peter was questioned to discover why, with such good examination predictions, he was not interested in a college course

I could get a better job with 'A' levels, but not what I want to do BTEC is a training scheme, they train you for a particular job (third interview) I

want to do car mechanics. I can do that in the Marines, and its better than going on the dole. I don't want to go to college except as part of an apprenticeship. (Peter, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

The main argument for undertaking an apprenticeship rather than a college course of any kind is explained by Peter, though Colin gave exactly the same argument.

All the jobs say you need experience and college doesn't count. I went for a work experience and they told me the college courses weren't worth anything - it's experience that counts. I get bored easily especially with school - I wouldn't get bored with car mechanics though. (Peter, third interview, town comprehensive)

Colin was asked if he worked hard at school, and whether he knew what his results might be. He was only able to give information about his expected results nearer the examinations. When asked to give reasons why they had chosen not to apply to any colleges, Colin gives an explanation which is applicable to both boys.

I know they could teach me about working on cars at a college, but its better to have a job. People in garages want you to have experience. (Colin, fourth interview, estate comprehensive)

Peter and Colin were avoiding further education. They were anxious that they should avoid being trapped in the system. They would have attended a job related course if an employer insisted upon it, or if they could secure a job in this way.

## **7.7 Complacent Decision Makers**

Michelle, Helen, (girls' school) Raquel and Carol (estate comprehensive) rarely entered into the process of making choices about colleges, or even about their own future. When asked about the colleges, these four girls had gained information only by attending the compulsory careers lessons - when

they were not absent from school. They were working class girls who were relied upon at home to help with younger children, and had attended the school nearest their home. They were unable to give time to their school work or their careers. All four girls missed lessons, and interviews. They were all 'missing' by the time the research period ended. Results were obtained from the school, not from the girls. These girls were optimistic in the early stages of interviewing, but gradually realised that they were going to fail their examinations. They were very ill informed, and confused about their options, and the qualifications needed for courses.

Both Raquel and Carol were each living with one parent, their mother, and younger children, and in common with Kylie, claimed that their families needed them. These girls were virtually unable to answer questions, or give an opinion on any of the issues relating to specific colleges. They were unable to name the colleges unless the interviewer suggested ones which required comment. A conversation with Raquel gives an impression of the discussion about further education, held with these girls.

The technical college has no course on wild animals. I only look for qualifications for animal jobs. I chose sciences so I can do it. I'm still looking on my own - they don't help you here. There's not many people I know who want to do that sort of job. People here think I'm mad wanting to do that. - It's all I want to do, there's nothing round here - I'll have to move away - here its only factory work. (Raquel, third interview, estate comprehensive)

By the following year, Raquel had become more realistic about her GCSE grades, and briefly speculated on the possibility of applying to college.

I prefer the FE college, my mates are going there.....Its got beauty therapy which I could do.....I could change an' do that if I can't do biology.... I didn't know before that I couldn't get higher than a 'C' I'd have worked harder if I known. (Raquel, fourth interview, estate comprehensive)

Raquel stopped attending school in the summer term. Michelle, and Helen made attempts to find out about colleges, but missed careers lessons, and visits. Helen's view is summed up as, 'I might go to college, if they send me

for job training. If I had to do a course, I 'd go.' (Helen, fourth interview, girls' comprehensive) Michelle spent a good deal of time prevaricating, and did not apply. Carol had found every aspect of school difficult and claimed, 'I don't want to get any qualifications.' (Carol, fourth interview, estate comprehensive) She was unable to answer questions about colleges, and most questions had to be simplified to help her to understand. She said, 'my Mum would let me go, but I don't want to. I'm still lookin' for somethin' to do.' (Carol, fourth interview, estate comprehensive) These girls were preoccupied with domestic problems, avoided information about colleges, and had only given time to the issues in careers lessons - when they were not absent.

## **7.8 Maximising Decision Makers**

'Maximising' decision makers were characterised by their determination to find out information about all the options before making a decision. Five students in this category were from the same school, the private school, and utilised their own resources, those of the school and the colleges to gain information. (The town comprehensive and the private school were very thorough in their careers advice and provided a wealth of information about all the colleges.)

### **7.8.1 'Idealists'**

Alec, Dora and Emily were constantly searching for the ideal combination, but eventually persuaded themselves that the sixth form college was the best alternative, although it did not entirely fit their stated requirements. Alec, Dora and Emily also considered the grammar school and various boarding school sixth forms, as alternative options weighing up the information carefully. They were all middle class, and gained GCSEs which qualified them for 'A' levels. Even before these pupils began their investigations, they had some knowledge of the reputations of the colleges,



gained through friends, and ex-pupils of the school.

Emily and Dora, two enthusiastic talkative girls, were initially in favour of the grammar school, but constantly searched for the ideal or perfect choice. Emily claimed - after choosing the sixth form college that, 'the grammar school has got the best reputation for academic subjects, but the sixth form college has got the best reputation for social life.' (Emily, third interview, private school) Dora compares the colleges appreciating the differences between them and argues,

I think the sixth form college has a very good reputation in the area basically because of the kind of people it attracts. I suppose that's unfair, because the others are good too, but you can't compare them.  
(Dora, fourth interview, private school)

When asked how they would be treated at college, or what sort of 'discipline' they expected, at the second interview Dora argued, that 'I wouldn't be well motivated at the sixth form college. I would be too easily distracted.' (Dora, private school). However Dora and Emily, after visiting the college, later argued that the sixth form college was quite strict. 'I prefer the sixth form college because they're used to people straight from school, and so y' know, they're quite strict.' (Dora, fourth interview, private school) The question about discipline was answered differently each time it was mentioned, and the two girls were quite confused about the kind of freedom the sixth form college offered.

I decided not to go to the grammar school sixth form, because I don't get as much independence as at the sixth form college. At the sixth form college its still strict, but you get more independence. (Emily, fourth interview, private school)

The pupils were asked the same questions after they had begun their course at the college and explained,

Well, when you apply they make out that it's your choice whether you go to lessons or not. But it's not. If you don't go to lessons you get 'kicked' out. So it sounded freer than it is. - Well it's better that way because I probably wouldn't go to lessons if they didn't make me. (Emily, fifth interview, at the sixth form college)

Alec summed up the views of all three of the (ex)private school pupils, by explaining that,

I am looking for somewhere which is more adult, and the sixth form college gives me more freedom to make my own decisions. *Are you comparing it with other colleges?* No, I'm comparing it with school here. Or maybe a boarding school like C..... (Alec, fourth interview, private school)

The pupils went to the sixth form college open evening, where the results had been drawn to their attention. 'Yah, they showed the results to us, they said they were good - I can't remember what they were.' (Dora, third interview, private school). Once attending the college Alec was asked if there was anything the college had been biased about, anything which was not quite true, and he replied,

They were a bit biased about the results. They told us about the good results, and they left out some of the not so good ones. I know quite a few people who went here who have good results - but I know some who have got quite bad results from here. (Alec, fifth interview, the sixth form college)

All pupils were questioned about the size of classes at their chosen colleges, especially because the private school boasts about small classes. The pupils were however aware that in the maintained sector classes would be larger. Emily's response at the fourth interview is typical.

Well at the grammar the classes are about seven or ten and that's a real benefit. At the sixth form college they are bigger but there's only about ten - or maybe fifteen. The teachers said its better anyway because you get more opinions in the group discussions. (Emily, fourth interview private school)

On arrival, at the sixth form college Dora admitted that , 'the classes are bigger than I expected - they are bigger than they were at school - its well over twenty. (Dora, fifth interview, at the sixth form college)

All pupils from the private school were asked whether the buildings, or the facilities had influenced their choice between the colleges. Alec said he

had not thought about the surroundings at all, or the buildings, but he mentioned the sports facilities as important, when prompted. Both girls agreed that,

The FE college has nice buildings. I don't like the building at the sixth form college, the atmosphere there is grim, its cold, large and the feeling of it's wrong. The tertiary college is much better. (third interview) ..... The sixth form college has horrible buildings - they're like - really grim. But you know, although its important, I'm still going there. (Emily, fourth interview, private school)

Travel was deemed to be unimportant when choosing a college - all three pupils claimed that, 'I get to school on the school bus. The sixth form college is nearer to home than the private school is. But its not important.' (Emily, private school) Emily was anxious to claim that her choice had not relied on travel considerations, even though the college was closer to her home than the school she was attending.

When asked about the kinds of people attending the various colleges, and whether their own friends were going to the same college, Alec said, after he had been to open evening,

Well, its mainly sixteen to nineteen year olds at the sixth form college, so they give more attention to that. There are no adults on the courses. I have friends at the sixth form college, and other people here are going there. (Alec, third interview, private school)

Dora and Emily were at first determined to go elsewhere, and not attend the same college as their friends. 'I don't want to go to the sixth form college because too many people from this school go there. I want to go somewhere different.' (Emily, second interview, private school) By the fourth interview however, and after visiting the college and accepting a place, Emily admitted, 'a lot of my friends are going to the sixth form college.' (Emily, the private school)

Once attending the college, it was clear that the girls had met others like themselves, and had found the college 'friendly'.

There are a lot of people like me here. The

majority of people came from the catholic school and other schools like the one I went to. People here know you by which school you went to. .... It's definitely better here because there aren't any adults. (Dora, fifth interview, at the sixth form college)

For the three pupils attending the private school, a job straight from school was out of the question, and 'BTECs' were not considered suitable for their needs. 'From 'A' level you can do a job like office work, or medicine, or anything where you need understanding and knowledge. But BTEC, well that's just learning practical things on the job.' (Emily, second interview, private school) Both girls found some difficulty choosing whether to attend the grammar school or the sixth form college. Emily complained throughout interviews that, 'I liked the grammar school more, but they didn't do the subjects I wanted.' (Emily, second interview, private school) Dora who also wanted to go to the grammar school, was persuaded by the sixth form college to choose a new subject at 'A' level.

The range of 'A' levels they have at the sixth form college is the main reason I'm going there. I decided to do Politics and Government because I'm really interested in that. I avoided the technical college because it's all to do with jobs. (Dora, second interview, private school)

Once attending the sixth form college the issue was raised again, and the girls were asked if they were still happy with their choice of subjects. Dora admitted, 'I didn't end up doing Politics. That was a last minute choice I made in the summer holidays.' (fifth interview)

When first asked about how hard they would be expected to work at their chosen colleges, Dora and Emily, early in the interviewing believed that the grammar or a boarding school would be the best choice in this respect. 'I was thinking of going to Q..... boarding school - I had an interview but my parents decided they couldn't afford it. I would work harder there.' (Dora, fourth interview, private school) She had earlier pointed out that,

I wouldn't be well motivated at the sixth form college. I'd be too easily distracted. I'd be attracted to other things like driving my own car, going out in the evening, meeting new people. I

need to be surrounded by people who are working hard, not enjoying themselves like that, because I wouldn't do any work. (Dora, second interview, private school)

Once they were attending the college both girls were reminded of these statements, although the researcher had not confronted them with their contradictions earlier in the interviewing. Emily admitted,

I would still have liked to go to the grammar school. I would have done better there. They really push you there, I would have got better results. (...) I might get a grade lower by coming here but (...) I like it here now. (Emily, fifth interview, sixth form college)

When the question of the teaching staff at the various colleges was raised, Alec claimed he had gained valuable advice at the open evening from one particular lecturer. Emily however pointed out that when going to open evenings, 'the teachers were helpful everywhere I went.' (Emily, third interview, private school). When asked finally before attending the college, if they had a main reason for choosing the sixth form college, each of the three pupils found different reasons for choosing this college. Alec said that, 'the sixth form college is a friendly college, and its near. They only do 16 - 19 years old, and there are no adults.' (Alec, fourth interview, private school) Dora's reasons were similar, and she admitted that, 'I have some friends who go there, and they told me about things like the social life. Although its quite strict there, they only have 16-19 year olds and that's important.' (Dora, fourth interview, private school) However Emily concluded, although with some resignation that,

the sixth form college is where I'm going to end up, because they do History and they offer the syllabus I want. I can do drama in my spare time too and I can't do that at the grammar school I have loads of interests and I don't want to give them up - I have to do that if I go to the Grammar school. (Emily, fourth interview, private school)

When asked finally, in the fifth interview, if they were disappointed about the college in any way, Emily complained that, 'Yah, I thought they had lots of social events, but they don't really (...) they run a few things but ...,' (Emily,

private school) Dora pointed out that, 'the classes are bigger than they told us - bigger than they were at school (...) there's over twenty, they said it was only fourteen. They told us we had a choice of History syllabus, and then they changed it.' (Dora, fifth interview, private school)

The absence of an ideal choice caused these three students to employ bolstering tactics to persuade themselves that their decision was the right one. The marketing provided by the college assisted them in this, and they were particularly keen to promote the positive aspects of the college after they had accepted a place.

### 7.8.2 'Retakers'

Wayne, Stuart and Mandy were consciously avoiding a particular choice, and working hard to find all the positive characteristics of the remaining alternatives. Their choice did not rely on deciding between vocational and academic education at the outset. They each acknowledged that an alternative college from the one they had chosen, offered a more suitable course for their needs, but their self image was an overriding factor in their choice. These students investigated at least two alternatives very thoroughly.

All three pupils have parents working in manual jobs, who had left school before taking examinations. (Stuart attended the private school, because his mother worked in the kitchens there.) All three pupils gained results below expectations and Stuart and Mandy failed to qualify for the courses they had chosen. All three pupils seriously considered the FE college, and the technical college, and both Wayne, (estate comprehensive), and Stuart (private school) visited the sixth form college as well as the FE and technical colleges. Stuart chose the sixth form college after a good deal of research. Wayne and Mandy chose the FE college.

Wayne's summary is appropriate for all three pupils, when he says, 'We had

a visit from some students and a teacher from the FE college, the sixth form college, and the technical college. (Wayne, November 1992, estate comprehensive) Mandy was enthusiastic about the day which pupils from town and estate comprehensives, had spent at the FE college. 'I spent the day at the FE college - doing secretarial - I can type and do shorthand now.' (Mandy, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

When asked to summarise their views on the local colleges, both Wayne and Stuart believed that the sixth form college has a good reputation. However, Wayne added, 'It's the best place for 'A' levels. I would've liked to go an' do 'A' levels. But I wouldn't want to go because of the people. If you look at a college you can tell what it's like by the people. There's more people like me at the FE college'. Stuart declared that, 'I think the sixth form college has the best reputation. It's more academic and it gets the best exam results.' (Stuart, fourth interview, private school) Stuart intended to study for 'A' levels, not knowing that he would fail to achieve the necessary qualifications. During the second interview he summed up the reputations of the colleges and claimed,

the technical college is for people who are not so academical (sic) that doesn't use the brain too much. Like catering or design or physical courses. The grammar school is a high standard for people who want to achieve higher things - high academic - I'm not academic. The sixth form college is high academic again - so its not suitable for me. (Stuart, second interview, the private school)

Although Stuart was very anxious to discuss the examination results at the various colleges, especially the sixth form college, he did not mention the discipline or ethos at the colleges. Wayne was more concerned than Stuart or Mandy and said that,

compared with the sixth form college, its freer at the FE college. You do what you want. It's better at the FE college. I'm not against the sixth form college though. (Wayne, fourth interview, estate comprehensive)

However, when Wayne had spent a term at the FE college he claimed, 'they treat us like children here. There's too much discipline!' (Wayne, fifth interview, at the FE college) Mandy merely claimed that she would be

treated as an adult, and that this meant she could call the teachers 'by their first names'.

Stuart mentioned the 'good results' several times in interviews and regularly used this to support his choice of the sixth form college. He claimed that,

the results that the sixth form college got for the students is (sic) better than the ones the FE college got. It's better to go where it's higher. I think the sixth form college is better for getting the results in exams. They came top in something, they told us.  
(Stuart, third interview, private school)

Mandy however, claimed that, 'I would do just as well at any college. It's up to me how hard I work really. Don't know anything about the results at the FE college.' (Mandy, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

Mandy, Wayne and Stuart were asked if they knew how large the classes would be at the FE, or sixth form college. Stuart pointed out that, 'the classes at the FE college are about fourteen or sixteen. But, they are about the same at the sixth form college.' (Stuart, fourth interview, private school) However, when he was at the sixth form college, re-taking his GCSEs he claimed that the classes were, 'not too big. I thought the classes might be bigger, but when we got to classrooms, some were smaller even than at school - PE has about twenty, but the others are smaller.' (Stuart, fifth interview, at the sixth form college) (The classes for GCSE re-take varied from under ten, to over twenty students, according to reports by staff at the college.) Mandy and Wayne were used to larger classes, and were unconcerned about the size of classes at college. Once she arrived at the college Mandy could make a better assessment.

There were twenty two in a class, I thought it was going to be bigger, but there's only sixteen now, some left. (Mandy, fifth interview, at the FE college)

Wayne and Mandy were more concerned with the overall size of the college, than with class sizes. They had no figures to work on at all and only estimated that the technical college was larger. Mandy also claimed, 'I chose the FE college because it's smaller than the technical college.' (Mandy, fourth interview, town comprehensive) Mandy made negative



comments about both the sixth form college and the technical college, during interviews, to support her choice of the FE college.

Although Stuart and Wayne were aware of the facilities offered at the FE college, and prepared to make a judgement about the buildings of the two establishments, they both insisted that these factors were not relevant to their decision. Both Wayne and Stuart claimed the buildings and facilities at the FE college were better than the sixth form college, but claimed it was unimportant. When Stuart had been at the sixth form college for a term, the question was raised again, and he admitted that,

Well, yes, it's much nicer at the FE college the surroundings are nicer, its a better building - modern. Some of my friends from school came here for a look round last month, ..... they said, 'well, its pretty shabby,' and that's what I thought. I think it looks OK at the front, but everywhere else is not very nice at all. (Stuart, fifth interview, at the sixth form college)

Although Mandy, and Wayne were living near their schools, and Stuart was travelling some distance, all three claimed that their choice of college was not influenced by travel considerations. Wayne's comment is typical.

I only live across the road from the school. The sixth form college is nearer. But I wouldn't go there. I would go to the one I want anyway. (Wayne, fourth interview, estate comprehensive)

Both Wayne and Stuart were concerned about the kind of people attending the FE college, and the sixth form college, and it became clear from their comments that this was influencing their final decision. Wayne confessed,

From what I've been told, I wouldn't go to the sixth form college. (pause) Well, it's the pupils who are in it. (pause) Well, the people at the FE college are not like sixth form college - there's a different group. Well, they are different. (pause) They wear funny things an' that. It stops me going there. I know people from the FE college, and they're like what I'm like. (third interview) ..... If you say you go to the sixth form college, it's 'cos you're weird. (pause) They dress different. They have long hair. They like the same music, do the same sort of thing. (pause) They might be brainier I s'pose - I don't know. I go

by what they look like mainly. (Wayne, fourth interview, estate comprehensive)

Mandy had prepared herself before going to the FE college, in case she did not fit in with the people there. She had not mentioned this until the last interview when she admitted,

I thought that people would be funny about different people y' know. Say 'look at her' an' things like that - that there'd be some who wouldn't mix. .... My best friend came here though, she's on the same course. (Mandy, fifth interview, at the FE college)

Although Stuart was evasive about whether he was following his friends in choosing the sixth form college, he made comments throughout the interviewing which related to this issue. The question was raised in the final interview held at the sixth form college, when he was reminded that,

*You said you would prefer to go somewhere friendly - did most of your friends come to the sixth form college? They did, but that didn't influence my choice, but I prefer to go where my friends are.*  
(Stuart, fifth interview, the sixth form college)

Stuart, Mandy and Wayne were given information about BTEC, or NVQ courses when they visited the FE college. Both Mandy and Wayne were attracted to vocational courses, rather than 'A' levels. Stuart was equally enthusiastic, in the third interview, when he had just visited the FE college and claimed,

I like the FE college ..... There's lots of subjects there I could do. I could go there. .... I could do BTEC if I don't get the results to do 'A' levels. I like the work they did at the FE college. (Stuart, third interview, private school)

However, he changed his views over the following months, even though the sixth form college did not offer any BTEC or NVQ courses, and by the next term, he said, 'I'm not choosing just the courses, I'm choosing the college I want to go to. The FE college and the sixth form do roughly the same courses.' (Stuart, fourth interview, private school) He was further tackled about this change of view, after he had received results which prevented him from studying 'A' levels, but which would have qualified him to study BTEC

or NVQ at the FE college.

I want to do 'A' level Design. I can't do that at the FE college. *But you're re-taking your GCSEs aren't you?* Yes, but next year I can do 'A' levels. .... I decided myself I would rather do 'A' levels. I have to re-take some of my GCSEs first though. If I pass them, I can do 'A' levels. (Stuart, fifth interview, sixth form college)

Although Wayne and Mandy were aware that they would have to work hard, they believed that it would be the same at all the colleges, and depended on their own motivation. Stuart argued,

They make you work harder on the BTEC course at the FE college. He told me that. Its a one year course. They make you work hard here too, but the man at the FE college said 'you'll be working hard, on the BTEC course.' So it's better for me to do 'A' levels because I get two years to do it. Its easier. (Stuart, fifth interview, at the sixth form college)

Mandy and Wayne believed that teachers were 'the same everywhere' when they were asked about the staff at the colleges. Stuart, who admitted that he had not met any teachers at the sixth form college before he went there, lamented,

they don't help you here as much as I thought they did. They'd always come up and help you at school but here they don't. They don't say anything at all. But it's a college isn't it, you have to work on your own. (Stuart, fifth interview, the sixth form college)

Wayne, Mandy and Stuart relied heavily on the marketing and promotion to ensure that they gained the information needed to reach a decision. They were aware of the social class of students attending the colleges, and were anxious to select a college which fitted with their self image. The information provided by the colleges was used to justify their final decision.

## **7.9 Compliant Decision Makers**

'Compliant' decision makers were very persuadable, and relied entirely on the school for advice. They followed the advice, and selected an option within the range of possibilities provided by the school. They showed little or no initiative in finding out information for themselves, although they showed some preference for either vocational or academic education before they began the search, based on the influence of their families.

### **7.9.1 'Vocationalists'**

Rachel, Nikki and Darren were determined to follow a vocational route, whether or not they gained qualifications for academic courses. They were strongly influenced by family pressures, and were essentially focusing on a job, but aware that they would need to undertake training. They were from working class families, and had endured rather than enjoyed their schooling. They valued vocational qualifications, and were optimistic about their prospects in the job market if they could gain examination qualifications in a specific field. They were quite single minded about pursuing a vocational route, and viewed this as entirely their own choice, without regard for the labour market. These students relied on the school to prompt them into action, and gained their information through careers lessons, but were strongly influenced by their families prior to the search for a post sixteen option.

Rachel and Nikki from the town comprehensive, and Darren attending estate comprehensive, considered the FE college and the technical college the most suitable options. Both Rachel and Nikki chose the technical college, and it is possible, although not certain, that Darren also went there, since he favoured this option throughout interviewing. All three pupils claimed that the technical college has a 'good reputation', but were unable to define the reputation in any way. Both Nikki and Darren relied on claiming that a member of their family had recommended the college. A typical comment is

provided by Darren who asserted that,

The technical college is better than the FE college. The FE college hasn't got a bad reputation, its just not as good. My brother-in-law went to the technical college. I'd feel more proud of going to the technical college because of its reputation. (Darren, fourth interview, estate comprehensive)

Rachel was surrounded at school by friends going to the FE college but she claimed, 'Everyone thinks that the FE college is very good. People think it's better than the technical college. But I prefer the technical college.' (Rachel, fourth interview, town comprehensive) These pupils could not be persuaded to make much comment on the way they would be treated at the various different colleges. To these three, all colleges were the same. Nikki's comment is typical.

It's more adult at the technical college. They tell you off at school but they treat you like an adult at college. Its the same at all the colleges though. (Nikki, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

These pupils were unlikely to claim that 'results' were good at any particular college, and the question of results was raised only because of a questionnaire undertaken during the fourth interview. Rachel said in response to this question, 'Some people from the technical college got jobs. I think that's important. Most people get passes. But it's the same at the FE college as well.' (Rachel, fourth interview, town comprehensive) Nikki also commented that, 'results are the same in all the colleges.' (Nikki, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

The size of colleges was debated regularly, and Rachel said in support of her choice, 'the technical college is bigger and there are more people on the courses, so its more professional.' (Rachel, third interview, town comprehensive) Nikki held a similar view but, typically, denied that size of college had influenced her choice.

The technical college is very big - it's the biggest. I didn't choose it for that reason though. I don't know how many are in a class - it doesn't matter... (Nikki, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

Nikki was quite passionate about the facilities and the buildings of the

college she had chosen, and also took every opportunity to make a negative comment about the sixth form college.

I didn't see anything at the FE college, but at the technical college they have a lot of equipment. It's better there. I didn't decide to go there because of the equipment though. .. I deliberately didn't go the the sixth form college because it's scruffy. And it's like a school. (Nikki, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

All three pupils were living within walking distance of their school, but claimed that travel would not be a problem, although the technical college was some distance from home. (5 miles)

All three of the pupils who chose the technical college were knowledgeable about the course they would be studying, and were able to find some factors which enabled them to make comparisons with the FE college. Rachel provides a good summary.

I didn't apply to the sixth form college because they don't do BTEC. The main reason I prefer the technical college to the FE college is the course. They know more about the course they have more visits and contact with hospitals, nurseries and placements. That's why I prefer it. (Rachel, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

Nikki believed that the sixth form college and the FE college were each offering the same courses. On my last interview with Darren at the school he announced,

I've found out about the technical college. They do a 2 year Electrician Course. (sic) ..... I wanted to find a job and go day release, but the course at the technical college is better. (Darren, fourth interview, estate comprehensive)

Darren, and Nikki, who gained low examination results, were unable to understand fully the questions about how hard they would have to work on the courses they had chosen. However, Rachel commented in connection with the technical college course,

If you're not getting on well, they talk to you about it to help you work harder. Everyone passes though and everyone who passes seems to get a

job of some kind. I can do the course even if I don't get sciences at GCSE. (Rachel, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

Finally the three pupils were asked to summarise their reasons for choosing the technical college, in the fourth interview held in March before their GCSE examinations. Rachel said, 'the main reason for going to the technical college is because they know more about the course, and they do more work placements. (Rachel, fourth interview, town comprehensive) Nikki, who had decided to attend the technical college very early in the interviewing sessions, claimed,

my Mum went to the technical college an' she says its the best. A friend of my mum said it was the best course around here. (Nikki, fourth interview, town comprehensive)

Darren also mentioned work experience as the main reason for his choice and said, 'I'd be more proud of going to the technical college.' (Darren, fourth interview, estate comprehensive)

### **7.9.2 'Academics'**

Susan, Kylie, and Pindi were attending a girls' comprehensive in the city, which did not have a sixth form. Their parents were generally unable to inform them about their options, and the girls gained all their information from the school - but were given only limited alternatives, with an emphasis on the city sixth form college. These girls were all lower middle, or working class, although Pindi was from an Asian family and found difficulty with English, her second language. They were all concerned about travel, and were unprepared to consider colleges outside the city. They made a late decision, and were very ill informed during the early stages of the interviewing. They made their choices in March of the same the year they attended the college.

Three girls, all of whom attended the girls' comprehensive, chose to go to city college - a sixth form college near the school. These girls did not

mention any other colleges during the interviews, although they were asked to give views on the technical college, the FE college and the sixth form college in the second interview. Susan gained ten GCSEs at grade 'A' - the highest ever achieved at this school, and Pindi, who is of Asian origin, passed one GCSE (grade B) in Bengali. Pindi accepted a place at city college to retake her GCSEs. Kylie gained a place at city college, but left after only a few weeks. These girls were given a good deal of information about city college, but very little information about the other colleges. 'Someone came here to tell us about the college. I had an interview at school, and everything.' (Kylie, fourth interview, girls' comprehensive) It was clear from the way Pindi spoke that securing a place at college would be difficult without direct help from the school. When asked about the technical college she said,

they told us about the colleges, but I can't remember..... I find the language difficult ...But people who came in were alright. (pause) I just listen, but I forgot. I don't want to go there ..... I found out about the city college when I went with the school, but I haven't got any leaflets. (Pindi, fourth interview, girls' comprehensive)

When asked about the reputations of the various colleges in the area, by name, all three pupils were unable to answer the questions. They knew virtually nothing about any of the colleges until they visited city college. By the fourth interview Pindi and Kylie were still only able to say 'It's adult' with no further explanation, although Kylie commented that they would not be allowed to smoke.

Neither Kylie, nor Pindi were able to make any comment on the results achieved by colleges, even city college. Susan perceptively remarked however, 'I'd be a bit worried if everyone got low grades. It would mean they were all low ability.' (Susan, third interview, girls' school) Susan was asked whether she thought it would make any difference to her results - depending on which college she chose, and she argued,

Well, I've got the motivation to work, it doesn't matter what results other people at the college get. The results are generally good I think. (at city college) (Susan, third interview, girls' comprehensive)



Susan was asked the same question again at her final interview at city college, and she reflected,

I broke the school record - ten grade 'A' GCSEs. I don't think I'll do as well in my 'A' levels, I don't know why, I'm just not confident. (Susan, fifth interview, at the city college)

Although Kylie and Pindi were asked to comment on the size of classes at colleges, they were unable to answer this question. Before joining city college however Susan believed, 'the classes are small - only about ten in a class. I think small classes will be better. It gets rowdy if there are too many.' (Susan, third interview, girls' comprehensive) Once attending the college she was asked to confirm this and found that classes varied considerably.

I've got one class of nineteen, a class of six and a class of nine. English is the big class. They said it was smaller than at school, and that's right. (Susan, fifth interview, at city college)

Even after visiting the city college the three girls were unable to give any information about facilities or the buildings. They were unconcerned, and unwilling to comment, but city college was the nearest college for these girls. Travelling distance was more important for these working class girls and they all lived within walking distance of their school. Susan confirmed,

I walk to school, it's ten minutes. (first interview)  
There are other colleges, further away, (than city college) some people might think it was worth travelling, but I wouldn't. The FE college, and the sixth form college are too far. (Susan, fourth interview, girls' comprehensive)

Susan was able to comment about friendship and how friendly the college was after she had spent a term there, but was unable to comment in advance. Earlier she had argued, 'It sounds very cruel, but I would go where I want, not with friends. Though some friends are going there too.' (Susan, third interview, girls' comprehensive) She was more reflective once she had spent a term at the city college.

Because there's all different people, you tend to socialise more, and its a distraction. There's all sorts of different people here, like some who work,

and some who just laze around. Not different ages, but a bit of a range. (Susan, fifth interview, at the city college)

Kylie and Pindi were likely to be attending the city college with many of their friends, simply because it is close to the school. Kylie and Pindi confirmed that, 'Everyone is going to the city college from here. There's a mixture of people at the city college anyway - so anyone would fit.' (Kylie, fourth interview, girls' comprehensive) When asked if her friends were at city college in the final interview Pindi admitted that she was still associating mainly with her own friends from school.

When questioned about BTEC, NVQ and 'A' levels, the three girls relied on the careers department and the colleges to inform them. Susan gained her advice from a city college lecturer.

I think 'A' level and BTEC are the same level. It would be possible with the right BTEC level to go to university, but the teacher at the city college said it was better to go with 'A' levels. I'm doing economics because I want to be an accountant. (Susan, third interview, girls' comprehensive)

Kylie and Pindi had both decided to become lawyers, although in both cases their GCSEs were not high enough to gain a place on an 'A' level course. They were however keen to take GCSE Law, offered at the city college. Both pupils were under the impression they could go to 'Law School' once they had left the girls' school, until the careers programme introduced them to city college. When asked how she would select a college, Kylie claimed,

What courses they do, whether I can do my retakes, and if they do Law. I would choose by what Law courses they do. I need to be close - my Mum and the family need me. (Kylie, third interview, girls' comprehensive)

When asked about BTEC, NVQ and 'A' levels, Pindi and Kylie had difficulty replying, for example, Kylie explained,

Is that the work experience thing? Someone came in and told us about it. I could do it if I wanted. I would rather do retakes. I think I do retakes instead of BTEC - I'm not sure. I didn't hear some of the stuff because they were talking in front of me. (Kylie, second interview, girls')

school)

The girls were asked if they expected to work hard at college, and Susan had strong views on this subject, whilst the other girls held no views. Susan complained that

I know someone who went to the city college. She said its too laid back there. I think that's awful really because you should go there to learn. She said some people go there because they don't want a job, and they are lazy. *Will that affect you do you think?* Not really, because I know that I will work hard. (Susan, third interview, girls' comprehensive)

When she attended the college herself, she was asked in the interview about her comments, and given the chance to explain the attitude to work at the college,

*What's the best thing about the city college?* Having lessons off. *Do you use the lessons to work?* No, I go home. *What do you do at home?* I doss about. ....Its up to you whether you work really, its on your own back if you don't - they don't make you work here. Some people come 'ere because there aren't any jobs. They just laze around because they can't be bothered to do anything. I get five hours for each subject but we are supposed to do five yours homework - but I don't. (Susan, fifth interview, city college)

When asked about the teaching staff at the colleges, all pupils who attended colleges, including the three girls, were unwilling to believe that teachers made much difference to their performance, though Susan's comment is typical.

The teachers can only do so much anyway really. I do most. Well, if you get the work done, and handed in that's it really. If you carry on, as normal and be attentive in the lesson they can't do any more can they? (Susan, fifth interview, city college)

These girls were all influenced in their choice of college by travel difficulties. Susan argued, 'I had to come here because of the travelling. So I would still choose the city college.' (Susan, fifth interview, girls' comprehensive) Both

Kylie and Pindi claimed, 'It's near, and it does the course I want.' (Pindi, girls' comprehensive) These girls confirmed that the rumours they had heard about the college in advance of their attendance, were true, but were resigned to their choice, in the absence of alternatives, and made comparisons with school rather than other colleges.

### 7.10 Summary

The study of decision making among sixteen year olds revealed two distinct areas for further consideration. Firstly, the reasons which pupils gave for their choice, and the factors and issues which pupils claimed finally influenced their selection of a post sixteen college. Secondly the underlying meaning of the statements made by pupils, which will contribute towards a greater understanding of the phenomenon, and to our understanding of 'choice' between colleges. The underlying implications of inferred meanings and covert intentions, teased from interview statements, and the way in which this might contribute to a deeper understanding of the marketing of colleges, is discussed in chapter 8.

The issues and factors which were mentioned by pupils, as having an influence on the decision making process, (not in any rank order) were,

- the 'reputation' of the college,
- the amount of discipline and of freedom,
- the work ethic,
- examination results,
- the size of classes,
- buildings and facilities,
- travel considerations,
- peer group pressure,
- courses, academic, versus vocational,
- staff and teachers,
- and social class perceptions.

Three broad styles of decision making emerged during the interviewing, based on the students' approach to information gathering. Students exhibited either a self reliant approach, further defined as independent,

resolute, or complacent, depending on their ability to collect and assimilate the information; a determined approach, characterised by a maximising strategy, whereby students attempted to find the best possible combination of factors before making a choice; and a compliant approach, characterised by a dependence on others, especially schools for information.

Chapter 8 is concerned with analysis of the findings, and discusses the issues and factors mentioned by respondents in interviews. The implications of the findings are presented as the basis for a model of decision making, in connection with the marketing of post sixteen colleges (Chapter 9)

# Chapter 8

## CHAPTER 8

### ANALYSIS OF DEMAND SIDE ISSUES - DECISION MAKERS IN THE POST SIXTEEN MARKET PLACE

#### 8.1 Introduction

The market system presupposes that customers will make an informed choice about the alternatives available. This chapter examines issues related to the characteristics of analytical principles, and the issues mentioned by sixteen year olds as having an influence on the decision making process, through a discussion of the data provided in interviews with the research participants.

'Analysis of meanings often centres on the question of how members define for themselves a given problematic topic.' (Lofland and Lofland, (1984) : 73)  
The analysis of interview data is a 'process of making sense, of finding and making a structure in the data, and giving this meaning and significance for ourselves, and for any relevant audiences.' (Jones, (1987) : 263)

Powney and Watts believe that,

an analysis of interviews does not merely recognise facts and phenomena present in the responses of the interviewee. Rather on the basis that we perceive things from a point of view, our intentions inform our attention. That is analysis is a reconstructive and not a reproductive process. (Powney & Watts, (1987) : 162)

In finding pathways through the transcripts, the researcher was aware that some 'interpretation' of the interviewees' intended meanings, at the time of the interview, would need to be conveyed.

The problem is that what interviewees say they believe, prefer or do, may not correspond with 'actuality'. This is not to say there is necessary deliberate deception of any interviewer.' (Powney & Watts, (1987) : 190)

The process of creating categories, and finding patterns, emerged as the data was recorded, and restructured. Tesch confirms that, 'categories for sorting segments are tentative and preliminary in the beginning; they remain flexible.' (Tesch, (1992) : 96) (see appendix y) Additionally in the experience of the researcher, 'instead of defining and categorising the researcher is involved in a 'search for a pattern and meaning' (Moustakas (1981) : 209) Tesch, (1990 : 95) summarises the ten fundamental characteristics of analytical principles and procedures, which are provided in figure 8.1 below. In a condensed version here, are the ten common characteristics that hold true for analysis, from ethnomethodology to phenomenology.

**Figure 8.1**

**Characteristics of Analytical Principles**

- 1 Analysis is not the last phase of the research process; it is concurrent with data collection or cyclic. Both analysis and data collection inform each other.
- 2 The analysis process is systematic, but not rigid. The analysis ends when new data no longer generate new insights.
- 3 Attending to data includes a reflective activity that results in a set of analytical notes that guide the process.
- 4 Data are 'segmented' ie., divided into relevant meaning 'units' yet the connection to the whole is maintained. The analysis always begins with reading all data so as to provide context for the smaller pieces.
- 5 The data segments are categories according to an organisational system that is predominantly derived from the data themselves.
- 6 The main intellectual tool is comparison. The goal is to discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories and to discover patterns.
- 7 Categories for sorting segments are tentative and preliminary in the beginning; they remain flexible.
- 8 Manipulating qualitative data during analysis is an eclectic activity; there is no one right way.
- 9 The procedures are neither 'scientific' nor



'mechanistic'; qualitative analysis is 'intellectual craftsmanship'. (Miller, 1959)

10 The result of the analysis is some type of higher level synthesis.  
(Tesch, 1990; 95-97, Ely et al, (1991) : 178)

The present researcher categorised all qualitative data under headings, which emerged during the research, and which gradually changed, and were redefined during the process of analysis. There are three main headings, firstly a comparison of research findings against decision making models, reasons for choice provided by respondents, and the underlying meanings teased out from statements made by respondents, ie; stated reasons for choice, and unstated reasons.

## **8.2 Comparison of Research Findings against the Vigilant Decision Making Model**

An analysis of decision making processes suggests that when implementing a market system based on choice, caution should be applied before assuming that individual decisions will be informed, thoroughly investigated decisions in terms of the 'vigilant decision-making' model. The interview data were systematically compared with each stage of the Janis and Mann, (1977) model of vigilant decision making. (see chapter 3) Is there any evidence that students undertake the stages of a 'rational' decision making process - described by Hindess, who said that decision makers, 'exhibit a well behaved preference structure.'? (Hindess, (1988): 9) All students, were able to make limited judgements about their personal preferences, although there is no support for the claim that preferences are reviewed in a logical fashion, to reach a rational choice at the end of the process.

Twelve students in the study were over-optimistic about their chances of gaining qualifications, and this influenced the information search when making choices about further education at sixteen plus. Stuart, Mandy and Wayne investigated options which they were not qualified to pursue. Stuart did not qualify for the course he was applying for, and had been warned that

he was unlikely to achieve the qualifications needed. Consequently, the information search he carried out did not match with his qualifications - but it was a rigorous search. There is no reason to argue that his choice of college was 'unwise' or a 'poor' choice, but it was not overtly logical or 'rational'. Students in the decision making group described as 'maximising' undertook very thorough searches for information partly because they found it difficult to find an option which matched their hopes and aspirations - although they had been unable to pinpoint precisely what these requirements were at the outset. The researcher is also aware that, 'one basic and well known hazard in interviewing is the discrepancy which can often appear between what people say and what people actually do and think.' (Powney & Watts, (1987) : 190)

Interview data will be discussed in connection with the following elements; alternative courses of action, (8.2.1), assimilation of new information, (8.2.2), and assessment of risk, (8.2.3).

### **8.2.1 Alternative Courses of Action**

The first element described by Janis and Mann, in the vigilant decision making model is that the decision maker, 'thoroughly canvasses a wide range of alternative courses of action' (Janis and Mann 1977 p11) Four interviewees considered a 'wide range of alternatives' including further education and apprenticeship or job opportunities. Wayne at estate comprehensive, visited three colleges in the local area, and also weighed up the possibility of entering the army if his results were not as he hoped. Students who investigated a wider range of options were aware that their preferred option might not be open to them, either because of qualifications, or a shortage of places. It was uncertainty which encouraged them to canvas a wide range of options. For students who are actively choosing between options, where there is competition for places based on examination results, or simply shortage of places, the security of being given a second choice programme to fall back on helps students to decide in favour of selecting a particular college.

The majority of students did not undertake a wide search for alternatives, and typically students considered two possible options, and weighed up the evidence between two alternatives, often with a clear preference for one option early in the process. Seventeen students altogether undertook some research on their own and with teachers, to find out what the options were - seven out of twenty five students investigated one post sixteen option, and ten investigated more than one option. Nine of the twenty five students in the case study investigated several options, - that is they made some attempt to assess the relative merits of all three colleges in the locality, and reached conclusions on the basis of weighing up their findings. Seven students in the study, all embarking on an 'A' level course, did not secure an alternative course of action, and claimed that it would not be necessary. These students all qualified for the courses they had chosen. Four students (all working class girls) who remained 'complacent' throughout interviews, gained GCSEs below grade 'C', and did not intend to continue with their education. Although they were aware that courses were available, they were largely preoccupied with domestic matters, and were regular truants.

Three of the most academically successful students interviewed remained at the grammar school in the sixth form, and found no reason to seek alternatives. The decision to remain in the sixth form at the school rather than seek alternatives supports the claim that some students will 'take the line of least resistance', unless challenged by events. Two boys at the grammar school investigated alternatives on the basis that they were dissatisfied with their present situation, but they needed parental support to make the change.

The number of options students investigated was partly influenced by the school they had attended. The grammar school, where there is a sixth form, did not offer the boys any options - they found out about one option (the sixth form college) themselves through friends, and both leavers in the study went to the sixth form college, claiming that other boys had chosen this option in the past. The mixed eleven to sixteen independent school offered information on many options, including boarding school sixth forms, and

tertiary and sixth form colleges, from a wide geographical area. Providing an abundance of information about a wide range of options however, did not cause the four private school pupils to study 'A' levels at a different college, from the two pupils who were deprived of information by their school. All six of these students chose to attend the sixth form college. All eleven to sixteen schools provided some introduction to local colleges and left the students to decide which ones to visit. The ten students who investigated more than one option, continued to gather their own information and proved to be better informed about the courses they were interested in, and open minded about their choice until a much later stage.

There is a good deal of support for the view that students, 'economise on the collection of information and evaluation of alternatives by searching only for a course of action that achieves a satisfactory result.' (Hindess 1988 : 69) All students found out more information about the college they had chosen to attend, although when genuinely choosing between two options, students collected almost the same amount of information about both alternatives. They stopped finding out information as soon as they had reached a decision.

### **8.2.2 Assimilation of New Information**

Four students provide examples of a sixteen year old who 'intensively searches for new information relevant to further evaluation of the alternatives'. Colin for example, undertook more determined research to find out about apprenticeships when he discovered his only choice was the technical college, or unemployment. I believe he was further encouraged to look for alternatives just prior to our meetings, and so he was affected to some degree by the research itself, in his decision making process. Absence of a satisfactory choice, caused students to search more thoroughly and widely for an acceptable course of action. The majority of interviewees however, did not reach this point in the decision making process. They found an adequate solution, through a process of 'satisficing' earlier in the decision making procedure. There is therefore, support for the claim, that,

'they economise(d) on the collection of information and evaluation of alternatives by searching only for a course of action that achieve(d) a satisfactory result.' Simon (1972) :161)

There were very few examples of a student who

correctly assimilates and takes account of any new information or expert judgement to which he is exposed..... (Janis and Mann 1977 p11)

Although initially students knew which subjects they were looking for, such as History, or English Literature - when presented with other choices, such as Politics or Law, which they had been unaware of, Gareth and Emily were attracted to the new option - and later, rejected an alternative college, claiming that the new subject was not available. (In one case, the pupil did not eventually study the course which had become an important deciding factor.) Two pupils at the private school had originally intended to go to the sixth form of the boys grammar school. They were both intending to follow this option as a first choice. Emily and Dora claimed, that they finally decided to choose the sixth form college because of the wide subject choice available - even though they had not considered this factor when they originally set out to choose a sixth form option. New and unexpected factors often help decision makers to reach a final choice, and the reason in this case, was provided by the college in their marketing information.

### **8.2.3 Assessment of Risk**

A vigilant decision maker, 'carefully weighs whatever he knows about the costs and risks of negative consequences, as well as positive consequences that could flow from each alternative.' Wayne and Peter provide evidence of this phenomenon, and this occurred in situations where the student could not decide easily between two alternatives, or when a student believed one choice was more logical, but was expected by others to choose a different option. Wayne seemed to think he might be expected to choose the sixth form college, and felt he needed to find reasons to explain his rejection of this option. He acknowledged the good reputation of the sixth form college,

but claimed that he would be given more freedom and independence at the FE college. He admitted to the researcher, that although he would like to go to the sixth form college, he did not like the people there.

Finally the decision maker,

makes detailed provisions for ..... contingency plans that might be required if various known risks were to materialise.

Seven of the students had made plans for an alternative course of action, should their results not match their expectations and in five cases, the alternative was a different course at the same college. Stuart when asked whether he had any other plans, in case his results were not good enough, said, that he could embark on another course at the same college if his results did not qualify him for an 'A' level course. Students were given extra security because they could still go to the same college even though their results were lower. The view that, 'if the decision is reversible, then the decision maker might only undertake a superficial search for information.' is partly supported. Five pupils at the bottom end of the order of merit, were aware of the competitive situation but unable and unwilling, to find an alternative to their first choice. They did review the alternatives when pressed, but reinforced their earlier views. The 'complacent' did not, when last interviewed, acknowledge the need for any contingency plans against losing the competition for a job. They had not undertaken a search amongst post-sixteen options at any stage, and were very defensive about their choice. They insisted that further education would not help them to get a job in their chosen field, and quoted adults other than teachers in support of this decision.

The following sections, 8.3 and 8.4 discuss stated reasons for choice, and unstated reasons for choice respectively, and concentrate firstly, (8.3) on the reasons pupils gave for their choice of college, and secondly (8.4) the underlying motives pupils revealed when making choices about post-sixteen pathways.

### **8.3 Stated Reasons for Choosing a Post Sixteen College**

The reasons sixteen year olds gave for choosing the institution they had selected, when asked directly, were not the same as the reasons which came to light, by analysing their motives and disclosures over a series of interviews. This section will discuss overt reasons provided by students in interviews, for their choice of college. Interviewees preferred to give a straightforward reason for a choice, even if it was not a full explanation. The principal stated reasons for choosing a college were, the kind of course offered - whether it was vocational, or academic; the results achieved by students at the colleges; the ethos and working atmosphere; travel considerations; staff and teachers - and these factors contributed to a colleges' overall reputation. Students divided themselves broadly into two groups, those who intended to pursue academic education, and those who intended to follow a vocational route or to find a job. These issues will be discussed in the next sub-section.

#### **8.3.1 Academic Versus Vocational Pathways**

There is considerable support for the findings of Taylor, especially amongst students interested in vocational courses, or making a straight choice between a vocational and academic course. She argued that, 'for those staying on in education the specific course chosen was the major determining factor;' (Taylor M. 1992 : 327) Ten students considered three colleges in the area, but quickly discarded one of them by using a single criterion to eliminate one option very early on in the decision making process. Ten out of twelve interviewees - of the top twelve in the GCSE 'league table', had decided they would only consider an 'A' level course, and were unprepared to consider any other option, at any stage. Therefore, when choosing they rejected a college which did not offer 'A' levels - such as the technical college, without gaining further information. Advanced level courses, ('A' level) and academic courses, were viewed by some students as superior, because of the higher qualifications needed to study for 'A' level. Respondents who had decided to take an 'A' level course, on the

whole knew more about this route from the start of the process, and did not find out about other courses. (Ten respondents, out of the top twelve students in the order of merit, were aiming for university) **The belief that 'A' levels is the only route to university was common knowledge amongst sixteen year olds.**

Although more able students followed academic routes and those with fewer qualifications followed vocational routes, this was not consistent, and three students provide evidence to deny this rule. Two students who attended town comprehensive followed vocational routes, having gained seven GCSE passes above grade 'C'. Students in the private sector expressed hostility towards vocational courses, and they were reluctant to pursue this route, and favoured academic education, regardless of ability, and GCSE results. Interviewees divided themselves into groups, according to social class with 11 students in social classes 3-5 (upper middle to lower middle class) choosing academic courses, 11 students in social classes 1-2 choosing vocational training or employment. Three students in social classes 1-2 chose academic routes, but there were no students in social classes 3-5 choosing vocational routes. Respondents held clear views about the choice between vocational and academic courses, and in agreement with Foskett and Hesketh (1995 : 7) hopes of 'parity of esteem' between these two pathways still seems to be out of reach.

Vocationally biased students always checked whether the training course they wanted was available first. If this subject was not listed in the brochure, they did not give any attention to further information about this college, even during careers sessions. Those who decided to be, for example a motor mechanic, would not even listen to information about any college, or course, which did not involve motor mechanics. They claimed they did not listen when information was being given to them about other options. Sixteen year olds who chose not to attend college had not been persuaded by anyone that attending college would be the best route to finding a job. They had made up their minds about one particular kind of job, and believed that gaining experience was more important than studying. The most important influence on this decision had been an adult other than a teacher, and the



views were not fundamentally changed by advice offered by teachers. A member of the family, or in some cases a worker in the field concerned, had told the pupil that a college education was not worth considering. The marketing of courses in the vocational sector must promote the value of vocational education to the people who work alongside students in their work experience placements. Students who had worked in unskilled or semiskilled work during work experience quoted the workers from this field and claimed that further education was worthless. These individuals did not acknowledge the benefit of further education in their own development, and conveyed this to young people, who seemed to value this advice more than they valued advice from teachers. **Sixteen year olds interested in seeking a job were prepared to take a college course only if an employer insisted it was worthwhile.**

Complacent students were a difficult market segment to penetrate, since they were largely unwilling learners, preoccupied with domestic problems, and were influenced by adults other than teachers. 'Compliant' students relied on colleges and schools almost totally to help them gain enough information to make a choice about job training, and further education. These students were willing be guided by lecturers at the colleges, and by their own teachers at school, but their willingness to pursue some avenues was still influenced by family and culture attitudes. In the absence of good advice, provided by the marketing and promotion activities of colleges, such students relied entirely on the (often outdated) advice of members of their family.

The significance of examination results, and league tables in choosing between colleges in the post sixteen market place will be discussed in the next section.

### **8.3.2 Results and League Tables**

**Students chose the college which claimed to have gained the highest results, rather than the college which had achieved the**

**highest results.** Students who claimed they were selecting a college on the basis of the best examination results, did not choose the college with the highest results. Students compromised on the issue of 'results' and did not maximise. Although students attending the sixth form college claimed that they had chosen it because of the examination results, five students had knowingly rejected an option which achieved better 'A' level results even though this option was open to them.

Interviewees only discussed the significance of the results when the colleges raised this issue in their promotional activities. Students who were most concerned about 'results' were students from the grammar school, where the results were known to be better than the colleges. These students considered the pass rate at the sixth form college to be 'very high', even though, the results at the grammar school were 8% higher, in the year being quoted. The message that the sixth form college has excellent pass rates was prominent in their marketing, and this phrase was quoted regularly by students, who presumed that the results must be the best in the area. The highest pass rate that year was achieved by city college, but this was not conveyed in the marketing. The FE and city colleges however, had opted not to enter a fierce competition to promote the pass rates, in their promotional information. Students who did not come in contact with the sixth form college did not mention results. They simply said they were 'very good', and claimed that results were 'the same everywhere' although they had no information about results at any college. Students attending the grammar school said they believed that they would achieve the same results wherever they studied for 'A' levels. No-one knew anything about the results, at the FE college, the city college or the Technical college.

Students at the grammar school were concerned about hard work, and the ethos of the college, which is summarised in the next section.

### **8.3.3 Ethos and Hard Work**

**Colleges and schools, in particular the grammar school, and the**

**FE college which claimed to make students work hard were disfavoured.** The evidence of this study supports the view that some students choose relatively undemanding options. Describing a college as 'hard working' did not encourage students to join the course, even when they acknowledged a need for strong guidance. Alec, Emily and Dora finally made a choice based on the range of subjects, the possibility of continuing with extra curricular activities, and because this college would be more enjoyable and sociable. Emily and Dora were seeking a 'strict ethos', and in the first two interviews had rejected the idea of too much 'freedom', but had been persuaded by the sixth form college's marketing, when interviewed a third time, to take this more liberal option. Students were only able to make comparisons with their experience at school (which differed largely because they were younger at that time), and were unable to make comparisons between institutions. Emily and Dora found a choice which would have fulfilled their stated requirements, but rejected it, and were persuaded that they needed to learn to cope with greater independence and freedom. After visiting the sixth form college, they were persuaded to favour this option, which they had previously claimed would furnish too many distractions, and where they claimed, they would lack the self discipline to work.

All students at the grammar school claimed that students do not have to work as hard at the sixth form college - including Gareth and Sebastian who chose to go there. Gareth, who claimed that he would not have to work as hard at the sixth form college, complained when he discovered he would have to work hard. At the grammar school the sixth form is promoted to parents, and the idea of making students work hard is an important issue. All students claimed that they worked hard and were unwilling to acknowledge that anything other than their own determination had an effect on their capacity to work hard. Typically students claimed, 'its up to you' how hard you work. (It was difficult for the interviewer to estimate which students worked hard, advice given by teachers in the school was relied upon). The private school pupils decided that once they went to college they should be able to work hard without teachers pushing them, and used this argument to support a decision about their choice of college.

The city, FE and sixth form colleges all described a pastoral care and tutorial system in the prospectus. Thomas and Dennison claimed that,

staff at ..... schools seemed aware that perceptions about pastoral care, (although not called this) was a major consideration for parents, and stressed this in school publicity. (Thomas and Dennison : 245)

However, when asked about the tutorial system, and meetings with personal tutors, to monitor progress, all respondents claimed that this would be the 'same at all the colleges'. They did not perceive the difference between the colleges, even though a 'stricter system' operates at the sixth form college, compared with the FE college. The details which would enable pupil to determine the stronger tutorial support offered at the sixth form college, were not fully ascertained, although the college was generally described as 'stricter'. When asked for comments on attending city college Susan claimed that 'the best thing about it is free lessons', and that many other students are lazy. The two girls attending this college were unable to expand on any issues relating to what the college was like, regardless of their background and academic ability - one pupil is a high achiever and one low ability. These girls found it equally difficult to express any opinions about the college before they enrolled. City college had not relied on marketing slogans. None was quoted either before or after the students attended the college, except the 'grapevine message' that students at this college were lazy.

Students were all questioned about the facilities at each of the colleges, and asked for their views. The responses to questions about college buildings and facilities are summarised in the next section.

#### **8.3.4 College Buildings and Facilities**

**Poorly maintained buildings do not necessarily condemn a school to market failure.** The FE college has purpose built, modern buildings and facilities, for their combined programmes, and yet this was mentioned as important by only one student in the present study. (The FE

college had not capitalised on this strength in the marketing literature.) Stuart pointed out that the buildings and surroundings, subject rooms, equipment staff, and courses were more suited to him and 'nicer', at the FE college but he went to the sixth form college because he said these things 'don't matter'. The buildings of the sixth form college were described as 'grim' or 'shabby' by five students. However, respondents claimed this was not a problem - even a pupil who had decided not to go to this college said that the state of the buildings did not make a difference, and did not capitalise on this by exaggerating how grim the buildings were, to bolster his decision to go elsewhere. (This pupil was already attending a school which could be described in a similar way.)

There was very little support for the claims of West and Varlaam, and Thomas and Dennison, that, '48 per cent mentioned that the school had many facilities.' (West and Varlaam 1991 : 206) Or that, 'more than half of the children mentioned the attractions of 'unique' or specialist features like a swimming pool or computers.' (Thomas and Dennison : 245) Vocationally biased students were more concerned about facilities because of the nature of the course, but, Nikki, hastily added that she was not influenced by the facilities at the college, and that it had not affected her decision. Peter and Colin, who mentioned facilities chose not to go to college.

The problem of travelling to colleges was an important factor for city girls' school pupils. The distance of colleges from home, as an important factor in choice of college will be discussed in the next section.

### **8.3.5 Travel Considerations**

**All five respondents who said that they were not prepared to travel, were working class girls, attending the girls' school in the city.** Interviewees living in the town were prepared to travel into the city, to attend the technical college, but not the (alternative sixth form) city college. All Interviewees who chose the sixth form college had already demonstrated that they were prepared to travel, since they were travelling some distance to

their eleven to sixteen school. There is no support for the possibility that students choosing between the FE college, the sixth form college, and the technical college decided to go to their chosen college because it was the nearest. Where three colleges offering different courses were located within a few miles of one another, students made their decision based on criteria other than 'nearness to their home'. Although the majority of students attending the state sector schools lived close to the school, the nearness of the college was not important for the majority of students, when choosing a post sixteen college. Twenty out of twenty five students, claimed that they would be prepared to choose the best college whether or not they had to travel.

Students in maintained sector schools were all sent brochures by direct mail from all the colleges. The influence of brochures and prospectuses on students' choices will be summarised in the next section.

### **8.3.6 Brochures, Prospectuses and Open Evenings**

There is support for the view that, 'the main function of the brochure appeared to be reinforcing decisions made already.' (Thomas and Dennison : 247) Very few students were able to demonstrate that they had read a college brochure, even though it was sent to all state school sixteen year olds by direct mail. The main use of the brochure seemed to be for students to check whether a particular course was listed. Providing people with information did not cause them to see that institution in a favourable light. Students who were encouraged to find out about options they viewed unfavourably, continued to support this view by describing only the disadvantages of choosing the option. Brochures and booklets provided by visiting speakers and careers advisers helped in particular, 'compliant' students, who had not been able to collect much information on their own initiative.

West and Varlaam found that, 'visits to schools had been made by just under two thirds.' (West and Varlaam 1991 : 205) In this study all students who

intended going to college visited at least one college, and all students had visited the college they selected. 'Complacent' students had not visited any colleges to gain information, and found excuses claiming they had forgotten the dates of the open evenings. They admitted they had not listened to information. Thomas and Dennison's advice is therefore valuable. They say,

The actual visits appeared to affect choice in three ways; they helped confirm or reinforce a choice already made, they could influence pupils and parents who remained undecided and (importantly) they assisted in dispelling myths carried by the neighbourhood grapevine. (Thomas and Dennison : 247)

Support was found for the claim by Taylor, that 'in general there was a strong association between a pupil's level of knowledge of a post 16 option, and their attitude towards it.' (Taylor M. 1992 : 320)

Students frequently described their chosen college as having a good reputation, when asked to provide reasons for their choice. The concept of reputation will be discussed in the next section.

### **8.3.7 The Concept of 'Reputation'**

Students choosing the sixth form college, the FE college and the technical college in the present study, described their chosen college as having a 'good reputation'. This supports the findings of West and Varlaam, (in a study of compulsory schooling), who claim that

the school's good reputation was given as the most important reason for choosing the school.....  
(West and Varlaam 1991 : 207)

A clearly perceived difference between colleges' relative strengths, helps reputation by clarifying the position of strength an organisation prides itself upon. Alec claimed, 'I think most colleges have their own things they're good at.' The technical college specialised in vocational courses, and this was recognised easily by students, who claimed that it was 'the best college

for job training'. When asked to expand on the claim that a college had a good 'reputation' students relied on information they had heard on the 'grapevine', whether or not it was provided by the promotional information, by claiming that a college was very large, or very friendly.

All the grammar school pupils acknowledged that the grammar school had a better reputation than the sixth form college, mentioning results, and academic selection to gain places. Two boys from the grammar school, and two girls from the private school, opted to attend the sixth form college, in preference to the grammar school, even though they believed the reputation of the grammar school was better than the sixth form college. Students who chose the sixth form college in preference, were therefore unable to claim that the college had a better reputation. They did not attempt to do this however, but they still said that the college had a 'very good' reputation. Emily attempted to distinguish between her two alternatives and claimed, 'The grammar school has got the best reputation for academic subjects, but the sixth form college has got the best reputation for social life.'

The grammar school boys had been influenced by their parents to stay at the school in the sixth form. The influence of parents on the final choices made by sixteen year olds is summarised in the following section.

### 8.3.8 Parental Influence

**Sixteen year olds began with a preconceived idea about the kind of course they were prepared to consider.** Parental and peer group pressures were more important than the influence of teachers, in the **preliminary stage of decision making**. Sixteen year olds surrounded at school by friends who are all going to college, are more likely to choose to go to college, as long as their parents believe that a college education is worthwhile. Attitudes to further education are formed before pupils are fourteen, supported and encouraged by parental and family attitudes to education. Compliant pupils, (whose parents had not attended further education institutions), were unable to give an opinion about any colleges, until they were provided with information by the school, or the college.



Sixteen year olds who were determined to find a job in a particular field, were not persuaded otherwise, and those choosing to pursue 'A' levels were determined to follow an academic route, and would not have been persuaded to follow a vocational route. Those most likely to change their views were, 'maximising' and 'compliant' decision makers, who each relied on; the information they gathered; advice from teachers at school; and college marketing, to make their final choice. They made their final decision later than 'independent' decision makers, and were more likely to quote the views of professionals, rather than their parents.

All five sixteen year olds who were under pressure from parents to attend a particular college, were 'self reliant' upper middle or middle class boys, who gained nine or more GCSEs, and had parents who had been to college or university. At the age of sixteen it is clear that parents are unlikely to pressure a child into making a decision they are unhappy with. The concept of the 'composite consumer' is defined by Foskett and Hesketh, (1995 :6) and describes the combined decision making of parent and student. 'The balance between the two partners will clearly vary from case to case.' The parent dominated in the partnership between middle class parents and their sons, and was less dominant in the case of daughters and lower middle class families. The working class boys tended to be dominant in the relationship, but it was clear they had acquired in their earlier life, the values and aspirations of their parents. The findings of this study support the concept of 'framed fields of reference' defined by Foskett and Hesketh, (1995, : 6) which suggests that 'the pupil's decision may not coincide with the parent's perception of the optimal post 16 trajectory, but will rarely be outside the parents' perception of an acceptable post 16 pathway.'

Young people are embedded in a broad 'cultural context, where culture is a common base of knowledge, values and norms for action, socially constructed through history and continually adapting.' ( Hodkinson and Sparkes, (1995) : 195). Bourdieu, (1984) suggests that we derive our personal identity from this social background as what he calls, 'habitus'. He coins the concept of '**frame of reference**' - which occupies the space between individual identity and class derived cultural values' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, (1995) :195) **Sixteen year olds use a 'frame of reference' which is a set of class biased cultural values, to make**

**choices which fit with their emerging identity.** Parents acknowledge that sixteen year olds may choose for themselves, however by this time they have been immersed in their parents' set of values, and have developed strong views about the appropriate route to adulthood. The attitudes individuals have acquired have been formed over a very long period, and are based on the role models available to them within the family, and the attitudes expressed by parents to further and higher education, throughout their childhood. **The marketing of post sixteen education, and its value to sixteen year olds, must be conveyed to the parents of children of all ages, not just to parents of fifteen and sixteen year olds.**

Compliant decision makers relied on teachers and colleges to make their final decision. The influence of teachers on the decisions of sixteen year olds is reviewed in the following section.

### **8.3.9 The Influence of Teachers**

Findings described by Hunter (1991) were not supported in the post sixteen sector. Hunter claimed that,

high quality teaching was given by the highest proportion of parents as the most important factor in a good school. (Kent Education Authority) (Hunter J. :32) (see also West and Varlaam (1991) : 22

In the second stage of decision making, the **refined search stage**, teachers when talking to a pupil on a one to one basis in a college, had a very positive contribution to make towards persuading an individual to attend that particular college. Susan explained that a lecturer at the city college had influenced her considerably by providing information about courses, 'A' level subjects and the requirements for university. She had gained all the literature from the school, and made a visit to the college under a scheme organised by the school. Providing answers to questions and giving information about the college to individual potential students is a very important part of the marketing process. All the colleges in the area had gained some benefit from this situation.

**The majority of sixteen year olds claimed that choice of a post sixteen option should be made on their own, and were reluctant to acknowledge that teachers had influenced their decision.**

Teachers and careers staff had provided information and arranged contacts and visits, but sixteen year olds insisted they had made all their own decisions. Respondents, claimed that they followed up courses and colleges without gaining advice, or accepting it when offered, although the researcher knew that teachers had advised them about appropriate courses, and guided their search for information. Stuart claimed that, 'I choose everything for myself. There is no pressure from anyone. My mum gets information for me. I sometimes talk to the art teacher about it, but I decide what I am going to do. (Stuart, the private school) Susan, claimed when she was asked directly, that she had made all her own decisions, and no-one had influenced her - even her parents. The greatest potential for encouraging positive views about post sixteen colleges, or helping students to reach a final decision - when they were predisposed to favour further education of some kind, was provided by lecturers at the colleges, and by careers staff in schools - however students rarely acknowledged this.

**During the second stage of decision making, the refined search, marketing needs to assist students to evaluate their own capabilities and help them aspire to an appropriate goal.**

In the preliminary stage, and later in the refined stage, students revealed a number of 'underlying reasons' for making choices about colleges, in addition to the factors provided by colleges in their marketing. These 'unstated' reasons will be explored in the next section.

#### **8.4 Unstated Reasons for Choosing a Post Sixteen College**

This section will discuss unstated reasons for choice and related issues, including self image, peer group pressure and group identity, self deception, reinforcement and exaggeration. Group identity was very important for all students, and interviewees selected a college which matched their self image, socially and academically. Students gained security from the choices of others and implied that ability was linked with social class. However, social class perceptions, and the perceived ability of others, were

not offered as a reason for choosing a college, except by Toby. The underlying factors which influenced the views sixteen year olds held about colleges were connected with self esteem, social class perceptions, and the perceived ability of students attending the colleges.

For example, Wayne claimed that he had chosen the FE college because it was friendlier and gave him more freedom than the sixth form college. However, under greater pressure to expand on this he admitted that he simply could not identify with the people already attending the sixth form college, implying that it did not fit with his self image. (Similar reasons based on 'image' were provided by grammar school boys for rejecting the city college.) Explanations based on social class, or on academic elitism, were rarely offered as justification, and students were guarded in their comments, although they revealed underlying prejudices in more probing interviews. Wayne later claimed that a college had been accepted or rejected for other reasons - reasons provided by the college's marketing. Firstly, the importance of self image and self esteem, are considered in the following sub-section.

#### **8.4.1 Self Image and Self Esteem**

**The perceived 'image' of a college is largely determined by the social class of students already attending the college, and is the most important factor in choice.** However, students typically offered other explanations, provided in the college marketing, to make declarations, and to disguise this more important influence on choice. The students who went to the technical college were aware of the 'adult image' which surrounds this college compared with the 'school image' attached to the sixth form college, and to a lesser extent, the FE college. All students who attended the sixth form college claimed that it was an advantage to be segregated entirely from adults. They also however, were less likely to claim that they would be treated as an adult, or say that they expected such treatment. All students, (except Kylie and Pindi, and 'complacent' girls) were aware of the social implications of the choice they made.

**Interviewees considered the effect their decision would have on**

**relatives and friends when they announced their choice.** Stuart decided to attend the sixth form college because of the academic image created by the high population of very able middle class students in attendance. He was aware that in his interviews he had described the FE college as a much more appropriate college for his own needs. However, he would have to announce his decision to his peers, and justify making the choice to others - many of whom had chosen the sixth form college. He needed strong arguments provided for him to make a choice which was different from his peers. He rejected all the practical reasons for choosing the FE college, and chose the sixth form college, which satisfied his social aspirations. Wayne was aware that the sixth form college offered the 'A' level courses he had hoped to pursue, but he was uncomfortable with the social mix of students there. He admitted that the image of the sixth form college was so unlike his own self image that he would not 'fit in'. This decision caused Wayne to pursue a more vocational course, like his peers rather than an academic course. Stuart's decision caused him to pursue an academic course even though he had been focused on a more vocational route, and admitted that his qualifications suited this pathway. These students persuaded themselves that their chosen college was the best college for their needs because they were more comfortable with the 'image'.

Janis and Mann (1977) claimed that decision makers 'consider their own self esteem when making decisions.' There is evidence that all students were conscious of their 'self image' and were aware that the choice they made contributed to this image. Toby was also aware of the self image he hoped to promote, and his claim that more academically able students attended the sixth form college caused him to choose that option, because he wanted to identify with that image. Identifying with a particular image is connected with social class identity, and peer group pressure, which are discussed in the next sub-section.

#### **8.4.2 Peer Group Pressure and Social Class Identity**

In connection with peer group pressure, the claims made by Thomas and Dennison, in their study of compulsory education, need to be modified.

They found that,

for children friendship was a major factor.  
Occasionally it over-rode other issues and  
exaggerated difficulties associated with choice.  
(Thomas and Dennison : 244)

The reason that 'friends' are important, is not simply that one's own friends go to the same college, but that the people who are already attending are either people whom 'I want to be identified with' or people who are perceived to be 'like me'. Sixteen year olds were very sensitive about these issues, and some respondents defined the colleges by describing the kind of people already attending, and saying whether they would fit in.

**Students were choosing colleges in a similar way to the way they chose their clothes and other 'commodities'.** Students needed to believe that there would be other students at the college of similar age, social class, ability, dress and appearance. Students who chose to attend the sixth form college perceived the social mix of students already attending the college, and made a judgement about whether they wanted to identify with these people. More middle class, academically able students or students who aspired to this image, favoured this college. Students from working class backgrounds perceived the social mix at the sixth form college and decided they would not fit in. They chose the FE college, which has more students with lower middle to working class backgrounds, and fewer 'academic high fliers'. Students at this age were conscious of the way other people dressed, and categorised them by these attributes. The way in which students were making choices is likely to increase the social inequality which already exists between the colleges. **Students were aware of social class, and the perceived ability of those attending colleges when judging reputation and making a choice. Students selected within a 'socially defined' range of alternatives.**

West and Varlaam in a study of compulsory schooling, found that, 'nine out of ten pupils reported that other pupils from their middle school were going to the high school at which they had been accepted. (West and Varlaam 1991 : 212) There was some support for the possibility that students attended a college with their friends. Most interviewees claimed that they were making a decision on their own, without considering their friends, but

five students later admitted that friends were not only at the same college, but on the same course. They typically found other reasons why they had made their choice, even though the reasons which emerged throughout interviewing suggested that students were taking into account views expressed by their peers. Gareth and Sebastian favoured the sixth form college because they recognised that the college was already populated by affluent and academically able students, like themselves. Boys at the grammar school said that no-one went to the city college from there, although it was very near, because it was rather 'rough'. and rejected it as an unsuitable option. The sixth form college is more middle to upper middle class, whereas the city college attracts more students from the lower middle and working class sections of the community. **Students considered some institutions to be 'socially' inferior as well as 'academically inferior'. Middle class sixteen year olds coupled 'social inferiority' with 'academic inferiority'.**

Students were anxious to make their decision appear logical, and rational to others, and needed to provide explanations for their decision. In anticipation of making a choice, students tended to persuade themselves that their choice was the best available by employing 'psychological tactics' including; the reinforcement of positive reasons; denial of negative attributes; post hoc justification; and self deception - which is explored in the next sub-section.

#### 8.4.3 Self Deception

**Students practised self deception; in advance of making a choice students distorted information to suit their current view.** The sixth form college benefits from the 'other side of the hill' syndrome, which means that in-house students in their eagerness to leave the school, were predisposed to like everything they heard about the sixth form college. The more the researcher pressed respondents to analyse the information about the sixth form college, the more difficult it became for them to justify their choice. The sixth form college marketing however, is designed to provide this segment of the market with exactly the arguments they require to justify going to a college rather than staying at the school. Students used these arguments to defend their decision. They could not voice these

reasons effectively until they went to the college and listened to the marketing rhetoric.

**Sixteen year olds deceived themselves by distorting favourable attributes and information about their chosen college to support their choice early on - and to persuade their parents to support their decision.** Students compared the class size they had experienced so far in school, with their chosen college, and did not compare the colleges with one another. Gareth quoted the lowest figure of 'about 12 or 13 in a class,' when asked about class sizes at the sixth form college, and rejected the school sixth form which offered small classes. Gareth also rounded up the pass rate figure to make it appear higher. He claimed that the pass rate was 'about 90%' - when the figure was 86%. **Sixteen year olds persuaded themselves that they had made a good decision by exaggerating positive factors about the college.** This phenomenon is described as 'reinforcement', and is discussed in the next sub-section.

#### 8.4.4 Reinforcement and Bolstering

**Sixteen year olds exaggerated the positive information provided by colleges once they had chosen the college.** 'When potential 'leavers' have decided (where) to go, they bolster that decision by emphasising only the good points about the college they have chosen, and find as many reasons as they can to denounce the school's sixth form, in order to reassure themselves that they have made the right choice.'  
(Hemsley-Brown, (1994 : II & III))

No pupil mentioned the importance of results before listening directly, or indirectly, to the promotional claims of the sixth form college. Sixteen year olds who had been told by the college that the results were 'excellent' then claimed that they had chosen the college for this reason. If predisposed to make a particular choice, pupils denied the importance of the negative information, and continued to support their original choice by finding other benefits. Marketing information in various forms must be provided by colleges to help students answer the question 'why are you choosing this college?' Students will then quote this information when announcing their



decision to others, to support their choice. Strengths when promoted by colleges are exaggerated by the students, not by the college. Because students needed to reinforce their decision to reassure themselves they had made the best choice, they exaggerated the best qualities of the option. When announcing their decision to attend a particular college, students exaggerated its strengths. The most determined, or maximising students, made declarations about the negative aspects of institutions they had rejected, and contributed to the biased information against the unchosen options. Gareth and Sebastian chose to go to the sixth form college because they were anxious to leave the school they were currently attending. These boys exaggerated the claims which were made by the college, to support their wish to leave, by making the college sound better than the school's own sixth form. Students who did not want to go, exaggerated the negative factors such as - lazy people go to the sixth form college, instead of staying in the sixth form at the school.

**Students denied negative information and found reasons to be positive.** There is considerable support for the claim by Vroom (1966) that students bolster the attractiveness of the organisation they had selected, giving higher attractiveness ratings to the chosen organisation and lower ratings to the unchosen ones. '**Post hoc justification**' occurred during the early stages, immediately after students had chosen, as well as during the first term when attending the new institution. Students denied negative information about the option they had selected. Emily for example denied the possibility that the sixth form college might furnish too many distractions, and prevent her from working hard enough - which contradicted her earlier claims that she would be too easily distracted by the social life at the college.

Colleges need to provide marketing information which promotes the particular strengths of the organisation to help students to decide between the alternatives, but also to help students convey and justify their reasons to others. 'Bolstering' to support the final decision, is an important element in the marketing process because it becomes the 'word of mouth' promotion, or the 'grapevine' which communicates the college's 'reputation', and helps to ensure that in the future, some students will be 'predisposed' to favour the college. **The phenomenon of 'post hoc justification' operated in the market place. Students used the marketing information**

**provided by colleges to support a choice they had already made.**

Although some students, e.g., 'compliant academics', were very limited in the number of options available, no student found reasons to transfer the blame for their decision to others. Transfer of blame, will be explored in the next sub-section.

#### **8.4.5 Transfer of Blame and Exaggeration of Negative Characteristics**

**The absence of compulsion to attend a particular college, implies that 'choice' is available.** There are very few examples of students finding reasons to blame others for the absence of free choice, since students claimed that they had been offered a choice - even when they had only been given one option. Susan, Kylie and Pindi had not been offered any alternatives, apart from the city college. During the third interview Pindi claimed she had been offered plenty of choice - although she could not name any other colleges. The main restriction of choice was related to subject choices at GCSE, and 'A' level. Susan still felt bitter about lack of choice a year later, and blamed the school. Respondents were unwilling to acknowledge any positive factors associated with the situation. Susan suffered in this respect both in her 'choice' of college, and her choice of 'A' levels at city college. She had not been offered a choice of college, other than city college, and acknowledged that other colleges were too far away. In spite of this dissatisfaction however, she continued to justify her choice - not by promoting the city college, but by describing the negative aspects of other colleges.

The claim by Klapper (1949) that people tend to 'censor their intake of messages in a highly biased way so as to protect their current beliefs from being attacked,' (Janis and Mann, (1977): 203) is supported by the behaviour and arguments offered by all students in interviews about choices. An example of this behaviour is provided by Stuart. After he had decided to attend the sixth form college, he continued to deny the advantages of the FE college and justified his choice of the sixth form college by quoting the promotional slogans. Stuart typifies many students in that he found different reasons to reject any positive attributes relating to the

FE college, once he had made his decision to choose the sixth form college. It was also counterproductive to invite students who were predisposed to dislike a college, to investigate and visit the college. The increased pressure caused them to promote the negative aspects of the choice.

**Sixteen year olds exaggerated the unfavourable factors about the college once they had rejected the choice.**

In this section, unstated reasons for choices were explored, and included a number of mechanisms which firstly, predisposed students to favour particular pathways, and secondly were employed to help students justify their choice to themselves, and explain their choice to others.

The next section explores factors which emerged in interviews as important factors relating to the reputation of colleges operating in a competitive market place. These factors are, 'specialisation and diversity', quality and performance, bias and manipulation, and the marketing agenda.

## **8.5 Specialisation and Diversity**

**Competition, may cause institutions to specialise, to clarify their position in the market place.** Therefore, an institution is more likely to gain a reputation for 'excellence' in that particular field. A college is regarded as attractive or excellent, because it is 'specialist' - regardless of whether the course is appropriate for the child's own needs. Specialisation convinced students that a college offered an identifiable area of expertise, and therefore they were prepared to believe it is 'excellent' in this respect. The technical college is considered to be excellent at job training, the sixth form college at 'A' levels, but the city and further education colleges are not specialised enough to be awarded a label of this kind. **Specialisation paves the way for claims of excellence.**

There was some diplomatic criticism from competitors, of the college which set out to attract, as a target market segment, the most academically 'advantaged' students, (most able and middle to upper middle class, 'A' level market), although the competitor colleges did not suffer a decline - they

had experienced a growth in numbers in many other areas, and 'A' level enrolments had remained stable. Both the FE college and the city college Vice Principals stressed that their market share of A' level students is affected by the highly specialised 'niche' market strategy operating at the sixth form college. The sixth form college marketing was directed only at students who achieved the qualifications for an 'A' level course. Whereas both the city college and the FE college relied on geographically identified market segments of 16-19 year olds, and offered a wide range of courses, vocational and academic. The two colleges were concerned that their own intake of well qualified A' level students is reduced, and that the sixth form college attracts a large share of the most well qualified applicants.

The market place in education has historically been dominated by a few highly valued outcomes, which can only be achieved not only through hard work but through innate privilege, such as being middle class, and highly intelligent - preferably both. Sixteen year olds who do not fit into this category are considered to have 'failed' and search for a way of achieving, by finding a different route. There are not very many routes for them to take, to achieve a measure of success which they can be proud of. We owe it to the nation's young people however, to find ways of providing courses which will satisfy the needs and demands of all sixteen year olds. Individuals from different social backgrounds, and with different levels of intelligence make different demands on the system. Respondents placed most emphasis on how hard they worked, and they expect and deserve to succeed on this basis - if possible while they are still young. We must try to widen what counts as success. The non -'A' level market at post -sixteen is becoming the larger portion this decade, and offers the greatest potential for expansion and success. Educationalists responsible for marketing need to genuinely value different kinds of success, at different levels, to enable sixteen year olds to willingly embark on a lifetime of education and training. Specialisation is related to the performance of colleges, which is explored in the next section.

## **8.6 Quality and Performance Issues**

Students claimed that if a college was very large, it was also 'specialised'

which was perceived as a strength. Students found it 'easier' and more straightforward to choose a 'popular' option, they gained security from this factor. A very large college appears to be more 'popular' than a small college, and it follows that a 'popular' college must be a 'good' college. This implies that larger organisations have an advantage in the long run, and that colleges which can claim the largest share of one recognisable market, have a good chance of attracting more students in this segment, and gaining success - whilst success is measured in terms of attracting more students under current FEFC funding arrangements. The claim that smaller institutions might benefit students was not promoted effectively, and was not therefore considered to be an advantage. Students who had attended a very small school, of three hundred pupils, favoured the sixth form college and pointed out the advantages of its size, in terms of its specialism in academic 'A' levels.

There is little chance that class size will reduce in a market system because **class size makes a positive contribution to 'efficiency' and 'cost effectiveness'**. It has been argued that, 'the market is a 'disciplinary mechanism. By seeking out inefficiency, (...) the market will eliminate poor schools.' (Ball, ((1990) : 66) No students considered large classes to be a serious negative factor, and this has enabled all colleges to increase class sizes and persuade students that larger classes are acceptable. It is in the financial interests of most organisations to have larger groups, and if they continue to promote these advantages to help to attract students away from small class sixth forms, this may exacerbate the problem for teachers. The advantages of larger groups were provided by the colleges themselves, and included 'the benefits of wider opinion in class discussion' in an effort to persuade students to attend the college, when this issue came to their attention.

There is an indication that the sixth form college is gaining sufficiently high, but not the highest results at 'A' level, by teaching in groups of 20 or more, even though a higher pass rate was achieved by the grammar school at the cost of very small classes and a narrower curriculum. Strictly speaking, this is not 'improved performance', but a 'sufficiently' high performance (good pass rates) with lower 'costs' (larger classes).

**Interviewees did not consider the consequences of their own decision in terms of the organisation's future success or failure.**

Downs (1957) claimed that each individual, 'though rational, is selfish' and the implication is that individuals will make a selfish choice, without regard for others in the education system. This is supported by the evidence collected, and no pupil considered his or her own choice in terms of the future success or failure of the organisation. This factor was raised by the grammar school boys, who were aware of the effect other students' choices might have on the sixth form. Grammar school leavers were aware that they were abandoning the sixth form, but they criticised sixth form life because of the 'image'. Each boy was making an essentially selfish decision, whether he chose to stay or leave. The suggestion that a pupil might consider the consequences of their own decision in terms of the organisation's future success or failure, was entirely rejected by all students, and was incomprehensible to them.

**Excellent services do not necessarily speak for themselves.**

Concern was expressed by grammar school staff, that because pupils are leaving to attend the sixth form college, the school as a whole will suffer. It is worth here, quoting 'Worcester's Law', that is, 'Familiarity breeds favourability, rather than contempt, and hence an image that is well projected and reaches the external audiences frequently and effectively, will enhance the institution's reputation.' (Keen and Greenall (1987) If the factors which make the service excellent are not conveyed to students, and other interested parties, a decline in the demand may follow even though the service is 'excellent' in many respects. The 'loser' in the present study, is the (fee paying) sixth form in a school which has,

the smallest classes,  
substantially higher results (10% above competitors),  
an ethos of working hard,  
opportunities for educating the whole person, including  
clubs, and societies and leadership responsibilities.

The school sixth form appears to be declining not because it is less effective, or achieving poor results - but because of a failure to promote the sixth form to its own apparently 'captive' audience. The staff are reluctant to enter the arena of choice - they are afraid of losing even more students. Unless teachers defend and market sixth forms in schools, they might close, in spite

of 'excellence'. The reason sixth forms find it harder to promote themselves to their own pupils within the school is because the people who stay are not actively involved in making a decision, and do not go through the 'bolstering' process. (see Hemsley-Brown, (1994) : II) (They stay because it is 'the line of least resistance') Therefore, they rarely feed enough positive information into the grapevine to counteract the information provided to promote the alternative post sixteen options. The pupils who choose to leave actively promote the alternative choice in a biased way, to support their choice. The quoting of information in a 'biased way', and manipulation in promotional information, are considered in the next section.

### **8.7 Bias and Manipulation in Promotional Information**

**There was some evidence of bias in the promotion and marketing information, especially when comments by students choosing the sixth form college were analysed.** The size of classes, and the 'level of freedom' for example, at the sixth form college, caused bias to enter the promotional grapevine. Students believed whatever suited their current view. Vague information or information which had not been available did not allow comparisons to be made, and this also increased bias. Students invented the information they lacked, to match the opposing side, favouring the institution currently supported. Stuart, for example, claimed that the work in the sixth form college art department was just as good as the work in the FE college art department, even though he had only seen work at the latter. He had persuaded himself that this would be the case, because he had decided to go to the sixth form college.

The strictness of the 'discipline', or the 'freedom' given to students, was only an issue if students visited the sixth form college, largely because this issue was prominent in promotional activities undertaken by the college.

Grammar school boys said it was 'freer' than school, and therefore better. Wayne saw the sixth form as stricter than he would tolerate - because of his school experience and his expectations of 'a college'. This contributes to the mixed messages which the college sends out about just how free and how strict it really is. **Students increased the bias in favour of the college they had chosen, by emphasising the good points, in**

**order to persuade their parents and themselves, that they had made a good choice.**

The factors considered important when choosing between colleges, form the 'marketing agenda', which is discussed in the next section.

## **8.8 The Marketing Agenda**

**Choice factors are dictated by schools and colleges in their marketing activities.** During the first and second interviews, twenty three students were unable to list what factors were involved in making their choice. However, in the third interview, in the autumn term, once students had visited a college or listened to a speaker from a college, they were capable of providing many factors which they believed were important in making their decision. At this stage students began to weigh up the reasons for choosing one option rather than another, and had discovered what factors were involved in making their choice. Alec, for example defended his decision in different ways, by providing reasons given to him by the college, such as the 'good results' and the fact that they 'specialised in courses for 16 -19 year olds' at the college. Students who have made an active choice among alternatives, and who need to justify the choice to themselves and others, are excellent promoters of the best attributes of the college - they typically describe the college in a biased way, with total disregard for any negative factors. The marketing agenda in this study seems to be set locally rather than nationally. Therefore a 'micro-market' system is in operation whereby the choice factors are dictated largely by the post sixteen colleges operating within a local area. (see Bowe, et al., (1994 : 38) The issues which were emphasised in a macro-market, or the larger national post sixteen education market, were relevant when a local college chose to include these issues on their marketing and promotional agenda. (For example, examination results, and league tables.)

**Interviewees were unable to give any reasons for choice unless marketing had provided the information.** Students were not able to express factors relevant to the making of a decision, until the colleges began to talk and write about the issues involved, and they made visits to colleges.



Students then began quoting the marketing information to enable them to justify the choice they had made. They quoted many reasons which supported their choice, whether or not they were 'deciding factors' for that individual. This is important for marketing, because these students 'spread the word' amongst other students, and this contributes to the informal reputation the college has within the 'grapevine'. Word of mouth recommendation affects whether a student is '**predisposed**' to make a particular choice, in the **preliminary stage**.

The reasons sixteen year olds provided to justify their choice enter the grapevine, whether or not they are the 'real' reasons the pupil chose the college. These reasons are quoted from the marketing information and help students - who are predisposed to make a particular choice, to persuade themselves, and to justify their choice to others, including in many cases, parents and peers. Students who investigated an option which they were not predisposed to favour, promoted the unfavourable aspects of the college, to support their current choice of a different institution. Therefore, these students were likely to contribute to a 'bad' reputation, by emphasising the negative attributes, to support their current beliefs. Students who failed to achieve the qualifications necessary to follow a particular option often investigated that course of action, and formed an opinion about it, even though they could not fulfil the requirements.

**The college operating aggressive marketing tactics set the agenda in terms of what factors count in the making of a decision.** The sixth form college 'cream off' a large target market. However, although this has created some hostility, it is not the essential issue. By undertaking a 'product centred marketing strategy' and by making a very early start, with clear messages over a long period, it has been difficult for competitors to introduce other decision making factors. Some students who do not fit into the segment being served by the 'A' level course, still used similar choice factors when investigating the options available. They were still persuaded by the prestige of 'A' level, and the academic reputation even though they did not fit into this category themselves. The FE college and city college need to find a way of moving the focus away from the issues the sixth form college emphasise, and shift the focus to their own agenda. The FE college for example can claim that, the surroundings, and

the facilities offered at the FE college, together with the flexibility of courses, and the advantages of combining academic study and vocational training, are strengths which the organisation has and which would serve the needs of many students. However, during the period of the study, potential students investigating post sixteen options, did not recognise these strengths.

Slogans and mission statements may appear unacceptable to many educationalists, but they are 'invented' by the students as a way of summarising the reputation of a college. For example, enquiries about the 'reputation' of the city college produced the comments 'it's very near', and 'some students there are very lazy'. The college had not conveyed any quotable positive statements for potential students to use when explaining their reasons for choosing the college. Students enrolled at the sixth form college however, invariably quoted statements which the college had devised, such as, 'the results are very good', or, 'its the best college for 'A' levels.' **In a competitive market, colleges need to provide potential students with clear marketing messages to help the choice, the announcement, and the justification of the decision.**

## 8.9 Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of issues and factors mentioned by respondents in interviews. Qualitative research data were analysed to discover patterns and themes in the decision making strategies of fifteen to sixteen year olds, emerging during the period when students selected a post sixteen college. The implications of these findings were summarised and presented as the basis for a model of decision making and choice, in connection with the marketing of post sixteen colleges.

The underlying meaning which emerged from comments made by respondents in interviews suggests that students began with a **preconceived idea** about the kind of course they were prepared to consider, which was socially and culturally defined, within a 'frame of reference'. Students, were aware of the social class, and the perceived

ability of others attending an institution when judging 'reputation'. Sixteen year olds chose an option which matched their self image, socially and academically - group identity was important,

In undertaking the process of decision making to finalise their choice of post sixteen institution, students employed psychological protection mechanisms to **reassure** themselves. Sixteen year olds, practised **self deception** by **distorting favourable attributes** and information about their chosen college to support their choice early on - and to persuade their parents to support their decision. Sixteen year olds, **exaggerated** factors about a college to support their choice, **denied negative** information and found reasons to be positive. '**Post hoc justification**', using the marketing information provided by colleges was used to support choices already made. Students considered the effect their decision might have on relatives and friends when they **announced** their choice, and practised **self appeasement** to provide **reassurance** that they had made a good decision by describing only the favourable factors about the college.

Finally, the analysis of interview data revealed a number of issues which relate directly to the marketing of post sixteen colleges. The data suggests that, choice factors are **dictated by colleges in their marketing** activities. There was some evidence of **bias in the promotion** and marketing information, especially when comments by students choosing the sixth form college were analysed. Colleges need to provide potential students with clear marketing messages to help the decision, the announcement, and the justification of the decision.

The final chapter, Chapter 9 seeks to tease out the key issues and key concepts emerging from the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter 9 provides a discussion and critical analysis of the supply and demand sides of the post sixteen market, and concludes with an input-output model of Marketing, Choice and Communications.

# Chapter 9

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSIONS

### MARKETING AND DECISION MAKING IN POST SIXTEEN EDUCATION

#### **9.1 Introduction - Responses to an Enhanced Market in Post Sixteen Education**

In this chapter the researcher will describe and identify a series of patterns and themes emerging from the data, and present a summary of 'theoretical categories, in the form of a cognitive map of 'psychographic types', and 'input output' models of 'Choice and Decision Making', and 'Marketing and Communications'. The analysis of the findings of qualitative and quantitative research data, in connection with decision making, choice, and marketing, should result in 'a reconstruction', or a 'unification' or 'synthesis' extracted from the data, to form a coherent whole, and produce models or theoretical categories. Tesch claims that,

the result of analysis is some type of higher level synthesis. While much work in the analysis process consists of taking apart, the final goal is the emergence of a larger, consolidated picture. (Tesch, (1990) : 97)

The final conclusion is considered to be a 'composite summary', (Hycner, (1985) : 296), 'a description of patterns and themes', (Patton, (1980) :302) 'a final order', (Lofland, (1971) :118) and 'an identification of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon studied'. (Colaizzi, (1978) in Tesch, (1990) :97) Attempts will be made to provide 'a new concept or theoretical category', (Lazarsfeld, (1972) : 225) 'or a substantive theory', (Glaser and Strauss, (1967) :113)

Firstly, in connection with the 'supply side', discussion and critical analysis will concentrate on responsiveness and quality, selection, diversity and specialisation, including a discussion of social 'inequality' in post sixteen education. This section concludes with a model of 'the responsiveness continuum', which illustrates diverse responses to market competition.

Secondly, the demand side issues are discussed under two broad headings, relating to two fundamental stages in the decision making process. Firstly, the preliminary search stage, and secondly, the refined search stage. The demand side issues are presented as utilitarian considerations, and non-utilitarian considerations. A summary of the conclusions of the qualitative research findings aims to describe concepts in theoretical stages, and provide a series of models of decision making processes. The chapter concludes with a 'marketing, choice and communications input output model.'

## **9.2 The 'Supply Side' - The Response of Post Sixteen Colleges to an Enhanced Market Culture in Education**

The present research was set up to examine key issues related to supply side issues in post sixteen markets. The specific areas of focus were;

- \* Is there any evidence to suppose that 'excellence' will result from the competitive environment in which colleges are expected to operate?
- \* Has the 'quality of education' provided 'improved' during the period?
- \* Is there any evidence to support the view that social 'inequality' will result from competition in the market place?

This section will also consider firstly, 'specialism', and 'excellence'; secondly, improvement in performance and 'cost effectiveness'; and finally 'selection' and 'inequality'. The section will conclude with a discussion of 'responses to competition' by presenting the 'student priority' style, and the 'course priority' style of responsiveness, and conclude with a model of 'The Responsiveness Continuum'

### **9.2.1 Analysis of 'Specialisation' and 'Excellence'**

**Specialism helped students to choose between colleges, and strengthened the market position of those colleges.** The implementation of a 'product based' (Baker, (1985) : 227)), niche marketing

strategy resulted in a narrowing of the range of courses offered at the college, and in a move by the college towards becoming a 'monopoly' producer of one type of course - thus effectively **reducing choice**.

It might be argued that **as specialisation increases among colleges in a local area, a monopoly situation develops which reduces competition in the long run**. In order to attract a sufficient number of students, the college undertook a high profile campaign, which spread across a wide geographical area. The high correlation coefficient scores, quoted previously, confirm that these promotional practices served to attract very highly qualified students, from a wide geographical area to attend the college. The specialist nature of the courses offered, paved the way for claiming that because the college only offered 'A' levels, the college must be the best place in the area to study 'A' levels. There are however, risks attached to becoming a 'monopoly' producer, and typically monopolies are slower to respond to change and less flexible, but monopolies may also be more 'cost effective' through 'economies of scale', and be considered 'the best', simply because there is so little choice in the market. In connection with manufacturing industries, 'Williams et al., (1987 : 427) point out that the apparent demise of 'mass production' - so characteristic of monopoly producers, 'is correctly understood in terms of 'simple market differentiation.' (Curry, (1994) : 102) In the 1990s therefore, it may no longer prove to be economically advantageous to be a monopoly producer, because the range of products demanded by consumers is widening considerably. The 'flexible specialisation' thesis contends that 'Fordist' mass markets are fragmenting and that 'production' itself must fragment in order to meet this challenge.' (Curry, (1994 : 102) Continuing to provide the same for everyone in the market place - including the education market place, may not in the future be the most economical and successful way forward.

**Specialisation, through a niche marketing strategy, paves the way for claims of excellence.** If only one college offers a particular kind of course, that college is likely to be described as excellent in that respect. The sixth form college was less responsive to local demand but provided courses which were considered excellent and the 'best' in the field, largely

through specialisation. Students continued to be attracted to the sixth form college, partly because the increasing size of the organisation was perceived by students as a sign of success, and this growth enabled the college to offer a wider range of options, within the specialism, and to develop a stronger identity. **Sixteen year olds were impressed by large organisations, and assumed that size was a positive factor, indicating specialism and associated 'a good reputation' with specialism.**

**A college embarks on the road to 'excellence', when people describe it as having a 'good reputation' for one identifiable accomplishment.** Marketing one particular course at the sixth form college identified the college as apparently the 'best' available college for that particular course, this specialism attracted the best qualified students to that course and enhanced its potential for success. The success of the sixth form college's niche marketing strategy, which was based on **product specialism**, is demonstrated by the **upward spiral of success - in terms of higher examination results, and success in attracting better qualified candidates to courses each year.** This spiral of success contributed to the belief that there was an 'improvement' in the 'performance' of the college as a result of increased competition, which will be discussed in the next section.

### 9.2.2 Improvement in Performance and 'Cost-effectiveness'

**The results of this study support the view that by promoting the success of previous 'A' level students, the sixth form college attracted better qualified applicants to courses, which enabled successive cohorts to gain high pass rates, which perpetuated a cycle of success.** Even when in the last year the exit qualifications did not continue to match the increasingly high entrance qualifications, the reputation of 'excellence' and 'excellent results' was still maintained and quoted by interviewees, because **the image of the organisation is based on the capacity to attract well qualified applicants.** The



proportion of applicants for 2 year 'A' level courses increased from 60.4% in 1978, to 82.1% in 1989, an increase of 21.7 percentage points. Keen and Greenall, (1987 : 26) point out that, one of the goals of good public relations management is to 'increase the level of suitably qualified, suitably motivated, applicants.'

**Excellent results confirmed the quality of the intake.** In 1979 there were 87 students with 8 or more 'O' levels, but by 1991, there were 203 students with 8 or more GCSE grades A-C, on 'A' level courses. There was an increase of 21.3 percentage points over the period of the study relating to this factor. (National GCSE results improved during the same period) The grammar school in the present study, found it more difficult to operate effectively and efficiently with only a small sixth form. Students demanded a wide range of 'A' levels, and were relatively unconcerned about large teaching groups, which are more cost effective. Larger institutions such as the sixth form college were able to offer a wider range of subjects, and teach larger groups of students, whilst still claiming to achieve 'high' results. (The college was able to claim that results were 'better' each year, even though results nationally were also slightly higher each year) **Claims that increased competition improves 'cost effectiveness' might partly be supported by findings in the present research.**

**The college might be described in these terms as operating in a more 'cost effective way'.** Cost effectiveness, based on 'economies of scale' is achieved by providing a wide range of 'similar' products - 'A' level courses, in one institution, and offering a more economical use of space, staffing and facilities, when compared with 11-18 schools. By offering only one type of course, the students are taught in larger groups, (20 students, compared with fewer than 10 at the grammar school), with specialist staff. The economics of scale can be exploited, without apparent reduction in successful outcomes - that is, students are still able to achieve results which are considered 'good enough', even though they are taught in more economically viable groups. The college was teaching larger groups, therefore with lower staffing and resources, and therefore lower apparent 'costs'. The results were slightly higher than the national average and

therefore it was accepted that these results must be 'excellent', by those who came in contact with the college. The discovery that decision makers tend to 'satisfice', rather than maximise on the results factor, enabled the college to attract well qualified applicants, even though the results were not the highest in the locality. Through the implementation of a niche marketing strategy, to offset economic decline, the college had improved '**cost effectiveness**' by becoming more '**specialised**', and teaching larger groups of students on courses. By attracting better qualified students to courses, the results achieved by cohorts of 'A' level students remained above the national average.

The tendency to attract some students, whilst alienating others by promoting the college in a particular way, leads to accusations that 'markets are socially selective' and have a tendency to increase 'social inequality', which will be discussed in the next section.

### 9.2.3 Perpetuation of Social Inequality

According to Hayek, 'the market itself is fair, because it has no morals, and no intentionality, (...) but it is also, 'unequal'. (Hayek, 1973) Edwards and Whitty, speculated that, 'The reforms may in practice serve to sustain more familiar patterns of social inequality.' (Edwards and Whitty, (1992) : 114) The findings of this study support the claim that **market systems have the potential to allocate resources by socio-economic class**. Promotional practices and marketing strategies, which promote particular types of course, (as an alternative to seeking an identifiable range of students, for a range of courses,) tended to create a **selective system**, which attracted some kinds of students and alienated others. In this study, the marketing strategy adopted by the sixth form college, resulted in a socially segregated student population.

Students identified and targeted as appropriate for the 'A' level courses were frequently **categorised by social class**, as well as by entry qualifications, and there is some evidence to indicate that '**selection by**

**social class**' operated within the college during the period of the study. Data collected through interviewing, and through collection of numerical data support this claim. During the period of the study numerical data indicated that following a niche marketing strategy, which targeted potential 'A' level students exclusively, the population of the college became more narrowly defined academically, and socially. The findings in the quantitative study exposed the rapid decline in the number of pupils applying to the college from council housing areas during the period of the study, (from 16.2% of the intake, to 4.9% over twelve years) a steep decline in the number of pupils from schools sited in the council housing district, and an increase (reaching 38.7% in 1988) in the enrolment of pupils from independent sector schools.

Students in interviews recognised and acknowledged that the sixth form college was populated by middle and upper middle class 16-19 year olds, and made a choice to apply to the college, or elsewhere, on this basis. The students who chose the sixth form college were all from middle or upper middle class backgrounds, or attended an independent school. Students with working class backgrounds in the present research, were not prepared to consider the sixth form college and they rejected it because the college was too academic, or too middle class. Middle class students were not prepared to consider city college, even though they claimed they were choosing on the basis of the pass rate, (and although the pass rate was marginally higher), because the college has a working class identity.

**Sixteen year olds gained security from the choices of others, and implied that ability and social class were linked. The reputation and image of local colleges are constructed around this perspective.** Colleges which are perceived to be predominantly populated by more socially disadvantaged individuals offer fewer attractions to the middle class, and aspirant middle class students, who were only prepared to consider colleges populated by other middle class sixteen to nineteen year olds. **Pupils judged the reputation of a college by the type of students perceived to be attending the college.**

**Market 'positioning'** is a crucial component of any market strategy. Marketers, making decisions about course programmes, and target markets of potential students, have the potential to identify students by qualifications, and social class, as well as by age, subject interest, career choice, and geographical location. The decision to offer a range of courses to ensure a 'mix' of student intake, both by social background and ability is within the sphere of control of the suppliers, or colleges in the market, and is based on an analysis of institutional strengths, an analysis of competition, and market research. It may be economically advantageous in some market planning exercises to identify a potential market by social class and ability, and it may be appropriate in others to identify potential markets by avoiding such segregation, and ensuring a 'social mix' within the institution. The next section discusses responses to competition, and presents the 'responsiveness continuum.'

#### 9.2.4 The Responsiveness Continuum

Baker argues that 'the real benefit of **positioning** lies in identifying the gap or a hole in the market place, and then filling it.' (Baker (1985) : 226) Responding to the needs of 'customers' and the demands of potential students, requires an 'interpretation' of the information collected through 'market research', and 'identification of institutional strengths.' The sixth form college in the present study responded primarily to external factors, including changes in legislation, and increasing competition from other colleges. The decisions made by management in response to these factors resulted in the college becoming a highly specialised 'A' level college with an excellent reputation locally, populated almost exclusively by middle class 'well qualified' (more than 5 GCSE grades A-C), 16-19 year olds. The decisions made by the sixth form college have been described in this study as a '**course priority style**' of responsiveness, and is related to Kotler's (1982) description of a 'product differentiated' approach to marketing. A **model of responsiveness**, illustrating the development and outcome of both a **course priority style**, and a **student priority style** of institutional decision making, and based on the findings provided by collecting

qualitative data and quantitative data, is provided in figure 9.1.

**The response of the sixth form college to competition**, based on an assessment of institutional strengths, and market research, was to **specialise** in 'A' levels, and reduce the emphasis on one year courses, for less able students. The strength of the institution was considered to be the 'A' level courses, and management chose to identify and target students who were qualified to study for the 'A' level courses exclusively. The Vice Principal, confirmed that the college promoted 'exclusivity', and 'A' level courses, specifically during the mid 1980s. (Hemsley-Brown (1991 : xii)

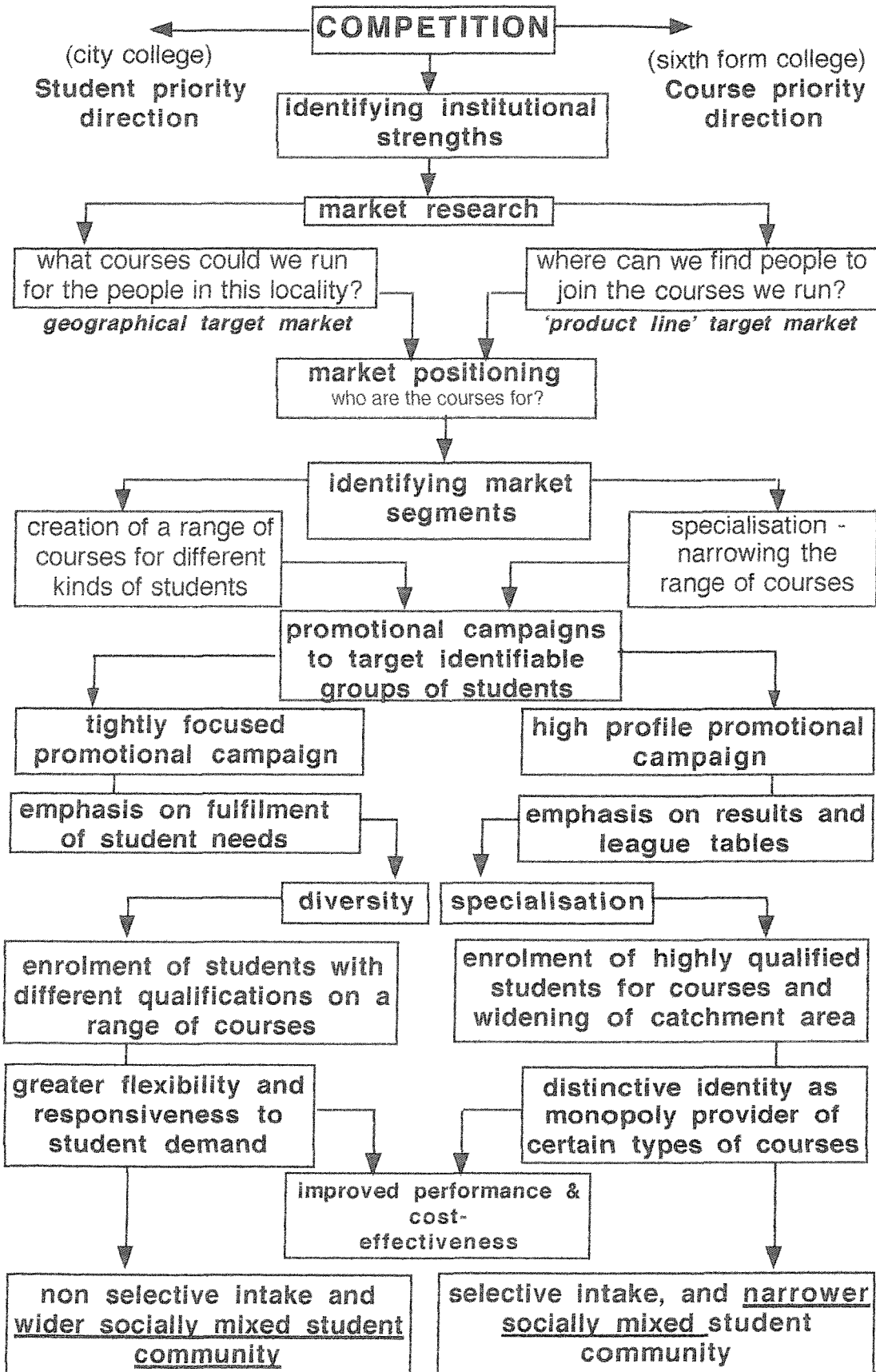
The outcome of a '**course priority**' style of marketing, which emphasised examination results and courses, is a narrower academically and socially mixed student community, an improvement in exit qualifications, an improvement in '**cost effectiveness**', increased '**specialisation**' and claims of '**excellence**'. The successful promotional and marketing strategy during the 1980s resulted in a rise in the number of applications from well qualified students for the course promoted. Keen and Greenall, (1987) observed that,

Colleges that suddenly acquire good press (...) find that they can sift through a particularly rich crop of applicants and improved application levels mean the entrance of better motivated, better suited students, who in their turn will provide a continuing testimony to the college. (Keen and Greenall, (1987) : 16)

Extremes of 'course priority' marketing may lead to local monopolies, which reduce choice in the market, and constrain the flexibility and willingness to respond to local demand.

The **student priority** or 'client centred' approach to marketing is similar to the description of the marketing style of city college, (appendix t) and may result in an intake which is less selective, and more socially mixed. 'There has been the growth of a 'client centred' culture in education and the recognition that education providers must tailor their provision to the needs and wants of individual consumers.' (Foskett, 1992 : 11) The strategy adopted by the city college, based on a geographical niche market, focused on the provision of courses for all sixteen year olds living locally.

**Figure 9.1** The Responsiveness Continuum



The pupils who attended city college described it as being 'very mixed', and the Vice Principal confirmed that the marketing targeted students who attended schools in the local area.

The choice of responding to competition at city college based on a '**Student Priority Model**', was made with the knowledge that a potential market of highly qualified middle class students, had already been successfully targeted by competitors. The most financially viable market segment were identified as those who were attending local 11-16 maintained sector schools, many of whom had not achieved the qualifications to embark on an 'A' level course, and many of whom would be classified as lower middle or working class in their cultural origins.

The 'Responsiveness Model' is a continuum, and colleges may respond to demand in a number of ways, by **combining specialism with diversity**. For example, although the sixth form college during the 1980s specialised in 'A' levels exclusively, and continues to offer these courses, the college has now diversified, and introduced a Business Centre, offering courses for adults, including short courses, and part time courses. Colleges responding both in predominantly 'student priority' and 'course priority' styles in the market place are now forced to prioritise economic issues, and operate more competitively to secure a larger share of the market in direct competition with other institutions, under the 1992 (FEFC) funding arrangements. Colleges such as the sixth form college, operating a 'course priority' approach to marketing, have been forced to diversify, by moving closer to a 'student priority' approach, to secure new markets, in competition with other institutions. This example illustrates the potential for colleges to respond in a number of ways at each stage of the responsiveness continuum, rather than to pursue a single line pathway towards either a specialised and narrow social mix and course portfolio, or a wide social mix and a wide range of vocational and academic courses.

**To carry out market positioning successfully a number of 'niches' must be identified,** (students may need to be 'selected' internally to ensure they are appropriate for the courses.) Further Education Funding

Council, (FEFC) arrangements have openly 'encouraged a competitive culture within which FE institutions compete with neighbouring institutions in an attempt to gain a larger share of the market place.' (Foskett and Hesketh (1995) : 1) The success of the 'student priority' approach is dependent upon identifying sufficiently large target groups of students to make the courses viable. Colleges may still be acknowledged as 'specialist', and outcomes may be described as 'excellent', but **greater flexibility may result from offering a number of specialist courses**, rather than relying on a single market. 'The ability to quickly develop and efficiently bring to market new products, or variations of new products, has supplanted mere efficiency as the playing field of competition.' (Lipietz, (1985) : 105) This response to competition is known as '**flexible specialisation.**'

Colleges need to capitalise on their expertise, and provide a range of courses for which they have identified a demand. Colleges each have their own range of expertise because of their unique (local) situation, which might mean that it is more appropriate to increase provision for some groups of consumers, and reduce what is offered to another; or to recognise emerging needs, or gaps in the market and provide additional - specialist courses, for a new group of students. Colleges, as the suppliers of education and training in a rapidly changing market place, may find it more economic to move away from monopolistic practices, which relied on captive audiences and slow growth, towards '**flexible specialisation**' in a number of '**niche markets**', which has the potential to offer the best of both extremes of the continuum.

The next section will consider 'demand' side issues, under the headings, 'preliminary search', and 'refined search'; and the final section aims to bring together the findings of both the supply and demand sides of marketing in post sixteen colleges, by presenting a 'marketing and communications input output model'. The decision making model combines elements of analysis provided by Janis and Mann, (1977 : 136), (the significance of non-utilitarian considerations, and utilitarian considerations) with a 'cluster analysis of buyer types'. (Chisnall, (1994) : 114)



### 9.3 The 'Demand' Side - Student Consumer Responses to an Enhanced Marketing Culture in Post Sixteen Education

The present research was set up to examine key issues related to the 'demand side' in the post sixteen education market. The specific areas of focus were;

- \* to determine how well informed the decision making process of sixteen year olds might be, and examine their perceptions and priorities, in selecting between post sixteen colleges.
- \* to discover any mismatch between the reasons potential students give when they are questioned, and the underlying reasons implied by the final outcome.
- \* to determine whether 'manipulation and bias' of information, affects decisions in the post sixteen education market place.

The decision making processes of sixteen year olds in the post sixteen education market place is a complex and interactive process, which is influenced by peers, teachers, and parents, in addition to colleges in their marketing and promotional activities. The investigation and analysis of decision making strategies has revealed that students employed both subjective, and objective reasoning in their handling of marketing information. Firstly, interviewees revealed subconscious, or subjective, and largely 'non-utilitarian' reasons for their choice, and secondly, they offered more objective, 'utilitarian', rational reasons to explain their choices. In this chapter, the stages of decision making behaviour undertaken by sixteen year olds will be discussed under two broad headings, the **preliminary search stage**, which deals primarily with 'non-utilitarian' factors, and the **refined search stage**, which considers 'utilitarian' factors.

### 9.4 The Preliminary Search Stage

Non-utilitarian factors, operating in the preliminary search stage of decision making are grouped under two main headings. Firstly, '**preconceptions**' including social and cultural 'frames of reference', and 'social aspirations' and secondly '**psychological defence mechanisms** including, self esteem and self image, and self deception.

In the **preliminary search stage** sixteen year olds combined subjective and objective reasoning to inform the decision making process. They relied upon an informal gathering of information, from friends and family, working within socially and culturally defined parameters. Preconceptions which were apparent in the preliminary search affected a student's willingness to pursue a particular option, and served as a **filter mechanism** when assimilating information later in the process.

The next section explains the way 'preconceptions' influenced decisions made by sixteen year olds. Students enter the preliminary search of the decision making process, with a set of '**preconceptions**' and their choice is made within 'framed fields of reference', (Foskett and Hesketh, (1995) : 6 ) which are socially and culturally defined. **Psychological defence mechanisms**, summarised in the following section, were employed during the decision making process to protect the **self image**, and preserve **self esteem**. Student decision makers were seeking '**social approval**' and some employed **self deception** to prepare themselves for **self appeasement**, and the **announcement** of a decision to others in the later stages of the process.

#### 9.4.1 Preconceptions

Students entered the process of decision making at the preliminary search stage, with a preconceived idea of the kind of further education option they were prepared to consider. **The preconceived ideas were formed within socially and culturally defined parameters.** During informal family discussions, parents show an early preference for vocational or academic education, and this influences the choice of post sixteen 'pathway' - even though parents may not directly contribute to choices at that stage. (The partnership between parents and students has been described elsewhere by Foskett and Hesketh (1995 : 6) as 'the composite consumer'.)

In making choices, students were working subjectively based on their cultural experience and social background to select a range of options, or a

choice which matched the **social aspirations** acceptable in their cultural setting. They matched these alternatives against their perceived ability, and their interest and enthusiasm for particular subject or career areas. Students were therefore working within a set of limitations defined by their social and cultural experiences, and by the potential reaction of family and friends to their choices. The findings agree with Foskett and Hesketh's analysis whereby, within middle class families there is a social expectation of children continuing into post compulsory education / training which permeates the home culture. (Foskett and Hesketh (1995) : 5) Sixteen year olds use a frame of reference based on class biased cultural values, which contributes to their **self esteem**, and emerging **self image** or personal identity. The marketing of post sixteen education, and its value to sixteen year olds, must therefore be conveyed to the parents of children of all ages, not just to sixteen year olds themselves, or to parents of sixteen year olds. In this way continuation beyond the age of sixteen may gradually become the social norm of sixteen year olds from all social class groups. Preconceptions, and psychological protection mechanisms are the key factors affecting students' choice of post sixteen pathway, during the preliminary search stage. The next section will discuss elements of 'psychological protection mechanisms.'

#### 9.4.2 Psychological Protection Mechanisms

Interviewees employed '**protection mechanisms**', which acted as a **filter**, and contributed towards an emerging sense of '**group identity**', which was very important to all sixteen year old decision makers. It was important for students **to preserve their self image**, or **self esteem**, and prepare themselves for the **announcement** of their decision to others. The protective mechanisms act as a filtering system, which **exaggerate** or **bolster** information to fit with the students' predisposition, and self image, and served in some cases, to **self deceive**, and in others to act **as self persuasion**, or **self appeasement**. The following sections will discuss, firstly, 'self image and group identity', secondly 'distortion and exaggeration',

and finally, self deception and 'post hoc justification'.

### 9.4.3 Self Image and Group Identity

The central concept during the preliminary search for information, is the protection of the '**self image**'. The choice must fit with the self image, and various mechanisms are employed to help the student to prepare to announce his or her decision publicly, and find acceptable ways of justifying the decision to others. Hodkinson and Sparkes confirm that, 'We all develop conceptual structures - **schemata**, which we use to filter information. Schemata both limit and enable understanding, by relating new information to existing understandings.' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, (1995) : 195)

Self image operated within 'framed fields of reference', (Foskett and Hesketh, (1995)) and was based primarily on long term attitudes provided by parents, by schooling and peer pressure, and therefore typically a sixteen year old was predisposed to choose a college where the students were perceived to match with his or her self image. An example of the importance of self image is provided by Toby, who viewed himself as a hardworking and academically clever student. It was important for Toby to be able to tell people that he was attending a college which had a local reputation, or image of being populated by intelligent, successful, students - like himself. By announcing that he was going to the sixth form college, he was at the same time able to convey to others that he identified with this image. Wayne would not apply to the sixth form college because his 'self image' - including the way he dressed, and his 'lifestyle', was mismatched with his perception of the 'image' of the sixth form college.

**Group Identity was very important**, and interviewees selected a college which matched their self image socially and academically. Self esteem was a primary consideration when making choices about colleges, and was a major factor in the '**preliminary search stage**' of decision making. Self esteem is connected with a perception of one 's social class,

and with a perception of the social class of students in other institutions. Self esteem is also connected with a perception of one's own ability to achieve in the education system, and with a perception of students' achievements in other institutions. The choices students make depends partly on what others have chosen, or are thinking of choosing. In practice, 'this is what economists term, the **demonstration effect.**' (Donaldson, (1992) : 154)

The next section concerns 'distortion and exaggeration', and deals with the way students protected their self image, by modifying information about colleges, to support their choice,

#### 9.4.4 Distortion and Exaggeration

As students collected information about colleges and moved into the **refined search** stage they tended to **distort** the information they gathered in connection with colleges, to support their choice, and to protect their self image. Determined, or 'maximising' students in particular, distorted information very early in the decision making process, and promoted the positive attributes of the college they favoured. After accepting a place and before taking up a place at college, students continued to provide positive reasons for their choice, and deny negative factors. Bolstering or '**reinforcement**' occurred immediately after a decision had been made, and **involved exaggeration of positive characteristics of colleges** chosen. The students choosing the sixth form college were most likely to go through this stage, and used the information provided in the marketing to **justify** their choice.

Gareth who had chosen the sixth form college, rounded up the pass rate percentage to make it appear higher, and reduced the figure he quoted for the size of classes, in order to support his decision to go to the college, and contributed to the biased messages on the 'grapevine'. The '**announcement**' involves **an exaggeration of positive reasons** for

making the choice, and **denial of negative attributes**, and **introduced distortion and bias into the system of communication between colleges and students.**

Sixteen year olds were working with a '**hidden agenda**' of non-utilitarian considerations, based on their social class and cultural background. Pupils tried to hide the influence of friends and their perception of other students and self image in choice situations, by finding other reasons for choosing, which they believed would be more acceptable, or appeared more rational. Declared reasons for choosing a college were quoted from the marketing information, and served to mask the underlying reasons for choice, which were initially based on social class perceptions and self image. Many of the reasons were provided after the choice had been made, as 'post hoc justification', which is discussed in the next section.

#### 9.4.5 **Post-hoc Justification and Self Deception**

The phenomenon of '**post hoc justification**' tended to disguise the initial reasons for choosing colleges. Market surveys for example, (and interviewing of candidates after the choice had been made), have a tendency to confirm the success of promotional slogans, because students quote the information they were provided with during the decision making stage.

During the period when the main promotional emphasis was the 'excellent results' at the college, Hemsley-Brown, (1991) in a pilot study at the sixth form college, confirms that, 'data collected through a questionnaire, (with a sample of 100 sixteen year olds at the college), resulted in 94% of students claiming that the reason they had chosen the college, was because of the "excellent results".' (Hemsley-Brown, (1991) ) Promotional slogans and statements provide a way of rationalising a choice which might have been made for more subjective reasons, and allows students to explain the **benefits of choosing a particular college.** Post hoc justification

contributes towards 'self persuasion', and helps to convince a student he or she has made a good decision. It serves to self deceive in cases where choice was limited. The decision may not have been arrived at by relying primarily on these utilitarian arguments, but by working within socially and culturally defined parameters. This phenomenon is effectively '**retrospective justification**' of a decision, and involves a degree of '**self deception**' to achieve '**self appeasement**'.

Throughout the 'refined stage' of decision making, 'maximising' and 'self reliant' students employed bolstering, self deception, and post hoc justification to support their choices. The refined stage is discussed in the next section.

## 9.5 The Refined Search Stage

Economic decision making models, (for example, Hindess, (1988)) which focus on choice in the market place, concentrate on rationality and maximising utility. There was more emphasis on maximising utility during the **refined search stage**, when decision makers began to take into account the choice factors raised by colleges in their marketing activities.

The concept of 'rationality' in the analysis of consumer behaviour makes assumptions about the level of rigorous and comprehensive deliberation which constitutes decision making behaviour in a culture of markets and choice. Although decision makers in the present study made rational decisions, based on careful assessment of relevant factors, and information about colleges, psychological defence mechanisms, and cultural influences, interfered with the 'maximisation of utility'. Hodgkinson and Sparkes, (1995) : 196) describe the notion of **pragmatic rationality** which is a social and culturally embedded activity. They argue that decision making is a process which is both subjective and objective, and does not follow a linear sequence. The decision making undertaken by sixteen year olds in connection with choice of post sixteen college, falls short of the criteria for 'technical rationality', but might be described as '**pragmatic rationality**', in

view of the combination of subjective and objective reasoning skills employed in the process.

Utilitarian considerations, or reasons which were openly expressed and stated, were connected with academic and vocational pathways, the results achieved by colleges, the reputation of each college, and factors including class size, size of institution, and facilities and buildings, promoted by the colleges in their marketing activities. Issues which students considered important during the **refined search stage**, were those raised by colleges in their communications with students, through marketing and promotion. Research which seeks to discover the important factors involved in choosing between colleges should take into account the marketing issues emphasised by colleges in the local area investigated. Marketing research questionnaires confirm the success or failure of promotional information. **Successful slogans are repeated back to researchers in their market research exercises, in response to questions about why students chose the college.** The next section discusses utilitarian considerations including principally, information collection and the effect of promotional slogans on decision making.

### 9.5.1 Utilitarian Considerations

Sixteen year olds primarily employed 'pragmatic rationality' and relied on non-utilitarian or unstated subjective reasoning, and they justified their decision by providing utilitarian reasons for their choice, based on the marketing and promotional information collected during the decision making process. This section is divided into five sub sections, firstly academic versus vocational pathways; secondly, the importance of practical descriptions of colleges, thirdly, the importance of examination results; fourthly, comparing colleges and their claims; and finally, the effects of promotional slogans on outcomes.

Firstly, students used a single criterion of academic or vocational study



to eliminate some colleges early in their decision making process. Respondents who had decided to take an 'A' level course on the whole had more information about this route from the start of the process, and were reluctant to find out about vocational courses. Ten out of the top twelve students in order of GCSE success, were aiming at university and avoided vocational pathways. The belief that 'A' levels are the only route to university was common knowledge amongst sixteen year olds.

'Resolute' students had been persuaded by friends, family, and workers they had met on work experience, that they needed 'experience not qualifications' (Peter, comprehensive school) and had fallen into an **'employment experience catch 22'**. They believed they would be unable to get a job without experience, and they would not get experience without a job. Both Colin and Peter believed that college based job training was no substitute for employment experience. Marketing and promotion of vocational training courses needs to concentrate on the importance of the employers' support of training programmes, (not necessarily financial support). In order to increase participation in education and training beyond sixteen **promotion of vocational courses needs to emphasise that employers believe the courses offered are valuable preparation for jobs in the industry.**

The arguments for remaining in further education are different for the two groups of students. Academically biased students especially the well qualified, (more than 5 GCSEs), were unprepared even to discuss vocational pathways, and believed in gaining academic qualifications for their own sake. Vocationally biased students were anxious to avoid academic work which they associated with school, and were anxious to become an adult and be regarded as a wage earner. Their reason for gaining qualifications was to make them more employable in the near future. Although there is concern that academic and vocational education and training should exist alongside one another, some students were anxious to alienate themselves from one in favour of the other. This finding highlights the problem of establishing 'parity of esteem' emphasised as a priority in the document, 'Education and Training for the 21st Century', (DES, 1991) The

recent Review of Qualifications for 16 -19 year olds, (1996) by Sir Ron Dearing, goes further than ever before in an attempt to break down the vocational and academic divide.

Secondly, factors raised during the research which related to class sizes, buildings and facilities, and the size of colleges, were not provided by students as a reason for choosing a particular college. Although students had collected information about these issues. These factors had not been highlighted by any of the colleges in their promotion as a reason for choosing the college. Students did not rely on practical descriptions of the colleges, such as facilities or buildings to support a choice.

Thirdly, 'maximising students' and grammar school 'leavers' had **not chosen the college offering the best examination results, even though they claimed they were choosing on this basis.** Students did not mention the importance of results before listening directly, or indirectly, to the promotional claims of the sixth form college. The claim made in promotional literature that the results were 'excellent', was quoted by students as a reason for choosing the college. Students did not discover that the results were higher at two institutions in the local area. The sixth form college was able to offer not the highest results, but results which were considered 'high', because they were claimed to be high in the promotional literature. **They chose the college which claimed to have the best results, but rejected the options offering better results.**

Fourthly, students were only able to **make comparisons within their own experience**, and were unable to make direct comparisons between colleges. When exulting the benefits of a college, there is little advantage in relying on direct comparisons with other institutions. Students were unable to compare the colleges on factors such as work ethic, adult atmosphere, or pastoral care. Sixteen year olds measured these issues against their own experience at school. They used these factors to support a choice if the colleges had highlighted the issues, but had not actively searched for information on these factors to determine which institution to attend. Finally, **sixteen year olds were unable to give any coherent**

**reasons for selecting colleges until they had been exposed to the marketing information provided by colleges.** During the first and second interviews, twenty three pupils were unable to list what factors were involved in making their choice. However, in the third interview, in the autumn term, once students had visited a college or listened to a speaker from a college, they were capable of providing many factors which they believed were important in making their decision, and quoted promotional information provided by colleges.

Confirmation was provided for the notion that **students quote promotional messages provided by colleges to support their choice whether or not that factor was crucial in reaching the decision.** Students who relied almost entirely on colleges and the school for their information were described as 'compliant decision makers', and would have been unable to make an informed choice without the input from college marketing, and the help of teachers in schools. Students described as 'maximising' relied on schools and colleges for information and were very thorough and determined in their search, although they also had the support of friends and family. The wealth of information provided by colleges, (the sixth form college especially), contributed to how 'well informed' students were during the refined search stage of decision making. The notion of 'well informed', and the categorisation of students into decision maker types, is summarised in the next section.

## **9.6 Decision Maker Psychographics**

Psychographic research aims to produce a series of categories of 'buyers in the market place' based on life styles, attitudes, family background, and other factors which have a direct bearing on decision making in the market place. (Chisnall, (1994) :112) The process of categorising student decision makers into a coherent, unified map or grid of 'psychographic types' was undertaken in three main stages. The first stage involved identifying linked

factors summarised from interview data; (figure 9.2) in the second stage factors were plotted on graphs to discover clusters of students, and identify patterns in the data; (figure 9.3) and finally, the decision maker types were plotted on a grid to produce a 'decision maker typology'. (figure 9.4)

The first stage of analysis of the choice behaviour of sixteen year olds, has produced a classification of 'types of decision maker', based on four linked factors,

- \* decision making style, (see figure 7.6)
- \* ability - (GCSE results, figure 7.1)
- \* social class (see figure 7.2)
- \* information collection (see figure 7.3)

Each factor has been listed against the name of the student, in figure 9.2 to show the relationship between the defining attributes, and shows that students could be listed on a sliding scale from; well informed to uninformed; from high ability to low ability; and according to social class. Students are also categorised under three headings according to the style of decision making they employed; self reliant - independent decision making; maximising - determined information searching; and compliant or dependent decision making.

Self reliant decision makers were those who relied on their own resources to gain information rather than the school or colleges. Some considered it unnecessary for example, the grammar school boys did not need to find an alternative option. The 'self reliant' category includes those who were less well informed, and uninformed who are described as 'resolute' and 'complacent' respectively. Maximisers were those who made a determined search using all available sources of information, although their success in gathering the information varied. Students in the 'compliant' category were entirely dependent on schools in the first instance, and on colleges to provide information.

**Figure 9.2****Decision Making Factors**

Name	style	achievement	search	social class	Fig 9.4 group
James	self reliant	high (10)	well informed (6)	u middle (5)	1a
Tim	self reliant	high (10)	well informed (6)	u middle (5)	1a
Neil	self reliant	high (11)	well informed (6)	u middle (5)	1a
Toby	self reliant	high (9)	informed (4)	u middle (5)	1c
Sebastian	self reliant	high (10)	informed (5)	middle (4)	1d
Gareth	self reliant	high (9)	informed (5)	middle (4)	1d
Ted	self reliant	high (9)	informed (3)	middle (4)	1d
Peter	resolute	average (7)	limited infor (3)	working (2)	1f
Nikki	resolute	low (1)	informed (4)	working (1)	1g
Colin	resolute	low (0)	limited infor (2)	working (1)	1h
Raquel	complacent	low (0)	uninformed	working (1)	1j
Michelle	complacent	low (0)	uninformed (1)	working (1)	1j
Helen	complacent	low (0)	uninformed (0)	working (1)	1j
Carol	complacent	low (0)	uninformed (0)	working (1)	1j
Emily	maximising	high (9)	well informed (6)	middle (4)	2b
Alec	maximising	high (9)	well informed (6)	middle (4)	2b
Dora	maximising	average (5)	informed (5)	low middle (3)	2e
Wayne	maximising	average (5)	limited infor (3)	working (2)	2f
Stuart	maximising	low (1)	informed (4)	working (1)	2g
Susan	compliant	high (10)	informed (4)	middle (4)	3d
Rachel	compliant	average (7)	limited infor (2)	working (1)	3f
Darren	compliant	low (0)	informed (4)	working (1)	3g
Mandy	compliant	low (1)	limited infor (2)	working (2)	3h
Pindi	compliant	low (1)	uninformed (1)	working (2)	3j
Kylie	compliant	low (2)	uninformed (2)	working (1)	3j

( ) The numbers in brackets are taken from the charts shown in Figures 7.2- 7.4 - relating to these factors  
The figures shown in the final column relate to the classification of decision makers shown in figure 9.4

During the second stage, the ability to collect information was linked both with 'social class' and with 'ability', and **clusters of student decision makers** were identified, by plotting these factors on graphs. (figure 9.3) Students of lower ability were less able to gather information, whether or not they approached the task in a 'self reliant', 'determined', or 'compliant' style. Upper middle class students were the children of parents working in the professions who were presumably more able to provide and gain access to information about colleges compared with working class children, whose parents had not pursued further education themselves, and were less able to gain access to information.

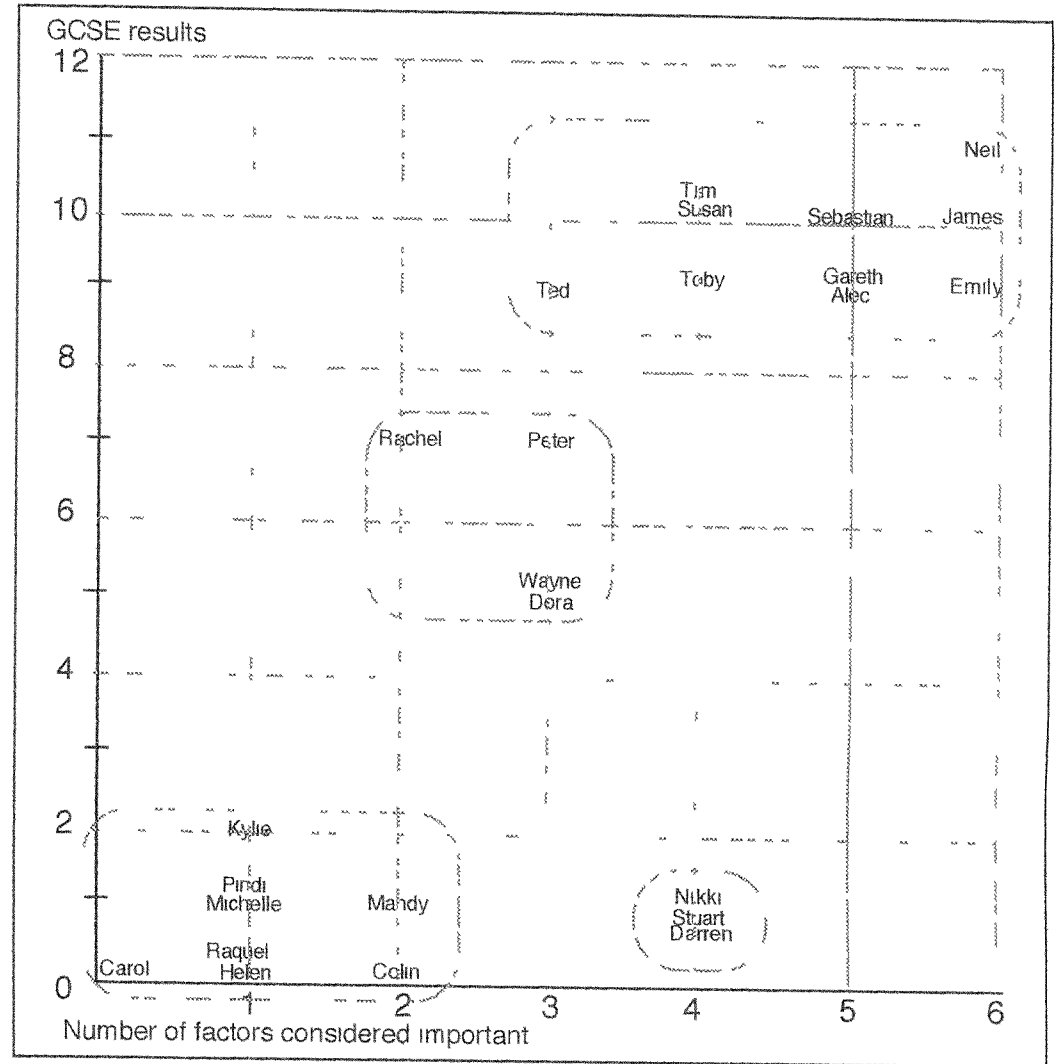
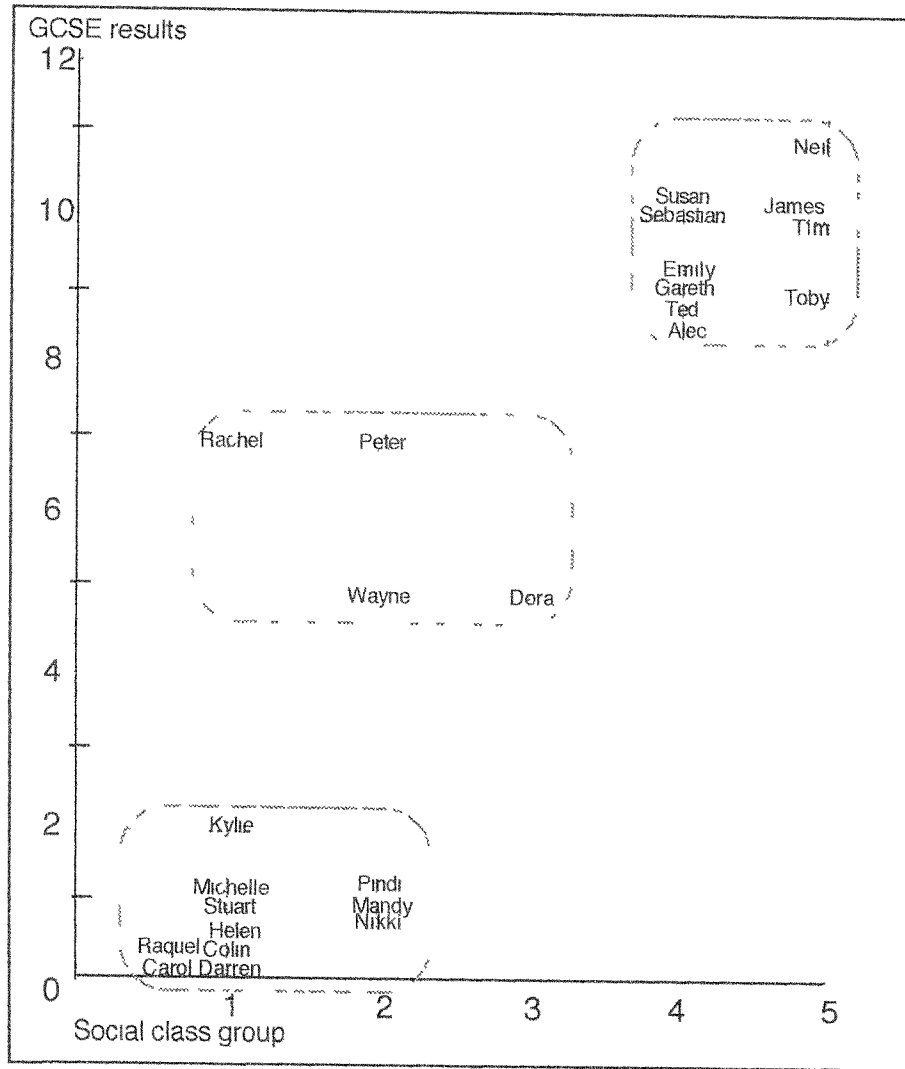
The third stage of the categorisation of decision makers was achieved by combining the summary of linked factors - social class, ability and information gathering, (figure 9.2) with a cluster analysis, (figure 9.3). Baker suggests that it will prove helpful to 'plot the perceptions of consumers on a perceptual map.' based on the factors considered important in the decision making process. (Baker, (1992) : 194) The result of combining the two stages of analysis, was the emergence of patterns in the data suggesting that both ability and social class were linked with the collection of information about colleges. There were also three styles of information gathering observed in student behaviour relating to the sources students relied on to collect information, which were included in the typology of sixteen year old decision makers. A grid is provided in figure 9.4 to show the final typology of decision makers in the post sixteen market place. Three broad groups of decision makers are identified, and in each case students are categorised by their ability, (number of GCSEs), social class (groups 1-5) and information gathering (on a scale of 1-6 factors.)

The majority of the categories are represented by students in the present study, and in some cases there are two or three students in the same category. However, the grid has been completed by filling in the information for categories of students who it is suggested, are part of the post sixteen market place, but who were not represented in the present study - in order to demonstrate the full range of student decision makers in the typology.

*(These categories are in italics)*

**Figure 9.3**

**Clusters of Decision Makers**



**Figure 9.4**

**Typology of Decision Makers in the Post Sixteen Market**

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
<b>self reliant</b> (independent) high (11) well informed (6) upper middle(5) 1a	<i>self reliant</i> ( <i>independent</i> ) <i>high</i> <i>well informed</i> <i>middle</i> 1b	<b>self reliant</b> (independent) high (9) informed (4) upper middle (5) 1c	<b>self reliant</b> (independent) high (9) informed (5) middle (4) 1d	<i>self reliant</i> ( <i>independent</i> ) <i>average</i> (5) <i>informed</i> (5) <i>low middle</i> (3) 1e	<b>self reliant</b> (resolute) average (7) limited infor (3) working (2) 1f	<b>self reliant</b> (resolute) low (1) informed (4) working (1) 1g	<b>self reliant</b> (resolute) low (0) limited infor (2) working (1) 1h	<b>self reliant</b> (complacent) low (0) uninformed (1) working (1) 1i
<i>maximising</i> <i>high</i> <i>well informed</i> <i>upper middle</i> 2a	<b>maximising</b> high (9) well informed (6) middle (4) 2b	<i>maximising</i> <i>high</i> <i>informed</i> <i>upper-middle</i> 2c	<i>maximising</i> <i>high</i> <i>informed</i> <i>middle</i> 2d	<b>maximising</b> average (5) informed (5) low middle (3) 2e	<b>maximising</b> average (5) limited infor (3) working (2) 2f	<b>maximising</b> low (1) informed (4) working (1) 2g	<i>maximising</i> <i>low</i> (1) <i>limited infor</i> <i>working</i> 2h	<i>maximising</i> <i>low</i> (1) <i>uninformed</i> (2) <i>working</i> (2) 2i
<i>compliant</i> <i>high</i> <i>well informed</i> <i>upper middle</i> 3a	<b>compliant</b> high well informed middle 3b	<i>compliant</i> <i>high</i> <i>informed</i> <i>upper-middle</i> 3c	<b>compliant</b> high (10) informed (4) middle (4) 3d	<b>compliant</b> average (5) informed (5) low middle (3) 3e	<b>compliant</b> average (7) limited infor (2) working (1) 3f	<b>compliant</b> low (0) informed (4) working (1) 3g	<b>compliant</b> low (1) limited infor (2) working (2) 3h	<b>compliant</b> low (1) uninformed(1) working 3i

categories described in italics were not represented in the present study



'**Self reliant**' indicates a dependence on the students' own resources including family, and their ability to collect information without help from the school or from colleges. Self reliant is divided into three sub categories:

**Independent** - indicates a confidence in own ability to make a well informed decision, and the personal resources to undertake the necessary research.

**Resolute** - indicates a reluctance to take advice from schools and colleges - even when it is available, and a stubborn determination to find out information alone without seeking assistance, except from their family.

**Complacent** - indicates that the student was very difficult to communicate with and reluctant to listen to advice from outside agencies, relying entirely on their (typically uninformed) family for guidance.

**Maximising** - indicates a determined and thorough search for information from all sources, school, family and colleges.

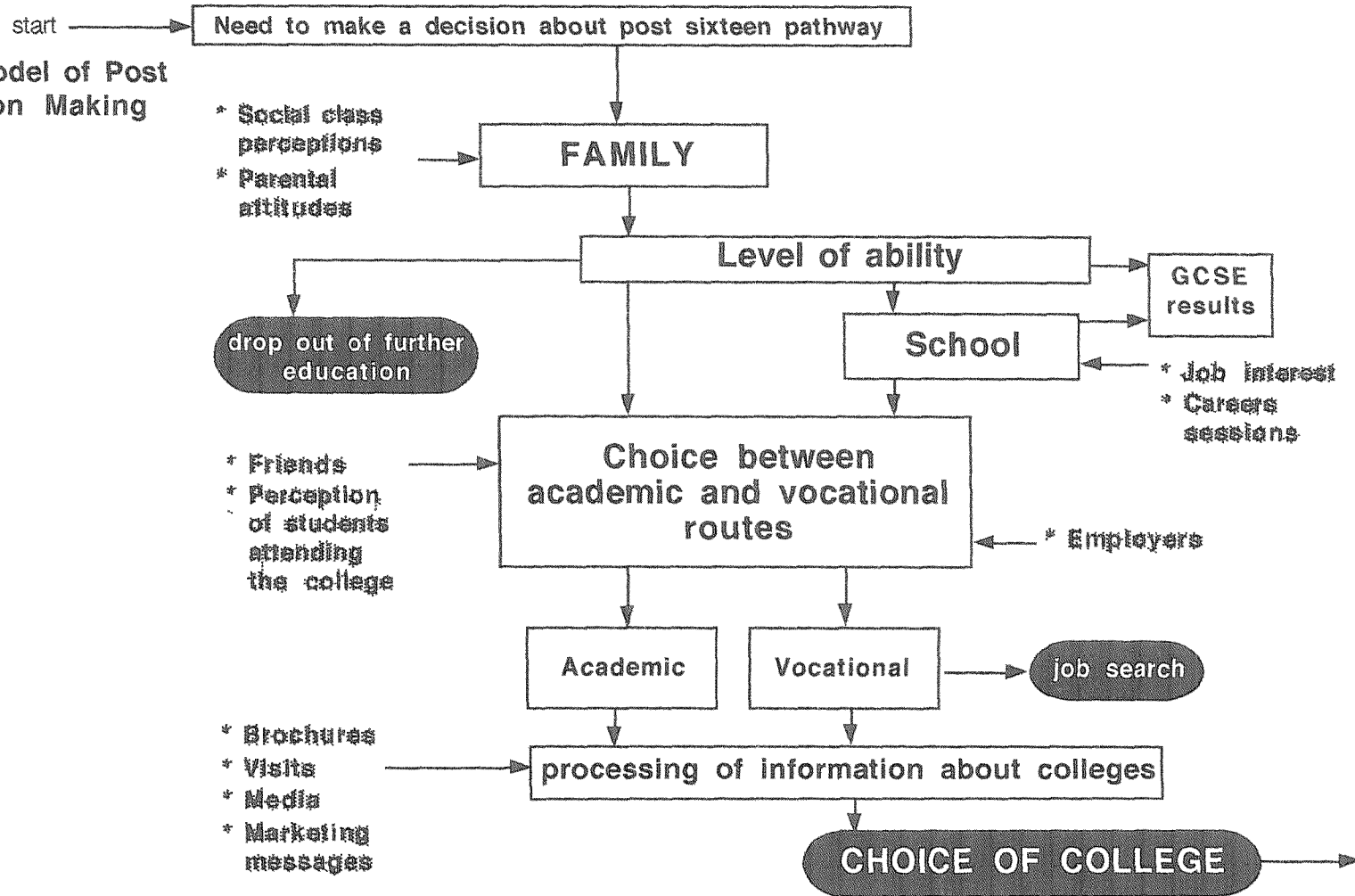
**Compliant** - indicates an acknowledgement that family have not been able to provide sufficient information about further education, or employment, and a great willingness to take advice, especially from colleges and schools, and a dependence on the information provided. **Compliant student decision makers were most in need of marketing attention by post sixteen colleges, especially in view of the commitment to increasing participation in post sixteen education and training.** They had relied on compulsory careers education and college marketing to provide information about further education opportunities, and were very willing to take the advice of teachers and lecturers.

Finally, an **input output model of decision making** is provided in figure 9.5. The model shows that students' followed a pathway towards a final decision based on the influence of **family background**, and **ability**, together with **school achievement** in the early stages. The decision to pursue an **academic or vocational pathway** is made within social and cultural parameters. Schools were influential in providing information about colleges, which together with the **style of decision making undertaken** by the students, (see figure 9.4) affected the final choice of post sixteen pathway.

Marketing Post sixteen Colleges

Figure 9.5

Input Output Model of Post Sixteen Decision Making



In the final 'refined search stage' of decision making, sixteen year olds were involved in processing information provided by colleges. Access to information was affected by the school they attended, and the style of decision making they employed, but students also revealed biased views about colleges when quoting promotional information. The effect of bias in marketing communications and information processing, will be discussed in the next section.

### **9.7 Effects of Manipulation and Bias in Marketing Communications**

In this study, direct questions which attempted to discover why students selected a particular college were likely to yield statements and slogans which had been presented to potential students in the marketing information provided by colleges. The view that producers use marketing techniques to react more sensitively to consumers' demands, ignores the extent to which consumers are persuaded to value the factors which producers have identified as desirable. 'Supply creates its own demand.' (Donaldson, 1992) : 156) **'Grapevine' messages proclaiming students' preferences are frequently a distortion of the information provided through marketing activities.**

The findings of the present study emphasise the significance of promotion, and public relations. Marketing slogans which worked effectively, in terms of being quotable, were those which describe particular, and **distinguishing strengths**, and provided **succinct justification of the benefits of choosing** a post sixteen college. The promotion details sent out by the sixth form college offered clear ready made justification for students making a choice in favour of the college. Students practised 'post hoc justification' by quoting marketing information to support their choice. The promotional information about the pass rates at the college during the Transition and Expansion Phases in the college's marketing history, implied that the college was achieving the best results in the area at 'A' level. Potential students had interpreted the promotion in this way, although the original

claim was based on the finding that the results were higher than the national average. The 'misconception' continued because it was in the interests of the college to perpetuate this belief. The college effectively exploited the misunderstanding. The biased description of the results was originally provided by the college, but potential students contributed to the exaggerated statement in the long term by **reinforcing** the claim that results at the college were 'excellent', to support their decision to attend the college. **Manipulative claims, and bias in marketing information were perpetuated and reinforced by students.**

**The potential to manipulate information is increased in a market culture, and colleges may contribute to biased communication by emphasising the strengths of the organisation.** Staff need to feel positive about the organisation. They need to believe that the college is improving, and expanding and changing for the better. They need to feel involved, and convey positive messages about the college, because a positive attitude towards post sixteen education and training is beneficial to the system as a whole. The emphasis on positive outcomes, and on the strengths of the organisation may gradually introduce bias into the communication exchange between students and colleges. The tendency for students to emphasise the good points about a college to support their choice, perpetuates this trend. However, the findings of the present study, through interviewing sixteen year olds, **emphasised the importance of providing a wealth of information about post sixteen choices, to enable students of all abilities and social backgrounds to make informed decisions about their future.**

Marketers need to promote the best attributes of a college, not because potential students will be directly attracted to the college by these messages, but because these messages enter the 'marketing communications cycle' and become the stated explanation for the college's 'good reputation' and 'image' in the future, and contribute to the claims that the college is 'excellent' in some respects. However, colleges need to reassess the marketing messages which are circulating in the marketing and communications cycle, though **marketing research, to adjust the**

**emphasis, and gain feedback about the 'image' and 'reputation' of the organisation.** In next section, a summary is provided of key issues in marketing and communications. A checklist is presented to amplify recommendations related to 'marketing research', 'market positioning', promotion, and public relations.

## **9.8 Key Issues in the Marketing of Post Sixteen Colleges**

The introduction of choice, and the free market in education are claimed to

- \* provide a greater impetus to build closer relationships between educational institutions and their potential students;
- \* encourage all those people who have an interest in education to support the 'providers of the service' - or schools and colleges in their endeavours;
- \* prompt schools and colleges to consider the needs, aspirations and expectations of young people, their parents, and members of the local community, in order to foster better communication and partnership between provider, policy maker, and client. (Megson and Baber, 1989)

The findings of the present research suggest that three broad areas of marketing strategy and planning are crucial as a way of responding to the key questions and issues raised by the study. These areas, which are summarised in sections 9.8.1, 9.8.2, and 9.8.3, are;

- 1) Marketing Research
- 2) Market Positioning
- 3) Promotion and Public Relations

### **9.8.1 Marketing Research**

**The potential to manipulate information about colleges is increased in a culture of markets and competition.** Colleges need to evaluate and gain feedback on the success of promotional communications through marketing research, to monitor the development of the college's reputation, as well as to identify new markets. This finding

emphasises the need to maintain regular and 'ongoing', '**marketing research**' including, appraisal of competition, appraisal of the general market environment, demand analysis, and market characteristics. (summarised in figure 9.6)

### 9.8.2 Market Positioning

**Markets have the potential to allocate resources by socio-economic class.** Colleges seeking to reduce inequalities in post sixteen education and training, committed to further education 'for all' sixteen year olds, need to ensure that a number of niche markets are identified, appropriate to local need and labour market conditions, and which are set up to accommodate a range of decision makers in the market. This finding emphasises the importance of **market 'positioning'**, including market segmentation, and marketing mix. (summarised in figure 9.6)

### 9.8.3 Promotion and Public Relations

**Sixteen year olds were unable to give coherent reasons for selecting colleges until they had been exposed to the marketing and promotional information provided by colleges.** Colleges need to provide accessible information for all sixteen year olds, to enable them to make informed choices about post sixteen education or training.

The findings of the present study emphasise the importance of **effective promotion and public relations**, to ensure that **positive** and **accurate** marketing information is entering the marketing and choice cycle. A checklist in the form of charts, is provided in figure 9.6 summarising elements of marketing research, market positioning and promotion and public relations. The main headings have been included as part of the 'Marketing and Communications Input Output Model, (figure 9.7) which provides a unified summary of both supply and demand sides of the marketing of post sixteen colleges.

Marketing Post Sixteen Colleges  
 Summary of Marketing and Communications in Post Sixteen Colleges

<b>figure 9.6</b>		
<b>1 MARKETING RESEARCH</b>		notes
<b>Appraisal of Competition</b>	1) Who are our competitors?  2) What do competitors offer?   3) Why do students choose this college?	<p>Write down the advantages and disadvantages of choosing other colleges. Students need to know the differences between colleges. Visit the open evenings at other colleges and look at the literature provided by competitors. The information will help to identify the strengths of the college, compared with the strengths of the alternative institutions.</p> <p>Investigate and identify major strengths and weaknesses. Find out the reasons that pupils give for applying to the college. These may be justified, or unjustified, and may be true, or a distortion of the truth, but it will be an informative exercise.</p>
<b>General Environment</b>	1) What are the local economic conditions and trends - how may these factors affect demand? 2) Government legislation 3) Political climate	<p>Investigate the socio-economic profile of people living in the local area. What changes have taken place in the local labour market in recent years?</p> <p>Anticipate and speculate in connection with changes in legislation to explore any expected potential advantage to the college.</p>
<b>Demand Analysis</b>	1) What are the characteristics of our current students? 2) How might students' characteristics and qualifications change in the future? 3) Which schools do they come from? 4) Who influences the decision? 5) How many other colleges are students also considering?	<p>Use existing records to monitor the profiles of students who go through the organisation.</p> <p>Monitor the achievement of local schools or schools which are likely to provide potential students in the future, to ensure that appropriate courses are considered for their needs.</p> <p>Find out by using questionnaires or interviews, which colleges applicants considered before applying for a place at the college.</p>

Marketing Post Sixteen Colleges  
Summary of Marketing and Communications in Post Sixteen Colleges

<b>figure 9.6</b>		
<b>1 MARKETING RESEARCH</b>		notes
<b>Demand Analysis</b> cont	6) Where can we find new students?	Are there any compatible groups of students for whom the college could provide, alongside current commitments?
<b>Market Characteristics</b>	1) Market size potential	It is important to monitor the qualifications of students in the area to discover what percentage are suited to the courses offered. If a sufficient 'target group' are not suited to the courses offered, then a more appropriate course could be considered, to meet their needs.
<b>2 MARKET POSITIONING</b>		
<b>Segmentation</b>	1) Identify potential groups of students by segmenting them into categories 2) What segments shall be targeted? 3) How is the course perceived relative to other competitors' offerings?	Students may be categorised by, location, socio-economic background, life style, motivation, behavioural attitudes, age, and qualifications. Isolate and identify groups of potential students, for 'targeting'. Identify essential characteristics which will make the courses particularly appropriate for the target groups of students.
<b>Marketing mix</b>	1) What should be provided? 2) Who is the course for?  3) Where, and when will the courses be held? 4) How will they find out about the courses?	Identify and determine the characteristics of the product, or courses. Determine the profile of those for whom the course is most appropriate, and the 'price' that is, the entry qualifications. Establish the place, duration, timing or commitment, involved, (if necessary to meet the particular circumstances of the target group - eg part time). Establish any unique promotional requirements of the courses, by marketing research (eg, specialist advertising or employer liaison).



Marketing Post Sixteen Colleges  
Summary of Marketing and Communications in Post Sixteen Colleges

<u>figure 9.6</u>		
3 PROMOTION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS		notes
Marketing Communications	1) What kind of information do students need to help them decide to come to the college?	Provide clear messages in promotional communications describing the main benefits of attending the college, and studying on one of the courses. Write down and prioritise all the reasons why the college is better for students, than any other option - including suggestions from current students. The list of reasons is valuable information for those who accept a place, and they will rely on it to convince themselves they have made a good decision. They will quote the reasons to others.
Public Relations	1) Find ways of boosting the self esteem of students who choose the college.  2) Try to involve all staff in public relations.  3) Keep a public relations calendar, which is updated regularly.  4) Maintain contact with feeder institutions.	A day at the college could be arranged to help to provide the information which supports their decision to accept a place. The experience of what it is like to be a student is more informative than telling pupils about the course.  Find ways in which the whole staff could become involved in conveying positive information about the college in more informal ways to all 'opinion formers'.  Draw up a list of times when it might be most appropriate to feed positive information about the courses into the 'grapevine'. Draw up a list of the current events which take place on the calendar to promote the courses. Compile list of additional features which could be added to the current schedule of events, to help promote the positive aspects of college life.  Check when schools are holding careers evenings, and other events. Concentrate on targeting the students most appropriate for the courses offered.

## 9.9 The Marketing, Choice and Communications Input-Output Model

The 'reinforcement' stage of the cycle is the key to effective marketing. Effective marketing relies on an acknowledgement of the preliminary search stage of decision making and exploits the student's need to bolster his or her self image by making a decision in favour of a particular college. Effective marketing also acknowledges the need to **promote and emphasise the main benefits of choosing the college**, to enable students to **vocalise their decision at the announcement stage**, and **feed positive and accurate information into the marketing communications cycle**, by practising '**post hoc justification**', to promote **self appeasement**.

The final model, 'The Input - Output Model of Marketing, Choice and Communications', combining both the supply and demand sides of marketing, is provided in figure 9.7, and moves through six main stages;

- 1) **Predisposition** or prejudiced stance - which is influenced by social class perceptions, family, and peer group culture, and serves as a protection for the self image. Many pupils have effectively made a 'latent' choice at this stage, and information may only serve to confirm or deny this choice.
- 2) **Preliminary search** -which relies on the decision maker collecting informally rumour and hearsay messages, from peers and family and making an evaluation based on self image and social approval, or self esteem.
- 3) **Preliminary evaluation** - including self deception, distortion and denial of negative characteristics.
- 4) **Refined search** and exposure to marketing, promotion and information about colleges, through careers departments, visits to colleges, and access to written information;
- 5) **Self appeasement**. involves using the information provided in the

marketing to support a decision, to promote and to convince themselves they had made a good choice.

6) **Reinforcing**, which involves the pupil in simplifying, and emphasising the best attributes of the college selected, to assist with adjustment to the final decision.

**Stages of reinforcing**; filtering; bolstering exaggeration; denial of negative information; self deception.

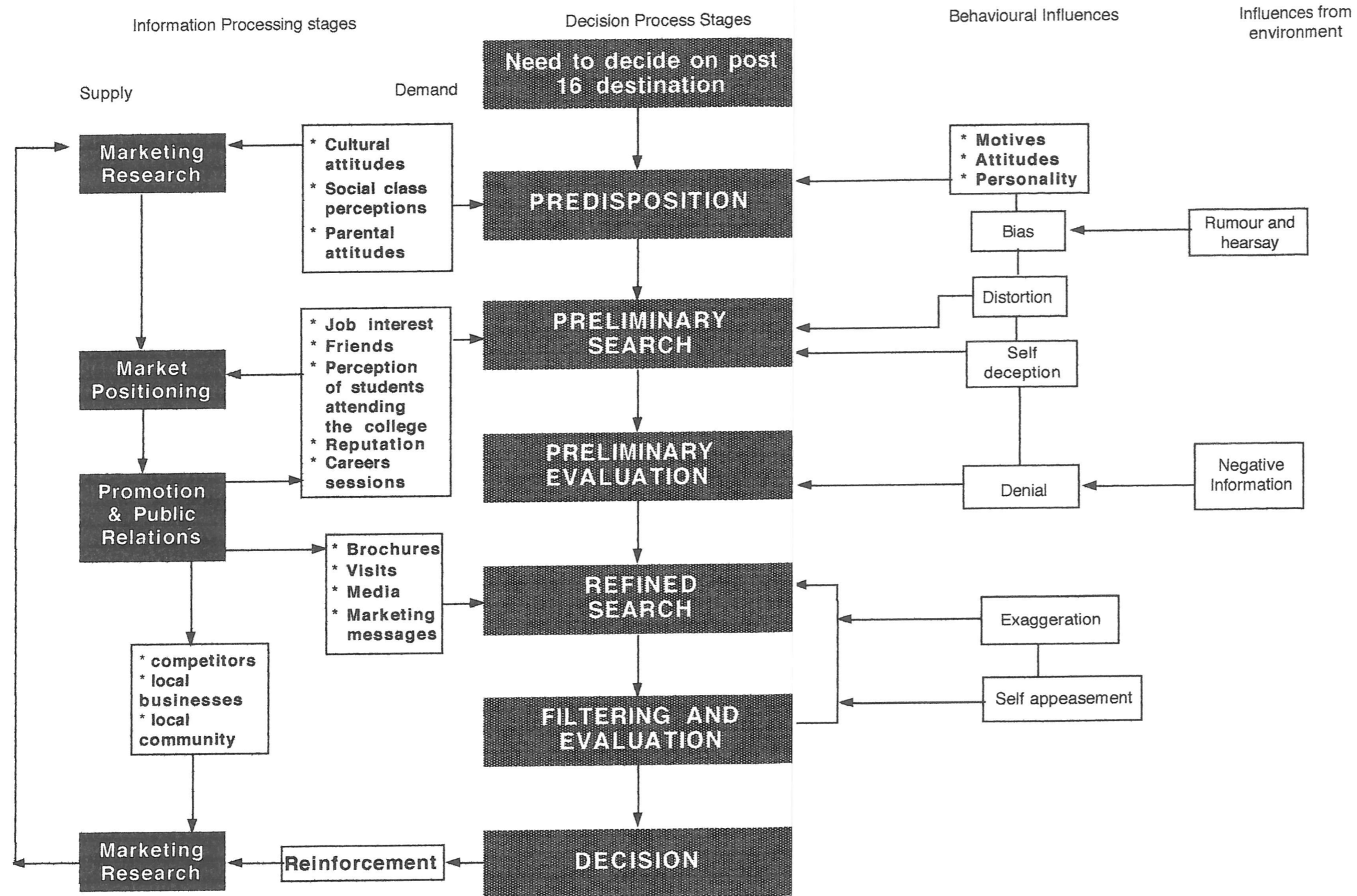
When potential leavers had decided which college to choose they constantly **reinforced that decision** by emphasising only the good points about the college they had chosen to reassure themselves that they had made the right choice, and attempted to deny or distort negative information. Decision makers in the post sixteen market place;

- 1) bolstered or **reinforced** the decision they had made by exaggerating the best qualities of the college they had chosen.
- 2) **exaggerated** these issues to support their choice, and unintentionally introduced bias into marketing communications.
- 3) **denied** negative information about a college once they had finalised their decision.
- 4) **filtered** information by adjusting the 'facts' about a college to fit with their own preconceived idea about that college.
- 5) practised **self deception** - whilst in the process of making the decision, students distorted information to support the choice they expected to make,
- 6) considered the effect their decision would have on relatives and friends when they **announced** their choice.  
(figure 9.7 is provided on pages 294 and 295)

**Figure 9.7**

**Input - Output Model of Marketing, Choice and Communications**

Originally developed from Engel-Kollat-Blackwell's Model of Buying Behaviour (Chisnall, (1968) : 205)



**The reinforcement stage**, is an important contribution to the communications cycle, and provides an important link, in the form of feedback, between supply and demand. Issues which are raised during the decision making process, are emphasised and repeated to other students, friends and family. This repetition becomes a 'grapevine' of information about the reputation of the college, and is often collected as feedback, during marketing research exercises. Exaggerated information relating to the reputation of the college enters the cycle, and contributes to the preconceptions of potential students in the future.

Students need to be given information about the options to help them to find reasons to choose one option rather than another, even though the initial reaction to a college might be based on social and cultural factors. Pupils need these reasons, more importantly, to defend themselves and their choice when they announce the decision to others. Pupils did not work out the positive reasons for choosing a college by themselves. Marketing conveys positive information about colleges, the pupils internalise it, and use it to defend their choice. This positive information is fed into the grapevine, and communicated to younger potential students, to family and friends, and helps to promote the image and the reputation of the college. In this way marketing paves the way for gaining a 'reputation for excellence', and promotes a positive image of the institution in the minds of all 'opinion formers', which reflects on the education system as a whole.

### **9.10 Summary**

This study was concerned with supply and demand side issues of an enhanced market culture in post sixteen education. The supply side issues, provided an analysis of specialisation and diversity, cost effectiveness and social inequality; and a summary of responsiveness, including a 'Responsiveness Continuum Model', (figure 9.1)

The demand side issues comprised both utilitarian and non utilitarian considerations - identified as 'preconceptions, and 'psychological defence mechanisms'. Section 9.6 concluded with a 'Typology of Decision Makers' (figure 9.4) and a 'Decision Making Input output model'. (figure 9.5)

The key findings of the present research are firstly that, the tendency to present biased information about colleges is increased in a culture of markets and competition; secondly that markets have the potential to allocate resources by socio-economic class; and thirdly that sixteen year olds were unable to give coherent reasons for selecting among colleges until they had been exposed to the marketing and promotional information provided by colleges. Section 9.8 of the study presented a summary of the key issues in educational markets, and a series of recommendations for the marketing of post sixteen colleges, summarised under three broad headings, marketing research, market positioning, and promotion and public relations.

The study concludes with a 'Marketing, Choice and Communications Input-Output Model', which highlights the significance of 'psychological defence mechanisms', and 'reinforcement strategies', in the decision making processes employed by sixteen year olds when selecting among post sixteen colleges. The reinforcement stage is a critical factor in the marketing and communications cycle, and provides a crucial link between the supply and demand sides of the post sixteen market.

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## APPENDICES

# **Appendix a**

## Appendix a

### Types of information needed for planning and control

#### I Situational analysis

##### A Demand analysis

- 1 Buyer and behaviour characteristics
  - a What do they buy?
  - b Who buys?
  - c Where do they buy?
  - d Why do they buy?
  - e How do they buy?
  - f When do they buy?
  - g How much do they buy?
  - h How will buyer behaviour and characteristics change in the future?
- 2 Marketing characteristics
  - a Market size potential
  - b Segments
  - c Selective demand
  - d Future market trends

##### B Competition

- 1 Who are competitors?
- 2 Competitor characteristics
  - a Marketing programmes
  - b Competitive behaviour
  - c Resources
- 3 Major strengths and weaknesses
- 4 Future competitive environment

##### C General environment

- 1 Economic conditions and trends
- 2 Government regulations and trends
- 3 Pollution, safety, consumerism concerns
- 4 Technology trends
- 5 Political climate

##### D Internal environment

- 1 Marketing resources / skills
- 2 Production resources / skills
- 3 Financial resources / skills
- 4 Technological resources / skills
- 5 Future trends in internal environment

#### II Marketing Mix

##### A Product

- 1 What product attributes / benefits are important?
- 2 How should the product be differentiated?
- 3 What segments will be attracted?

- 4 How important is service, warranty and so on?
- 5 Is there a need for product variation / product line?
- 6 How important is packaging?
- 7 How is the product perceived relative to competitive offerings?

**B** Place

- 1 What types of distributors should handle the product?
- 2 What are the channel attitudes and motivations for handling the product?
- 3 What intensity of wholesale / retail coverage is needed?
- 4 What margins are appropriate?
- 5 What forms of physical distribution are needed?

**C** Price

- 1 What is the elasticity of demand?
- 2 What pricing policies are appropriate?
- 3 How should the product line be priced?
- 4 How do we establish price variations for a product?
- 5 How should we react to a competitive price threat?
- 6 How important is price to the buyer?

**D** Promotion

- 1 What is the optimal promotional budget?
- 2 How important is sales promotion, advertising, personal selling in stimulating demand?
- 3 What is the proper promotion mix?
- 4 How do you measure the effectiveness of the promotion tools?
- 5 What copy is most effective?
- 6 What media are most effective?

**III** Performance measures

- 1 What are current sales by product line?
- 2 What are current market shares by product line?
- 3 What are current sales / market share by customer types, sales region and so on?
- 4 What is our product / company image among customers, distributors, public?
- 5 What is the awareness level of promotion?
- 6 What is the recall level of our brand name?
- 7 What percentage distributorship do we have in large retailers, medium retailers, small? By geography, customer type?
- 8 What percentage of channel is selling below suggested retail price? What is the average retail price of our product?

Extract from

Dik Warren Twedt, 'Survey of Marketing Research, 1978 Chicago: American Marketing Association 1978. in Marketing Research an Applied Approach Kinneer and Taylor 1983

## **Appendix b**

## **Appendix b**

### **Market Segmentation Categories**

**Locations** or the places where families live, may be used as a factor to identify a target group of clients. Because colleges are familiar with 'catchment areas' this way of segmenting potential students is acceptable to teachers, but perhaps if particular colleges are failing to attract sufficient numbers of students from the immediate locality, there may be a need to identify new target locations and, move into a wider geographical area.

**Socio-economic background.** In order to increase participation in education marketers may need to find new ways of identifying and attracting students from the socially disadvantaged groups in society. The middle class and more socially advantaged groups in society are a more obvious target because they have traditionally participated in post sixteen education without too much persuasion. To engineer the segmentation of people by socio-economic grouping, with a view to attracting students to the establishment because of their social class status, is unacceptable to many educationalists however. Any mechanism which increases social segregation is considered by some to be divisive and lead to the reinforcement of a rigid social class structure throughout adult life. It might be argued however, that the education service itself changes a person's socio-economic grouping. When a student from a working class background enters a college or university, he or she then frequently becomes more middle class - since people are often classified within a socioeconomic group because of their education, and lifestyle. (see Ainley, 1995)

**Life Style** is identified as a category which enables marketers to segment groups of people into potential clients. Attitudes towards education, or the richness of the cultural background which a person has experienced are considered to be valuable guidelines for categorising people into different interest groups. This might mean that colleges would be able to identify target groups who traditionally were indifferent towards education, or less inclined towards further participation in education. Alternatively, knowledge



of the kind of lifestyle people enjoy might provide an insight into ways in which the college or the school could offer flexible programmes, and thus enable a new segment of potential students to participate.

**Motivation** and inclination to opt for further education and the reason why an individual chooses to participate, is an important consideration - especially in further education. The motivation might be for example, further career development, the need for specific qualifications, or the pursuit of a leisure interest. In some areas, perhaps there would be a good supply of mature learners, or potential students working in a similar industry, to provide a growth in numbers especially when the college is perceived as providing for the needs of students in particular field.

**Behavioural attitudes** as a determinant of market segmentation, in commercial terms, is likely to emphasise for example, the buying habits of individuals, and the ways in which these issues might offer insights which would help with distribution or desirable attributes of the product concerned. In this way the marketer is able to make judgements about suitable sites to locate the service, and consider how frequently customers take advantage of that service. In a college it might be possible to identify a group of students who are not mainstream sixteen to nineteen year olds on 'A' level courses, but have different needs, and who make up a large enough segment to warrant a separate approach and different courses. Potential students could be identified by their attitude to education, for example, those who are essentially interested in gaining a particular skill to enable them to gain work in an expanding field of employment; or by their insecurity about returning to education after a long break from employment and from study. **(Adapted from Kotler, 1982 :217)**

## **Appendix c**

## **Appendix c**

### **Marketing Strategy and Planning**

Wilson claims that a typical marketing plan will contain a statement of the current position and programmes relating future courses of action to corporate objectives. Amongst the details of a marketing plan one would expect to find the following:

- an analysis of the company's present position;
- a statement of the basic assumptions made concerning environmental changes;
- a position audit showing the company's market strengths and weaknesses;
- a series of specific targets derived from the above analysis;
- a production programme giving details of launch timetables;
- a promotional programme;
- a price programme;
- a place programme detailing channels to be used for servicing each segment;
- any additional information covering organisational matters, and a summary statement of marketing objectives. (R. M. S. Wilson : 53)

#### Marketing strategies

*Modifying the product*, the college could alter its attributes to bring it closer to this segment's ideal college.

*Altering perceptions of the product* - The college could try to alter student's perceptions of where it actually stand on key attributes.

*Altering perceptions of the competitor's brands* - The college could try to alter student's perceptions of where a leading competitor stands on different attributes.

*Altering the attribute importance weights* - The college could try to persuade students to attach more importance to those attributes that the college happens to excel in.

*Calling attention to neglected attributes* - The college could try to convince students to pay attention to an attribute that they are normally unaware of, or indifferent to.

*Shifting the ideal product* - The college could try to persuade students to change their ideal levels for one or more attributes.

(Kotler, 1982 : 248)

## **Appendix d**

## Appendix d

### Responsive Organisations

The determinant factors :

#### Characteristics of a Responsive Organisation

*Customer philosophy* - does management acknowledge the primacy of the marketplace and of customer needs and wants in shaping the organisations plans and operations?

*Integrated marketing organisation* - is the organisation staffed to carry out marketing analysis, planning implementation, and control?

*Adequate marketing information* does management receive the kind of information and quality of information needed to conduct effective marketing?

*Strategic orientation* Does management generate innovative strategies and plans for achieving its long run objectives?

*Operational efficiency* Are marketing activities selected and handled in a cost effective manner?

(Kotler 1982 : 23)

# Appendix e

## Appendix e

Ely et al., list a series of

### **Questions that helped in the planning of interviews:**

- 1 What do I know about the interviewee? What should I know?
- 2 How will I gain access? What explanations will I give? What assurances of anonymity?
- 3 How will I begin my questions? Rule of thumb: start with questions that the interviewee will feel comfortable with.
- 4 How will I be able to influence the choice of the physical setting for the interview? Will there be sufficient privacy?
- 5 How much time should I request?
- 6 Will I use a tape recorder? Strongly recommended. Obtain permission by describing efforts to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Mention sharing the transcript, if this is reasonable. Tell this person where to reach me.
- 7 How will I conclude the interview? What opportunity will I provide for clarification? How do I make arrangements for a follow up interview?

(Ely et al, (1991) : 59)

# Appendix f



## Appendix f

### Interview questions Interview 1

Date March / April 1992

Age 14

How many brothers and sisters do you have, are they older? younger?

What are they doing at the moment - working, school?

Do you have two parents?

Do you live with both of them?

What do you know about your parents schooling ?

Did they pass any exams, 'O' levels or anything like that ?

What jobs do your mother and father do - do they work ?

Where do you live - very far away - how do you get to school ?

What kind of house do you live in ? Do you own it? ? or rent it, do you know?

What subjects are you taking at GCSE?

Which ones did you have to do - that everyone had to choose ?

Have you any idea how these are graded - are you taking GCSE in all of them ?

What is a 'pass' grade?

Is the grade you aim for in each subject based on you as an individual or for everyone as a group this grade you are aiming for ?

Which subject are you best at ?

Which subject do you like ?

What grades do you expect to get in each subject?

**Interview 2**

June 1992

School  
Name

- 1 What job interests have you had in the past?
- 2 Where do you think your ideas ideas originated?
- 3 What job, or career do have you in mind now?
- 4 What qualifications are needed?
- 5 What will you do immediately after your GCSEs?
- 6 What qualifications are needed at this stage?
- 7 Will you take general subjects or to study for a specialist job?
- 8 Would you consider  
A levels?  
BTEC?  
City and Guilds?
- 9 What sort of career prospects do you think you would have with...  
A levels? BTEC?
- 10 Which types of post 16 route have you looked at so far:  
Colleges? -  
Schools? -  
Training for a job? -
- 11 Are there some things offered which you consider, unsuitable options?
- 12 Who have you spoken to?  
Read up on anything - brochures?
- 13 What do you know about,  
H Technical College?  
S - FE College?  
Getting a job straight from school?  
G - Grammar School Sixth Form?  
H - Sixth Form College?  
P - Sixth Form College?  
A - Tertiary College?

**Interview 3**

October and November 1992

Have you found out about any more colleges since I saw you last ?  
Where ?

Have you found out any information about job training since....?

Have you decided what you intend to do in September next year, after your GCSEs?

What?

Have you a second choice if you don't meet the requirements? What?

Why have you chosen this course?

Was there another course you could have done elsewhere?

What do you like about that particular college? (course)

What do you know about:

the facilities?

the teaching?

the course itself?

the class size?

reputation - anyone you know there?

H College?

/ S College?

/ HS College? are there any alternatives?

Why have you chosen NOT to go there?

Colleges, HS /S /H offer the same course as X, why is X better?

OR

If you don't get a place on the job training you hope for what will you do?

Do you know which colleges offer these courses? H College, or S College, HS College?

Why have you not looked at this option ?

Would you consider going to S college, ? or H College? or HS College?

What do you know about the success other people have achieved in what you want to do?

Is the course good at getting you what you want? Does it matter to you?

How sure are you that you will be able to get to the next stage?

-a job? -university? college?

**Interview 4**

Interview March 1993

School  
Name

Do you have a clear idea now of where you will be in September?

Do you feel you have a choice? or one option? Might you change your plans?

What would cause you to change plans? Results any ideas?

What do you now think are the main reasons you chose this course, college, school above any other options ?

What do your parents think about this choice - would it have been their first choice for you do you think?

When did your search for somewhere to go in September end? Are you still looking and considering or have you stopped looking?

Tell me all the positive reasons for the choice you have made: list them

What problems do you see with this choice, are there any negative considerations - list them

Who provided you with this information, teachers, parents, booklets, friends?

If I want to find out how you get on in your exams in the summer, could I phone you at home? NUMBER

September plans ? Phone? visit?

**Interview 4 questionnaire**

Negative ,neutral or positive

Reasons why prefer chosen college:

Examination results

Discipline

reputation

single sex

brother and sisters went here

size of the school sixth form

boys and girls

teachers very good

travel to school

facilities at the school, college

parents want you to choose this option

other pupils in the school or friends

academic bias

caring friendly atmosphere

buildings, attractive well kept

wide range of courses

effect of open evenings

good, etc. teachers, or not

dress and behaviour of others

school uniform

academic or practical or vocational

facilities in a particular subject

elitist, or not taking pupils 'like you'

clubs or sports activities

chance of going on to course etc.

close to home

## Interview 5

### Sixth Formers Questions

You said originally that you always intended to stay here and not go to another college.

- 1 Are you pleased with your choice of 6th form, staying here, any regrets?
- 2 Noticeable differences in the 6th form, new combination of people.
- 3 Gained or lost by others leaving -  
socially - results better or worse - class sizes and relationships in subjects  
opportunities clubs etc. gained or lost by losing pupils? Whole idea of joining sixth form better because others left, or worse
- 4 Other establishments in the area do send leaflets to the school. Do you take any notice of anything they send. Do you look at information provided by Sixth Form, H Sixth Form? What is your perceptions of who the college is for, what sort of people, whom does it suit? Local state pupils, other independents school pupils, who goes there?
- 5 S- college send out literature, whom do you think they are aiming at?
- 6 P - Sixth Form college is very close compared with H - . Does anyone here consider going there? For whom is this college appropriate?
- 7 Why is H- better than P - Sixth form College?  
do you know their results? Do you know that they also do A levels.  
No-one talks about going to P - why not?
- 8 Do you think that boys who leave leave because they think that somewhere else is better than GGS. The results here are good.
- 9 But they would be treated as an adult at many other colleges, S - , and P -Sixth form, and they also offer the A level subjects they need.
- 10 Did you ever feel at any time that because others were looking around for somewhere else to go, that you were being complacent merely staying here, or do you think you have always seen the strength of your position. Strength or weakness to stay.

## Final Interview

December 1993  
Questions

- 1 Are you pleased with your choice of college at 16+ Any reservations at all about whether it was the best choice?
- 2 What is the greatest advantage about coming here. What do you like most about H-
- 3 Is there anything that you think they misled you about -  
results?  
friends?  
extra curricular opportunities?  
what other people here are like?  
are they like you?  
size of classes and the college?  
hours spent in subjects, and help you are given?  
choice of subject available?
- 4 When I met you before you were very enthusiastic about going there instead of other places, do you still recommend it as highly? Anything about the college which is not what you had hoped?
- 5 Specific any discrepancies taken from own testimony of previous interviews., by asking for clarification
- 6 What should the college tell people about do you think?
- 7 Are there people who you think have come here who don't fit in, or for whom the college is inappropriate?
- 8 Where did your friends go, how are they getting on in comparison?
- 9 Do you believe you would get the same results wherever you went or do you think that you can get better results here, or are you concerned about getting lower results than you are capable of in any subject?
- 10 How do you view the open evenings at H - now that you are a student here?
- 11 What is the best thing about coming to this college ?
- 12 Is there anything you are not happy about, at this college, something you hadn't realised before you came here?

# Appendix g



## Appendix g

### Interview Report

*Name* Peter

*School* town comprehensive

*Date* May 1992

*Age* 15 Smartly dressed in school uniform, well groomed young man with very close cropped black hair. concentrates hard on the questions. Self assured but quiet spoken slight regional accent.

*Brothers and sisters.* One brother at junior school. Locally.

*What are they doing.* School.

*Do you have two parents.* Step - Father and a mother

*Do you live with both of them.* Yes.

*What do you know about your parents schooling ?* Both parents attended local state schools.

*Did they pass any exams, o levels or anything ?* Don't know about their schooling at all.

*What jobs do your mother and father do ?* Taxi Driver. Used to be in the Navy. Petty Officer Rank. Mother looks after younger brother, no job. Mother worked as a sewing machinist for a company. Not working now.

*Where do you live, very far away, how do you get to school ?* Walk to school takes about 20 minutes.

*What kind of house do you live in ?* Terraced house, own the house.

*What subjects are you taking at GCSE?* English, (Set 1) Maths, (set 1) French mixed ability. Double Science, (top set)

*Which ones did you have to do, that everyone had to choose ?* Geography, PE no exam, Computing, Art (don't like computing)

*How did you choose them ?* dropped, D and T and I should have done it. I don't like computing. Its different from what I expected. I chose it although I didn't know very much about computing.

*How did you choose computing then.* Teachers talked about the subjects, and I chose Computing because it sounded interesting. I talked to someone who was doing the subject, I didn't talk to parents, or other teachers. I think I should have talked to the teacher concerned on my own. D and T I got on quite well when I did it in lower school. There's not enough materials in D

and T - wood or metal or plastic and stuff. There's plenty of machinery. I can't change now it's too late.

*Which subject are you best at ?* Art

*Which subject do you like ?* Enjoy PE but would not like to do an exam in it. Just enjoy games.

*What do you consider is an acceptable pass ?* C grade or higher. I think a C is a pass for everyone it's not just a grade I'm aiming for.

*Are you likely to get a C in all these or not ?* Not in Computer studies. probably a D

Art - (rejected Drama and Dance - didn't like these, and I am good at Art so I could get a good grade. I like Art but I don't like the lessons much. I like to do my own work not the teachers lessons. Grade C or higher. PE not exam. Would not want to do exam. RE is not a GCSE but we take an hour. Geography, or History, Get on better in Geography than History. Asked Geography teacher, parents supported did not advise. Double Science - could get better grades out of double want to get the best grades I can. Better people do double science. Want good grades in order to get a good job. Should get a C or higher for both sciences. French - don't like French but a language in compulsory. Might even get an E. Took French from first form. Maths - should get a C or above. and English C or above. Should get seven out of nine at C or above. Below four is disappointing. five would be acceptable. Want to be a car mechanic. Need four grade Cs at GCSE. Don't like school, not interested in the subjects, get bored easily although I get on alright with the subjects. I would not get bored with car mechanics.

## Appendix g Interview logs

### Interview 2 - June 1992

School private school

Name Alec

*I want to ask you about colleges, to find out if you have been to visit any or found out more information about the ones you might go to next year. Last time I spoke to you, you had heard of some of them, but not collected any information or been to visit any. You said last time I spoke to you that you were interested in studying 'business' or maybe languages.*

We have had a visit from 6th form College, FE College, C...s, Technical, and Alton. During careers we have a speaker. Tomorrow the Principal from 6th form College is coming in. We had an evening when three came in together and gave us leaflets.

*Tell me what you think of each of the colleges now.*

Well FE College and Technical don't only do 16 - 19 years olds, so I don't think they would give enough attention to someone under 19.

C... is fee paying and 'er, can't really afford it. ...too much like staying at school. I'd like to go to university and it would be too much of a difference to go from there.

6th form and A... (tertiary) are to better ones. To me 6th form is better because its nearer than A...

*Is A... as good then, apart from the journey?*

Yes. From what I remember they are similar, they offer the same, and I could go the either. I didn't go to the A... open evening but I went to 6th form open evening about a month ago, and had an interview yesterday. I've got a place. When I was at the open evening they arranged the interview and I filled in an application form later before the interview.

*Does that mean you won't look at other possibilities now then, now that you have a place there?*

Well yes, because I could always change to other subjects if I want, I've got a guaranteed place. I want to do Maths, Chemistry and Business Studies or Economics. They suggested double Maths. I went to the open evening and talked to all the teachers, and they helped me sort out my subjects. I've got to get four GCSE passes.

*How did you find out about the open evening?*

From Mr... (careers teacher) here, I went with my parents. I chose the subjects myself, and talked to them about it. I went round the stands, and talked to teachers and sorted it out.

*Have you found out about any other colleges you want to go to, any prospectuses or brochures?*

I have ones from FE College and Technical College. I looked through them to see whether they did the subjects I want - Maths and Chemistry. When I went to the open evening at 6th form, I hadn't thought about doing business studies but that came from talking to the teachers.

*What did you think of the facilities there?*

Well I knew about the college because I visit it three times a week to play hockey. I know people who go there as well. They say its good. I know people doing Maths, and Business Studies. I found out about the results as well when I was there.

*Were you looking to find out about the results?*

Well it was in the prospectus. I didn't look for it. They were on a board as well.

*Did you get results from any of the other colleges at all?*

When they came here I don't remember them telling us anything about their results. No.

*What results do you expect to get at GCSEs?*

Higher group for French. 'A' for French, German, 'A', Physics, 'B' or 'A', Maths 'B/A' Chemistry 'C' or 'D' but that was based on a test which was a low result.

*So tell me mainly why you are going to 6th form rather than A..... FE College, or Technical.*

Well they have mainly 19 year olds so they can give more attention to that. There are no adults there on the courses. I know some people who go there and say its a good college, and I also know a teacher there.

### **February 1993 Interview 3**

*Name* Stuart

*School* Private

*Have you got somewhere to go in September*

Yes, I have a place at 6th form, I'm going to 6th form College.

*Do you have a place anywhere else?*

Yes I have a place at FE college as well.

*Whats the main reason why you prefer 6th form to FE college?*

Because I would rather do 'A' levels instead of BTEC.

*So does that mean then, that if you can't do A levels at 6th form, because of your results, that you will go to FE college?*

Yes.

*What results do you have to get to go to 6th form to do A levels?*

Four Cs or above at GCSE in any subject.

*So, if you get four Cs or above you go to 6th form? If you don't get that, you won't go to 6th form and do something else, you will go to FE college?*

Yes. If I don't get my four Cs then I could go to FE college to do BTEC, or I could go to 6th form and do something else.

*Can you do 'A' levels at FE college?*

No, they only do BTEC Design, they do 'A' level Design (& Technology) at 6th form. I would rather do A level, but I need four Cs. I prefer to do 'A' level design.

*Parents preference.* They don't mind what I do.

*When did you stop looking for a place.* Just before Christmas when I had interviews at both places. When they showed interest in me, I stopped looking anywhere else.

*Most information?*

Through 6th form College coming to school and going to the open evenings.

*Main reason for going to 6th form because they offer A level?*

Well, I'd like to go to 6th form anyway really.

*Examination results.*

I have to have higher results if I want to go to 6th form so its better to go there.

*Now, what about the results others have got by going there in the past.* The results which 6th form achieved for their students is better than those which FE college achieved for theirs.

*Is that important. ?*

Well its better to go where the higher.

*In your subject?*

Well FE college don't do Design so you can't tell really.

*Discipline?*

FE college and 6th form treat you roughly the same. Not better at one than the other.

*Reputation ?*

I think 6th form has a better reputation. For getting results in exams.

*class sizes?*

They are about the same in both colleges.

*Teachers ?*

I met the teacher at FE college, I haven't met the one at 6th form so I don't know.

*Facilities ?*

Well FE college is more modern. I don't know about the equipment at either.

*Did it worry you that you met the teacher at FE college, but you don't know the teacher at 6th form, if you are going there?*

No, it doesn't matter.

*Friends?*

I prefer to go somewhere where I will know people, and everyone is going to 6th form.

*Tutorial system?*

Both colleges meet once a week, the teacher talks to you once a week about how you are getting on. They are both the same.

*Buildings.*

FE college is much more modern, its better. And the facilities are new.

*The courses*

Not choosing just by subject, choosing which college I want to go to. roughly the same courses apart from A level design. Both offer sport and clubs.

*Open Evening*

Design teacher showed me round at FE college on my own and answered all my questions, but I didn't see the teacher at 6th form Open evening.

*Image?*

Sounds better to say I go to 6th form rather than FE college. Well, if I was talking to someone, I would think more of them if they said they were going to 6th form. Because its more academic. Whereas FE college offers more everyday courses.

*Higher Education.*

Same chance of going on from both colleges. *Smaller groups or classes* I thought that the surroundings at FE college was much better than at 6th form. Is much nicer there.

*Will they make you work harder at one rather than another?*

The BTEC course is a one year course. So they make you work much harder at FE college. He told me that.

*Did that put you off the course.*

No. Not at all. But they do make you work harder at FE college.

### **Final Interview - at 6th form College**

**November 1993**

*Name - Emily*

*From - the private school*

*Interviewer - Well here you are then, what's it like here?*

Oh, I really like it, its really good.

*Are you pleased you came here?*

Yes, I am definitely glad I came here.

*What do you like most about it?*

Everyone mixes really well here, its really friendly.

*Did you expect that?*

No, I wasn't that sure, I didn't know what to expect. I didn't really think it would be. There are people from other schools here and they mix very well.

*Is there anything about the college you got the wrong information about, anything different from what you thought.*

Well when you apply they make it sound as though its your choice whether you go to lessons, but its not. If you don't go to lessons you get kicked out. So it sounded a bit freer than it is.

*Is it better that way or would you prefer it to be freer?*

Well its better that way because I probably wouldn't go to lessons if they didn't make me.

*What about results, are they what they said before you came?*

Yes, the results seem to be as good as they said. I wasn't sure about Politics because it was a new subject, and its one of the reasons I came to 6th form

College. But I like it, its really good I enjoy it.

*Extra Curricular*

Thats another of the reasons why I came here rather than grammar school. I play basketball, and hockey and they were able to fit them in. They swapped by groups so that I could fit them all in. There were no clashes with my subjects.

*Mix of people -*

They are more friendly than I thought, there are a lot of people I get on with here, from other schools.

*Size of classes*

Compared to private school the classes are large - I am used to six people in a maths set, larger than I thought, because private school was small classes. We sit differently anyway, in a group more discussion and so its not the same as school anyway.

*How much do they help you ?*

Its nothing like school. If you don't hand your homework in they chase you until you do it, but here, if you don't hand work in they don't chase you, you just don't get a mark. You know so its, different.

*Is that better or not?*

Sometimes its better they don't chase me, I don't think they should chase us, if you don't work by yourself now well, you're not gonna work whether they tell you to or not.

Its good you decide yourself.

*Subject choices available, nothing which disappoints you about the college.....No.*

*Whats the best thing then.....*

The people here (*other students*)

*Questions. You said that you did not want to go to 6th form College, you wanted to go somewhere different. Everyone goes there, the buildings are awful, the atmosphere is wrong.....What do you think now.*

Well I still don't like the buildings, and the atmosphere is better than I thought, now that I know people, we have a really good year group and so its OK.

*You liked the atmosphere at grammar school... but there's no drama, and no sport....and the subjects are too academic.....what do you think now...*

I would still have liked to go to grammar school or boarding school. But here I can do the drama and sport, I really like it, its really good.

*So are you under the impressions that you wouldn't have liked grammar school?*

I know people who have gone to grammar school and they can't do any of these things and they don't like it there.

*Grammar school classes - 7 or 10, at 6th form they are about 15. How you you feel about the class sizes.*

Its OK. I don't mind the larger classes.

*"Its still strict at 6th form, although you get some independence, you have to*

*stay on the premises at lunch time, and you can't smoke..” What do you think about that now, is it true?*

It is quite strict, but at the open day they gave the impression that it is quite strict, and that is true, but then at the open day they said its all up to you, sort of thing which it isn't.

*Can I clarify this, you are saying that, when you came to open evening they gave you the impression it was stricter than it is? No, that it was freer, than it is.*

*Freer?*

Yes.

*So did they give you the impression it was stricter, or freer than it is?*

Well when I came here, I found out that it is strict. Its just that at one open evening talk we had, they said it was up to us, but its not, they are quite strict.

*Which open evening, you have said open evening twice, at one it was strict, at the other they were freer, you said open evening and open day, what is the difference.*

Well we came in for one day.

*in July?*

Yes.

*Induction day?*

Yes.

*So did they mislead somewhere along the way?*

Yes. But its OK.

*You said that 6th form has a really good social life, do you think thats true now?*

Yes its really good.

*What do you mean by that, outside, or inside the college?*

Outside the college, really not the things inside the college. They run a few things, the union run a disco and things, but really its outside the college with people from the college going there, parties and stuff.

*You said that grammar school would make you work harder, especially compared with 6th form. “6th form leave you to work if you want to, they don't make you work hard” Now thats what you said about the college last year, is this true? This view that you work if you want to, does it come from one person you spoke to at open evening?*

No it was a general impression.

*And you said, I would rather have a choice of working or not.....if they make me work hard and I don't want to its not going to help me.....you were rather confused about that aspect even then is that so...?*

What?

*Well this idea that on one occasion they told you it was very strict and they make you work which you agreed with, and then on another they said you only work if you want to, and you seemed to agree with that too, how did you deal with that?*

Well, I wasn't really bothered either way.

My other choice was grammar school and that was very very strict so what ever 6th form was like it was going to be less strict than that. And if it was



freer and everything like you could do what you like, I wouldn't work anyway, so as I ought to work anyway, it doesn't affect me that much, they make me work so that's better really.

*Do you think they should have given you a clearer picture of just what they mean by strict, and freedom and so forth?*

Well maybe they did, maybe I just saw it how I wanted to see it. I don't think they tricked me at all, they didn't mention any particular things, it's just a general impression I got, and I could have got it wrong I suppose. I heard what I wanted to hear.

*So how does this work out now, what is strict and what is free.*

Well I'm free enough to not hand the work in, but I have to go to lessons.

*Are there any people here who you don't think fit in? Older people, or different types of people.*

Only one or two people who don't fit- everyone is the same age. People mix really well. There are one or two who arrived late who don't mix so well, but that's just them really. Most people seem to mix well.

*Do people separate out into different social groups from different school, or different types of people?*

No, not really all the people from different schools seem to mix. Like, there are obviously some who come from the same school, but the groups mix really.

*Would you have got the same results wherever you had gone, or might you have done better somewhere else?*

I would have done better at grammar school. They really push you there, I would have got better results. But then I wouldn't have done my sport or drama. People at grammar school do mostly academic subjects and not sport and drama and things. I might get a grade lower by coming here. But....I like it here now.

# Appendix h

## Appendix h

**Ways of assisting interviewees, (Woods, P. (1986) : 79)**

- 1 Check on apparent contradictions, imbalance, implausibility, exaggerations, or inconsistencies - *'Yes but, didn't you say a moment ago.....?'*
- 2 Search for opinions - *'What do you think of that...?'*
- 3 Ask for clarification - *'What do you mean by that.....?'*
- 4 Ask for an explanation - *'Couldn't one also say.....?'*
- 5 Seek a comparison, in the interests of finer understanding - *'Some others have said.....'*
- 6 Pursue the logic of an argument - *'Does it follow then that.....'*
- 7 Ask for further information where there appear to be holes in the account - *'What about, does that apply to....?'*
- 8 Aim for comprehensiveness - *'Have you anything more to say on that....?'*
- 9 Put things in a different way - *'Would it be fair to say then that.....do you you mean.....?'*
- 10 Express incredulity or astonishment - *Really!.....and does this mean.....?'*
- 11 Summarise occasionally, and ask for corroboration - *'So.....What you are saying is.....?'*
- 12 Ask hypothetical questions - *'Yes but what if.....?'*
- 13 Play devil's advocate - *'What would you say to the criticism that....?'*

(Woods, P. (1986) : 80)

# Appendix i

## Appendix i

### Results Questionnaire

Dear C.....(at School e),

Please would you answer this list of questions for me, to help with my research - I now need to know what your results are, and if you have changed your mind about what you are going to do in September.

1. What **grades** did you get ?                      comment if you wish

English Lang.    E  
English communication    4  
Mathematics    E  
Art            E  
BIS 1        E  
BIS 2        D  
Single Science    E  
Design and Realisation    D  
Social Science    E  
Please write in your answers:

2. Were these results what you **expected**? - Yes, better than expected, yes but.....or No, worse than expected, similar to etc.....

Yes. they were about what I expected except for maths which I thought was low.

3. Have these results affected your choice of **Training to be a Motor Vehicle Mechanic**? Are you still intending to do this?    Yes    where? The Honda Centre

Have you been accepted on a course or job training for certain    Yes

# Appendix j

## Appendix J

### Research criteria

By what criteria should research be judged?

1 Commitment to truth value is represented by concern with credibility, with whether the people studied find the account produced to be true.

2 Applicability takes the form of transferability. The naturalistic rejects 'generalisability' and 'the assumption of context-free laws'. But he or she 'nevertheless believes that some degree of transferability is possible under some circumstances' and 'those circumstances exist if enough 'thick description' is available about both 'sending' and 'receiving' contexts to make a reasoned judgement about the degree of transferability possible (Guba and Lincoln 1982: 247)

3 Commitment to consistency is represented by concern with dependability. Since designs are emergent in naturalistic research, replications is not possible. Instead, the naturalist must seek to assess the effects of research strategies employed on the findings and distinguish these from variations in the phenomena studied.

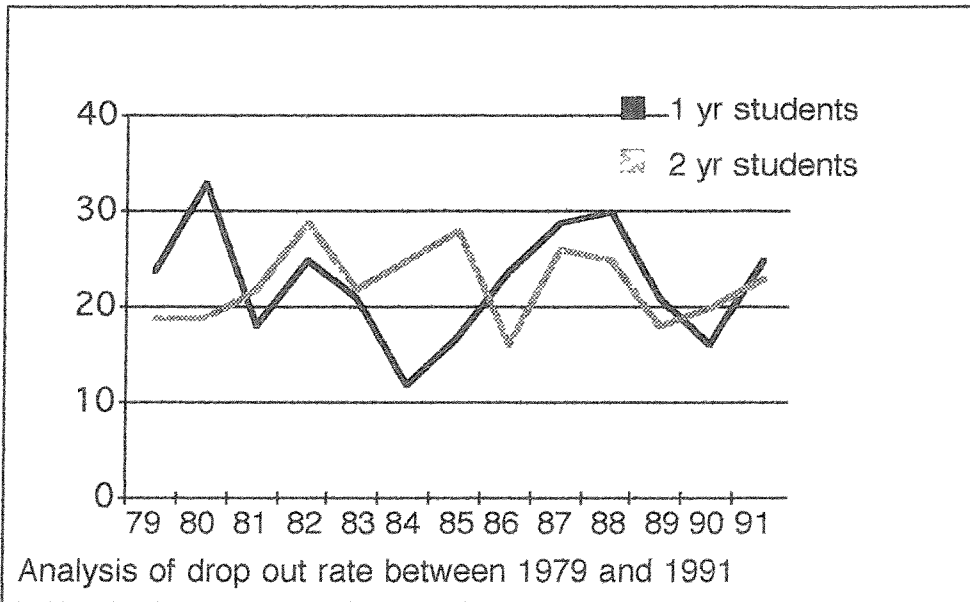
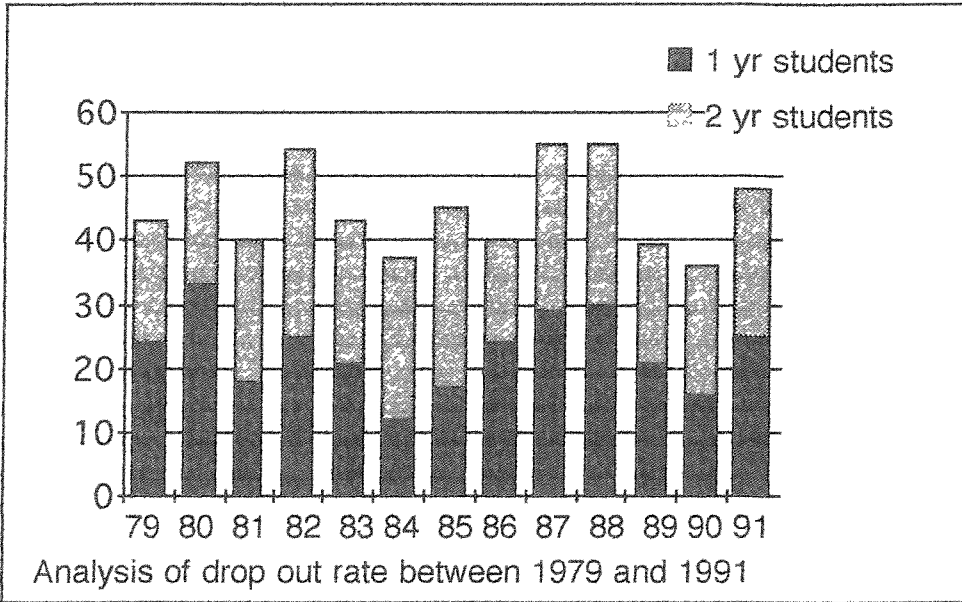
4 Neutrality takes the form of confirmability. The key question here is whether the data are 'qualitatively confirmable'; in other words, whether the analysis is 'grounded in the data' and whether inferences based on the data are logical and of high utility. (Lincoln and Guba 1985 : 323)

(Guba and Lincoln, 1982, 1985)

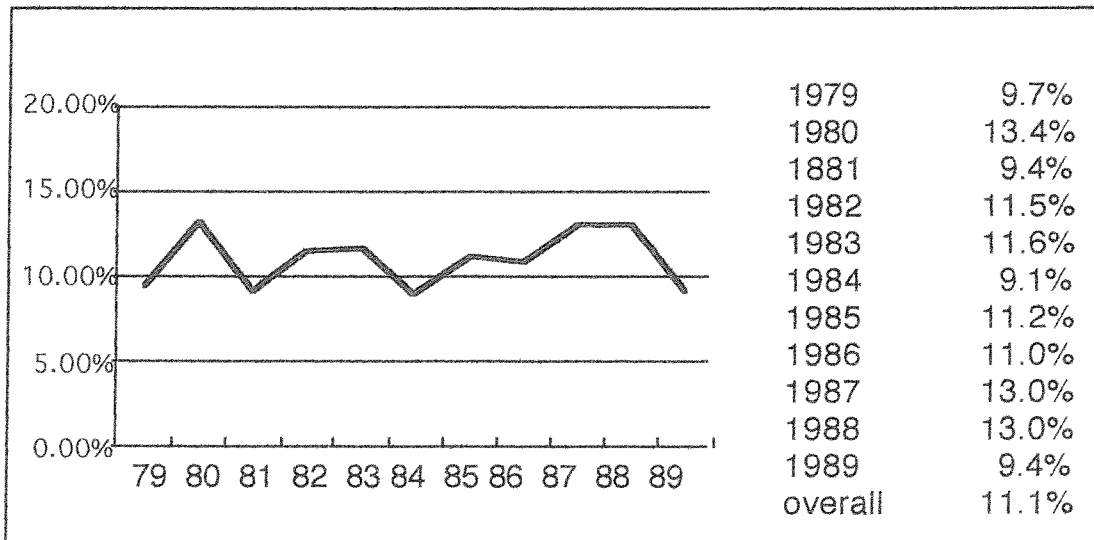
# Appendix k



**Appendix k - Drop out rates between 1979 and 1991**



**Percentage Drop out rate between 1979 and 1989**



# Appendix m

Appendix m. Total number of leavers between 1979 and 1991

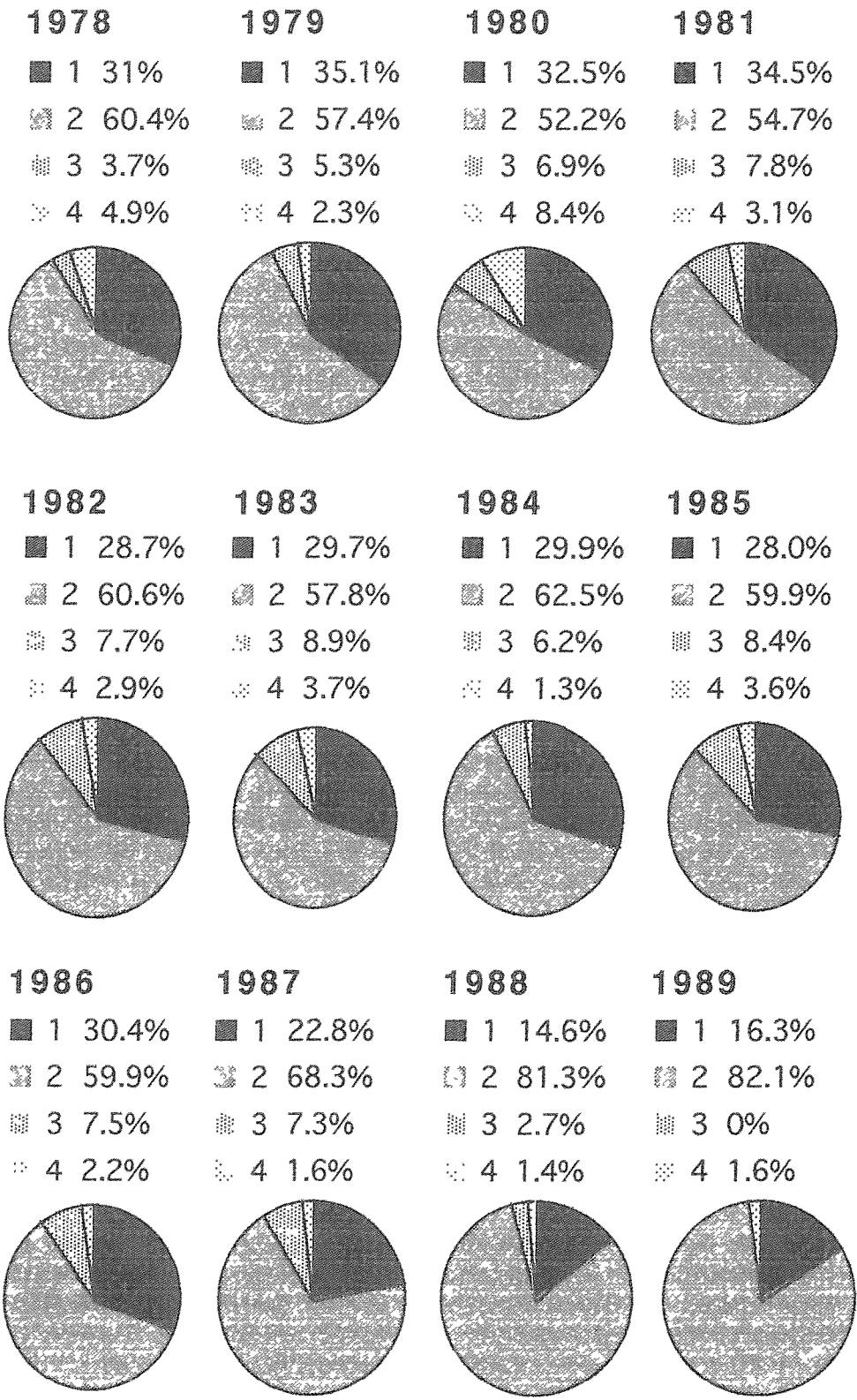
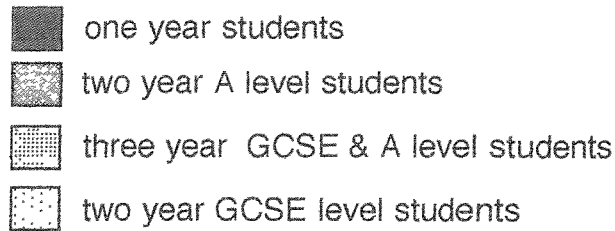
<b>Girls</b>	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
1yr	52	79	56	71	69	44	64	44	40	48	22
2yr (A)	104	107	135	89	109	120	101	112	110	100	151
3yr		5	6	9	12	9	10	11	14	11	10
2yr(G)	8	12	5	24	9	8	9	3	8	6	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>Boys</b>	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
1yr	49	57	50	62	50	53	47	56	58	36	32
2yr (A)	91	91	94	86	112	131	85	120	104	93	101
3yr	8	4	6	12	11	21	22	18	9	19	14
2yr(G)	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	2	6	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>All</b>	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
1yr	101	136	106	133	119	97	111	100	98	84	54
2yr(A)	195	198	229	175	221	251	186	232	214	193	252
3yr	8	9	12	21	23	30	32	29	23	30	24
2yr(G)	12	15	9	28	12	12	12	5	14	7	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>336</b>
<b>G Drop</b>	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
1 yr	16	24	12	12	14	6	8	16	16	11	6
2yr	7	10	10	11	14	13	14	7	16	12	6
Total	23	34	22	23	28	19	22	23	32	23	12
<b>B Drop</b>	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
1yr	8	9	6	13	7	7	9	8	13	19	15
2yr	12	9	12	18	8	12	14	9	10	13	12
Total	20	18	18	31	15	19	23	17	23	32	27
<b>drop ou</b>	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
1yr	24	33	18	25	21	13	17	24	29	30	21
2yr	19	19	22	29	22	25	28	16	26	25	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>375</b>

Appendix m. Total number of leavers between 1979 and 1991

<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>		<b>Girls</b>			
18	20		1yr (G)	627		
158	162		2yr (A)	1558		
12	3		3yr (B)	112		
3	4		2yr(G)	105		
<b>191</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>2402</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2402</b>		
<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>		<b>Boys</b>			
43	36		1yr (G)	629		
142	146		2yr (A)	1396		
15	7		3yr (B)	166		
2	2		2yr(G)	38		
<b>202</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>2229</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2229</b>		
<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>		<b>All</b>			
61	56		1yr(G)	1200		
300	308		2yr(A)	2646		
27	10		3yr(B)	268		
5	6		2yr(G)	137		
<b>393</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>4631</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>4631</b>		
<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>		<b>Girl Drop-outs</b>			
4	7		1 yr	152		
13	20		2yr	153		
17	27		<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>		
<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>		<b>Boy Drop-outs</b>			
12	18		1yr	144		
7	3		2yr	139		
19	21		<b>Total</b>	<b>283</b>		
<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>		<b>Total drop outs</b>			
16	25		1yr	296		
20	23		2yr	292		
<b>36</b>	<b>48</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>588</b>		
			boys	girls	all	
<b>429</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>5219</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>2512</b>	<b>2707</b>	<b>5219</b>

# Appendix n

**Appendix n - Analysis of intake between 1978 and 1990 (by year of intake)**

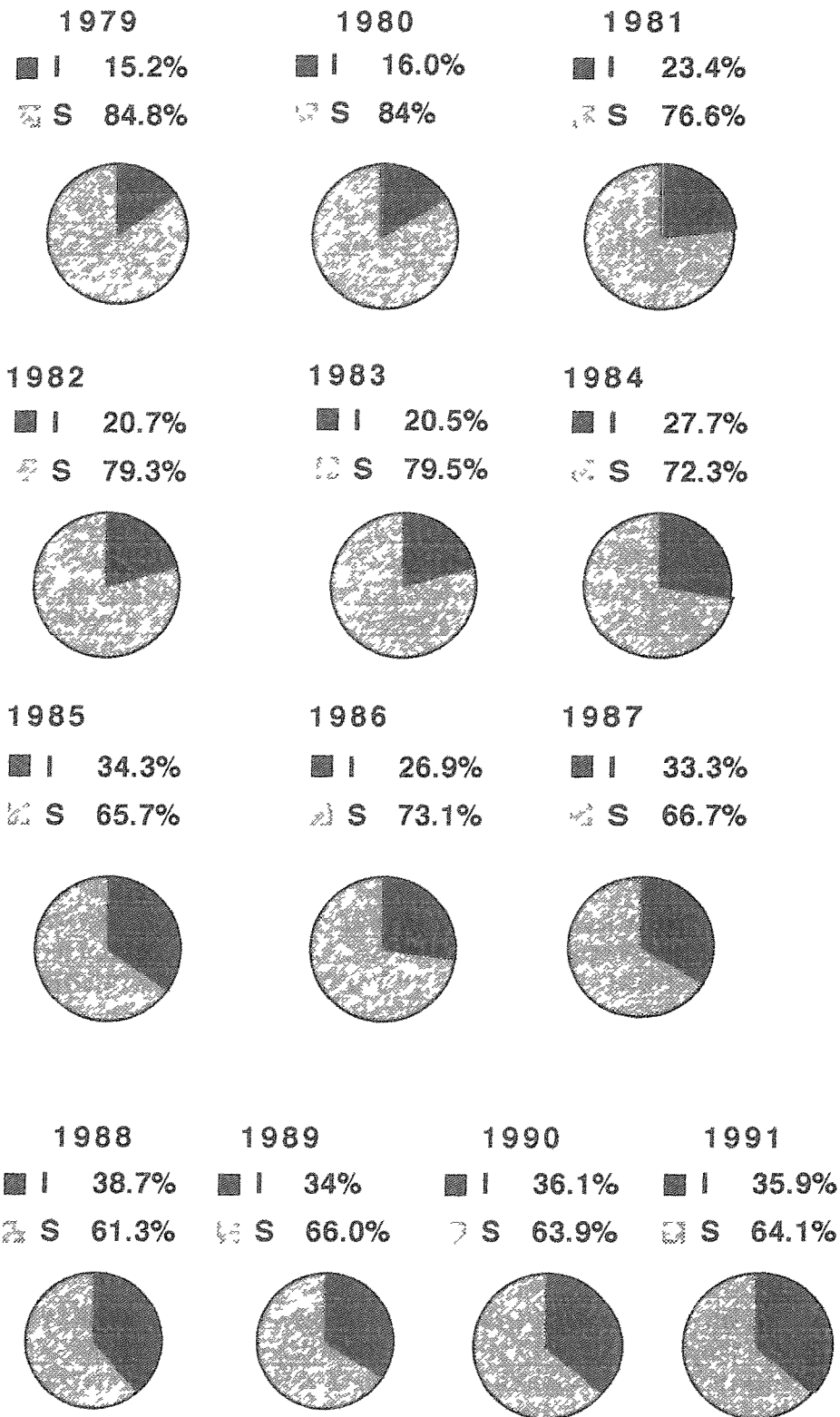


## **Appendix o**

Appendix o

Analysis of leavers between 1979 and 1991 by type of school

I = Independent school      S = State School





# Appendix p

Appendix p - Feeder Schools - by year of intake

Analysis of feeder schools 1977 - 1990 2 year A level intake													
State	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
Bayleigh											3	3	4
Bishop J			2	1					2		1	5	13
Bennett							1	2	4		3	3	
Boer						1	1	2	2	4	2	7	8
Broom	1	2	4	7	5	10	6	3		4	2	3	2
Cows Hill													6
Chad Hi (G)	2								4				4
Chad Hi (B)							1	1	1	1		1	1
Cadplain	13	10	21	8	10	9	7	7	13	5	9	14	6
City Girls				1		4	1						
City Boys					1	2	3	6		4	1	2	2
Crookshank	12	7	30	14	30	17	5	5	6	4	15	16	19
Hilling	9	6	40	27	30	23	21	14	15	7	16	11	19
HMG	91	97	2										
Hemdean	4	1	4	1	4	3	4	5	2	5	14	14	9
Kings													
Maymead				1				2			1	3	
Mile End			1										
Mill Chine	3	1	1		1								
Ottery Park	4	3	7	3	7	6	5	7	7	8	1	1	
Oaks	4	1	4	8	3	9	13	11	15	7	12	22	37
Ponds												3	
Peterton	5	8	8	4	8	7	4	2		2	3	7	8
Portville		2										2	
Princes					1		3	6	4	1	5	1	4
Purwick	3	6	2		5	3	4	2	2	2	4	7	14
Sultans		1	4								1		
Springmead		2	1	8	17	24	19	23	26	17	25	24	16
St Edward						3	5	1	1	1	6		1
St Lodes					1	1		9	2		1		
Stanley													5
Wickfords	4	3	4	4	2		4	7		6	4		
Wibling	8	16	32	39	42	48	26	35	23	24	23	33	25
other state		3		3	4	2	3	3	2	1	5	2	3
<b>total</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>206</b>

Appendix p - Feeder Schools - by year of intake

Analysis of feeder schools 1977 - 1990 2 year A level intake													
Independ	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
Bods	1	2		3	1	2		1	1				
Brit Paris			1			1	3			1	1	9	4
Choir		1				1			3	2	4	3	1
Chumleys		4	14	6	4	9	3	14	13	10	14	13	13
Christy H				1		1	1	1					1
Ditchly			2	1	4	6	2	9	7	6	15	12	7
Lance			2		1		1			2	1	2	1
Littlewick	2		2	1	2		1	1	3	2			1
Mayflower			1	1				1	1			1	
Midlodge G								1		1			
PHS	2	2	5	5	4	6	5	2	12	16	8	17	18
PPS	3	3	7	2	3	10	5	9	10	8	16	12	17
RPS			1		1			1		1			1
Seamead				1	2				1			2	
Swindell													1
St John's		2	1	4	10	14	6	8	9	8	3	6	8
St Marys	1	1	6	5	2	6	7	12	6	6	12	15	13
St Swathes										1			
Upper Ch		1	1	2		2	2	1	1	3		4	
Whykly H		1						2	1	1	3	2	1
Wishers				2									
other Inde	21	9	16	10	14	16	11	14	12	18	12	13	11
convents		3	1	1	1	4	1		2	1	4	3	1
foreign	2		2	1	1	1	2	2	1	3	2	2	3
<b>Total Inde</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Total State</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Total A lev</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>308</b>
%	83.6	85.4	72.9	73.7	77.4	68.5	73.1	65.9	61.2	53.4	62.3	61.3	66.9

**Appendix p - Feeder Schools - by year of intake** (names have been changed)

Analysis of feeder schools 1977 - 1990 Retakes at GCSE & CPVE 1yr													
State	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
Bayleigh													
Bishop J												2	2
Bennett									2				
Boer										2			1
Broom		5	8	6	6	13	11	4	12	4	5	3	
Cows Hill													1
Chad Hi (G)									2				
Chad Hi (B)			2					3					
Cadplain		12	9	2	3	4	5	7	3	4	5	3	2
City Girls								1					
City Boys							2		2	1	1		
Crookshank		12	28	13	14	7	5	2	5	1	7	1	5
Hilling		19	23	20	16	15	10	21	11	11	6	9	6
HMG		8	3										
Hemdean			1	1	2	2		1		2	3		1
Kings					1								
Maymead					1				1			2	
Mile End						1	1			1			
Mill Chine													
Ottery Park		10	12	14	21	22	9	8	7	12	2	2	
Oaks		2	2	5	8	2	4	1	6	7	7	2	4
Peterton			1	4	1	3	2		1	7			3
Portville													
Princes								3		1	3		1
Purwick			1	2	3	2			2	2	1	2	2
Sultans						4							
Springmead			2	4	3	11	5	10	2	2	2	1	3
St Edward		1					1	2		1			
St Lodes		1					2		3	3			
Stanley												1	4
Wickfords		1	2	2	3	5	1	5	3	3	7	3	1
Wibling		16	16	10	29	11	13	20	19	9	12	9	11
other state		4	2	2	2	1	1	1		1	1	1	
<b>total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>47</b>

**Appendix p - Feeder Schools - by year of intake** (names have been changed)

<b>Independ</b>	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
Bods			1					1					
Brit Paris								4					
Choir							1		2	1		1	
Chumleys					1	1	1		3	2	1	1	
Ditchly		1	4	2	3	1	5	5		3	5	2	
Lance				1			1	1			1		
Littlewick		1	2	1	1			1					
Mayflower			1					1	1				
Midlodge G													
PHS									1	2			1
PGS		1				1	3		2	2			1
RPS				1									
Seamead													
Swindell				1	1				1				
St John's			1	2	6	2	3		2	5	6	6	4
St Marys		1	2	2	2			1		1	3	1	1
St Swathes													
Upper Ch						1	1	1	1				
Whykly H													
Wishers													
other Indep		5	7	3	3	7	6	4	5	3	4	1	1
convents				1	1		1	1			1		
foreign			3	4		3	3	1		4			1
year 8 1yr		1	3	3	2			1	1	1	1	1	5
<b>Total Ind 1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Total Stat 1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Total Ind 2</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Total Stat 2</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Total retake</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Total A level</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>308</b>
<b>Excluded</b>	Pupils entering three year courses, two year GCSE courses, & 1 year 'A' level courses												

## **Appendix q**

Appendix q - Student leavers by postal district

Post Code	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89
G09	144	143	123	136	133	129	100	117	117	111	89
G011	69	81	83	85	63	53	76	50	50	39	48
G07	55	62	68	47	57	58	37	50	45	58	46
G010	39	31	25	53	42	47	45	44	37	39	37
G08	22	25	29	24	30	24	27	30	34	30	39
G06	1	11	15	21	40	49	36	32	48	29	43
GR31	12	29	27	21	16	18	11	10	15	9	13
G05	1	1	2	1	9	15	13	22	16	14	17
GR32	1	6	2	6	5	5	3	8	5	3	6
GR30	7	8	8	5	3	2	3	2	3	5	4
GR33	5	7	6	5	4	5	1	3	3	4	4
G016	0	1	1	3	0	0	3	3	4	3	5
G04	1	0	0	0	6	6	5	8	4	4	4
G01	0	0	0	0	3	3	7	5	2	3	4
G02	2	4	2	1	2	2	3	7	4	2	2
G019	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	6	4	2	3
G018	0	0	3	1	2	3	3	1	5	4	1
G03	0	0	0	1	2	5	4	3	2	4	1
G020	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	2
RS3	0	1	2	0	0	1	2	2	1	0	0
G012	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
G013	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
G021	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
G017	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
GR29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
G014	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
G015	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
GR34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1





# Appendix r

Appendix r GCSE (C or above) or 'O' levels - by year of leaving

All	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91
0	71	74	53	69	54	51	48	49	46	30	29	28	17
1	31	36	28	44	34	31	40	22	34	33	9	16	11
2	17	27	32	42	30	24	39	25	29	25	18	18	20
3	27	28	28	30	29	25	33	32	27	28	26	12	20
4	23	37	27	36	28	35	27	28	28	31	25	19	20
5	31	27	43	45	36	35	36	41	36	40	37	33	40
6	32	36	39	34	41	49	37	40	38	42	45	47	43
7	40	44	46	32	47	49	39	39	43	39	50	54	54
8	38	55	37	37	59	54	31	52	42	44	49	72	70
9	34	31	27	26	42	41	29	41	49	27	48	82	101
10	13	13	26	14	15	26	22	32	26	20	29	38	28
11	2	2	5	1	2	6	4	4	6	6	9	8	3
12	0	0	5	0	1	2	1	1	0	3	1	2	1
13	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
total	359	410	396	411	418	428	386	406	404	369	375	429	428
	190	208	228	190	243	262	199	250	240	222	268	336	340
ALL%	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91
0	19.7	18.0	13.3	16.7	12.9	11.9	12.4	12.0	11.3	8.13	7.73	6.52	3.97
1	8.63	8.78	7.07	10.7	8.13	7.24	10.3	5.41	8.41	8.94	2.4	3.72	2.57
2	4.73	6.58	8.08	10.2	7.17	5.60	10.1	6.15	7.17	6.77	4.8	4.19	4.67
3	7.52	6.82	7.07	7.29	6.93	5.84	8.54	7.88	6.68	7.58	6.93	2.79	4.67
4	6.40	9.02	6.81	8.75	6.69	8.17	6.99	6.89	6.93	8.40	6.66	4.42	4.67
5	8.63	6.58	10.8	10.9	8.61	8.17	9.32	10.0	8.91	10.8	9.86	7.69	9.34
6	8.91	8.78	9.84	8.27	9.80	11.4	9.58	9.85	9.40	11.3	12	10.9	10.0
7	11.1	10.7	11.6	7.78	11.2	11.4	10.1	9.60	10.6	10.5	13.3	12.5	12.6
8	10.5	13.4	9.34	9.00	14.1	12.6	8.03	12.8	10.3	11.9	13.0	16.7	16.3
9	9.47	7.56	6.81	6.32	10.0	9.57	7.51	10.0	12.1	7.31	12.8	19.1	23.5
10	3.62	3.17	6.56	3.40	3.58	6.07	5.69	7.88	6.43	5.42	7.73	8.85	6.54
11	0.56	0.49	1.26	0.24	0.48	1.40	1.04	0.99	1.49	1.63	2.40	1.86	0.70
12	0.00	0.00	1.26	0.00	0.24	0.47	0.26	0.25	0.00	0.81	0.27	0.47	0.23
13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.27	0.00	0.00	0.00
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
mean	5.54	5.68	5.55	5.02	5.73	5.68	4.98	5.96	5.62	5.72	6.16	6.61	6.73
Mean 'A'	2.06	2.22	2.25	2.35	2.48	2.41	2.44	2.52	2.63	2.59	2.57	2.67	2.73

5219

# Appendix s



# Appendix t

## Appendix t

### Interview with Vice Principal of city college December 1993 (unabridged)

*Some figures I have, collected suggest that G S School ,which was the school from which they created City College, changed to the Sixth Form in 1984? Is that about right?*

We had lower school in 1984, but I wasn't here. The school worked through. It was '86 I think before the lower school moved up to sixth form level.

*To begin with it was set up as a sixth form for particular schools in the area?*

To begin with there were official feeder schools, the schools lost their sixth forms and were allocated to City College instead. The schools were, City Boys, City Girls, V....., M....., St. I....., K..... , Pr..... Of those, V ....., even when it had its own sixth form, traditionally a very large number of those went to the sixth form college, because it is so near ..... (the town).

My feeling is that the sixth form college was one of the first sixth form colleges, and established itself very quickly. The sixth form college had a good reputation very quickly, and they were attracting a lot of very able students away from their sixth forms as well.

*You had quite a bit of ground to make up when you began in 1984 then?*

I think that - its difficult to comment because I wasn't here, but city school was a very difficult school. It was a mixed comprehensive school - and a very difficult school, very difficult to teach in. One might ask about the strategy of starting a sixth form in a school with such a reputation. There was already a Sixth Form College with a grammar school reputation.

*Where else could students go to rather than here in the sixth form. Whom do you consider to be your main competitors?*

We don't have feeder schools now, anyone can go anywhere. They can go to St. V.....'s Sixth Form College in W....., or the technical college, FE college, the sixth form college. Its open access in all of the colleges. These are the main ones they choose between though.

*How many students do you have?*

850, 16 - 19 year olds, plus some adult education work or so now. We have increased our numbers considerably in the last few years. The numbers when I came here were only four or five hundred in 1989. When we first began we only had the pupils from the schools

- from the schools who had lost their sixth forms.

*How have you increased your numbers?*

We have done it by trying to address the needs of young people in .....(the city). All young people in .....(the city). There would be no point in setting ourselves up with the same kind of image as the sixth form college. Because young people on 'the island' are different from the kind of people who go to the sixth form college. If you look at the school records of schools in .....(the city) they will not be the same as those in nice middle class areas 'north of here', To put it in those crude terms. If you look at those in the A-C GCSE pass rate, in .....(the city) you will see that they are not very high.

*So, you start from the profile of the students within your 'own' patch, or catchment area, and start from that?*

We say that our core market is sixteen to nineteen year olds in ....(the city), and what are their needs? For some of them it will be 'A' levels and we would still regard this as core business - to use marketing speech. There are large numbers of pupils however, who for one reason or another, do not achieve GCSE grades A to C, in city schools, so we need to address that need as well. When I first came here, (1989) the majority of students were on one year programmes, largely made up of retaking GCSEs in one year, or on 'A' level programmes. Forty to fifty percent of those on one year courses would then enter 'A' level courses. Some would take a more vocationally orientated course such as Secretarial. We were very aware though that GCSE retake, and 'A' level did not address the needs of all young people aged 16 to 19. There were young people with talent, whose needs were not met by those particular courses. We needed to look at what else was available for them. We resisted the BTEC route for all sorts of reasons. We were aware that BTEC students were labelled 'BTEC Business and Finance' and thats it. Part of our reputation is based on serving individual needs.

*So, you didn't look at what you were offering, and say this is what we are good at, where can we find people? You said, who are the people we serve, what should we offer to them?*

Yes, what should we provide that will serving their needs. So, GNVQ was exciting, partly because the Business department had been piloting the early courses. They can do these courses alongside their GCSE courses. If you look at the profile in any one year, there will be a third on 'A' level second year, a third on 'A' level first year, but one third on one year courses - so, of our intake every year, about half are one year students - that is a very different profile from the sixth form college who only have a small proportion of one year students. If you have a small proportion its very difficult to address their needs in the same way. GNVQ seems to us to be an answer to these problems for us, we began all five vocational areas in 1992.

*Did this affect your numbers at that time?*

No. I think our numbers were rising for all sorts of reasons. What it did do was provide another focus and maybe get some of the numbers onto courses which are much more suitable. What it really did was provide a better course for the ones who had achieved their GCSEs on their one year retake courses. It means we kept many of our own students, and offer a better course for them, they are not always suited to 3 'A' levels. A combination of GNVQ is better for them.

*What happened to your 'A' level intake during this, have the numbers changed for 'A' level intake since offering GNVQ as well?*  
'A' level numbers are approximately the same. The proportion of 'A' level to one year people is about the same. We did keep about 40 - 50% of our one year students at the end of the year, now we keep about 60%, so its a little better, but its about providing a more appropriate course for them really. The number of GNVQ 3 (advanced) has increase also.

*The total number of students at the college since 1989 has increased considerably though - is this across all courses, or mainly in one area? From particular schools, or from further afield, where have the new ones come from?*

In some ways it is the staying on rate generally, and we have all benefited from that. We have worked very hard indeed to attract students to come here. We have some schools where we have increased our intake for example, St E.....s is an 11 - 18 school, and has its own sixth form. It began with us attracting the ones who had not achieved their five GCSE grade 'C's. We had a number of one year students. Because of that our reputation spreads. Word of mouth is a good way of spreading our good reputation of course. If they get a good deal they tell people.

*So, are you now getting people from St E.....s who are on 'A' level courses as well, who are better qualified?*

We get a lot. We got 30 last year. That is a lot. We have gradually increased our number.

*How does this affect the relationship with St E.....s?*

Well there isn't a relationship. In some ways they just ignore our existence. We have a good relationship with 11 - 16 schools but we are most unwelcome there. We can't go there to speak to them but we seem to do rather well without it.

*Many from the grammar go to the sixth form college and I asked them about why they don't stay in the sixth form, and why they went to the sixth form college, and if they had heard of city college.....*

Well some won't know about us at all. Some will say where? Others will say well they take anybody. We are very up front about our open access, and that is genuine and up front - unlike some similar colleges.....Some try to give the impression they are selective even though they are open access.



*So you lose some because of this open access policy.*

I hope we don't put anyone off. One of our marketing problems is that we do have courses for everyone. In some cases that is a problem. I am very glad that the idea that 'if somewhere gets excellent results, then if I go there I too will get excellent results' is somehow being unravelled. For the last two years, our pass rate has been the same as the sixth form college. This year, it was one percent higher than the sixth form college, but people would not believe that that is the case. The street news is that the sixth form college's pass rate is high. But it is not strictly true. OK, if you want to pick their results apart, they got more 'A's but its the pass rate people are talking about.

*Is that reputation based on the fact that they tell everybody about the pass rate - you don't do you?*

Yes they do. When you have a duff year, then what happens? We have only been half a per cent different for three years, but they don't talk about our pass rate. the sixth form college promote their pass rate as though the others are lower, but they are not, there's only half a per cent difference in all three colleges.

*You don't tell them about your pass rate then, what do you say about the college to encourage people to come here?*

I don't.

*So what do you say about the college?*

Well it depends on the school and the pupils in that school. Our marketing style is far less aggressive than the sixth form college or the FE college. We try to have a close relationship with each school. I personally am against spending the money on promotional material that the others spend. We try to direct our resources as much as we can, and spend the money on the students. Our budget for promotion is not as high as the other colleges. However, if you don't get the students, you don't get the money.

We try to produce very professional material, and we try to deal with students in a professional way. We believe very much in personal contact. We try to deal with the students as an individual therefore we don't use figures and numbers to promote ourselves. We try to look at the needs of the pupils we see in the schools, we visit often and we try to give the impression that we care about them as an individual.

The ground out there has changed. The rules have changed. It is much more open market and open access. We offer our own travel grants now. They have changed the rules so that they only get funds for the nearest, but we offer our own grant for those who come here when another college is nearer, its worth it to us.

*You are not well placed geographically here are you?*

No, there are no 'buses or trains near here. Its a real problem. But

we are getting known. If I can give you an example. M..... is the largest school in the city, and we used to go to speak at their careers sessions. We spoke to all year elevens. We now go with several other staff from each subject, every day for a week and talked to the students in the lunch time, and that was much better. We can cope with the varying levels of ability and with the ones who are interested this way. We don't have the bore the ones who would go elsewhere anyway.

*What other events do you put on for students?*

We offer all the schools in ....(the city) a chance to come in for a day or a half day in the summer term of year 10. A taster course. It gives them a feel of the college, and they get to know some people. There are open evenings as well and they are very successful, they are very positive about open evenings. We work hard to ensure that staff are aware of the importance of the open evenings.

*If your numbers start to drop in the schools who you were set up to serve, what would be the way of addressing this. Would you attempt to find students to keep numbers up by looking elsewhere, do you 'throw your net wider'? Or do you look at the courses you offer - you reached a point like this about 1989 didn't you, when numbers were low?*

If we were not getting the people we were set up to serve, then that's the thing we need to address first. If we lose those people for whom the college was first established, then we will never get them back.

**What's going wrong, why are we not attracting them here, that's what I would ask, and set up courses to address their needs. We had to do that to a certain extent.**

To get back to what we do to introduce them to the college, we have an induction course. They get to know people, they think they're going to be happy here, and that is very important. They say it's friendly and that's what they mean.

# Appendix u

## Appendix u

### Interview with Vice Principal responsible for marketing at the FE college December 1993

*Whom are you aiming at in your marketing? It seems from my interviewing that the pupils are choosing between G.... College, and G.....Vlth Form, and G.... College and G.....Tech.. How do you sort out your position in the market?*

The colleges are all very different, so you could say that although geographically we are not in the middle, educationally we are between G.....Tech. and G.....Vlth Form. We offer 'A' levels and GCSEs, but predominantly 'A' levels, and any student who intends to study one of these courses looks at G.....Vlth Form as well as G.... College. We also offer vocational courses and G.....Tech. don't do 'A' levels, but any student wanting vocational courses will look at G.....Tech. and G.... College, with the exception of Building and Construction, because we don't do that. They all go to G.....Tech..

There are also the considerations of travel, assistance is given to some students. They have the choice at the moment of going to the nearest sixth form college or the nearest Further Education College. But that is going to be changed, they will from next year only get travel to the nearest college. We benefit from arrangements at the moment. For example, blanktown is 8 miles away, and G.....Vlth Form College is nearer. But students get travel to G.... College to do any course if they wish. We have a good intake from blanktown. From September they will only get the travel if we are the nearest college offering that course. This may affect the 'A' level intake.

*Although the numbers may be affected in this way by travel distances though, you seem to be getting pupils for whom it is not the nearest college, and who have made a definite choice to come here rather than G.....Vlth Form, and here rather than G.....Tech., why is this do you think?*

We ask students when they first come here why they have come to G.... College, and they answer a questionnaire.

We realise it is biased because they are keen at that stage, but it is useful. They say, the range of courses is good, and there probably are a good number because of the size of the college. The other one, and this is one I hate, but they always mention it, is that the college is friendly and welcoming and so forth.

*Do you see that as something they compare with other colleges, or are they just comparing the situation with their school or something?*

Well we have to be wary of course, because the only ones we interview are the ones who are already here. So they are biased. But we do need to have reports from the ones who went somewhere else of course. Though students do compare us with what their friends say about other colleges for example. The comments do depend on the experience a student has at an open evening, or an interview or someone they met at a day they spent here. We are at the mercy of the person they spoke to. I am sure they occasionally have a bad experience, but we try to avoid it. I interview people, and so do many colleagues, and they also attend an open evening - which we hold three times a year. Some pupils from some schools spend a day here with staff on a series of courses they have chosen.

People from all the local colleges go into schools, and talk to the pupils. We take ten staff into schools for a whole afternoon, so that there are plenty of people for them to talk to. They often do a 'taster' here, and that tells them a lot about the college.

*The two pupils I followed to G.... College, who started this year, had both attended one of these taster courses. They had not been to a taster course at either G.....Vlth Form or G.....Tech.. city college also hold a day of this kind, but the pupils going there seem to be mainly pupils living close to city college is that true?*

Yes, the city pupils are a different catchment area, we do not seem to attract a great many from that area.

*I still find it difficult to establish why a pupil, from your point of view, would prefer G.... College to G.....Vlth Form, what do you tell them about the advantages of G.... College over G.....Vlth Form, and why should a pupil come to G.... College rather than go to G.....Tech. if they want a*

*vocational course?*

We have proportionately more full time students than part time students compared with G.....Tech.. We also have half the college doing 'A' levels which is an advantage for this age group over G.....Tech., and is more like a sixth form college in that respect. I don't want to be critical of any college but the comment the students make when they compare us is that we are friendlier and we seem to take more care. Especially compared with G.....Tech.. Many students who go to G.....Tech. are there because that is where the course offered, the course which the job requires. They do not choose the college on the same basis.

*What about 'A' level then. I have interviewed people who chose to come here rather than G.....Vlth Form. so why would they choose G.... College, - do you take this comparison into account in your marketing?*

Its much harder. G.....Vlth Form College was a Grammar School. Traditionally a lot of parents went there when it was a Grammar School, or know it as the Grammar School. They attract many more people from the private sector than we do. We don't market ourselves to the private sector though. We are happy to take them. There is a different image of the two amongst students. I have no way of knowing what they say is true or not. Some of the students I teach say that G.....Vlth Form College students are treated like children. I am sure that isn't true! There is also an idea that G.....Vlth Form has a lot of more affluent students than we do. Some of our students feel more comfortable here than they would there.

*Is there a social class difference?*

Yes. Yes, I am sure there is. I have a link with the blank (council) estate schools. S... school, and P... school especially. G.....Vlth Form College make virtually no effort to attract pupils from there. So there might well be children at P..... and S..... schools who think that G.....Vlth Form College is not 'right' for them - though there is a possibility of course that they think 'G.... College is not right for me either.' They often don't even stay on.

*So are you saying that although G.....Vlth Form is their local 'feeder school' and close to the school, and travelling expenses are offered for that institution, that they prefer to come here? G.... College are catering*

*for many pupils who officially are listed as G.....Vlth Form College feeder school pupils?*

Yes, - but they are our feeder schools as well now. We do not have 'our own' feeder schools in the same way, but we take an interest in, and have very close links with many schools close to the college. For example, there are seven or eight 'key' schools in the borough - places like, blanktown, P....., (estate) S....., and G... (town) comprehensive, and several others where we take a good number of pupils.

*Were these schools allocated to any college then at some point, as an official feeder school?*

No. Its a free for all now, and the two colleges G.....Vlth Form and G.... College are only a mile apart, we share the same schools.

*So have you seen an increase in the intake from any particular school or schools recently?*

Yes. P... school (estate comprehensive). A large increase. The difficulty is that we don't know whether this is because of changes at P..... School or, because we have got a good link with the school. There are also more people staying on, because of jobs etc.....

.....There's one school where the numbers have gone down, its a city school, and I think they have gone to city college. It is so often a snowball effect. Two students come here for their own reasons, they had a good experience, and then others from the same school follow. When they get a place, or when they go back to visit they tell a whole class 'its good at G.... College'. So we rely on it - but we can lose them to somewhere else on the same basis. We might lose students just because of one bad experience or something.

*Do you see the combination of offering vocational and 'A' level courses alongside one another as an advantage, rather than a disadvantage?*

*How do students on one course view the ones on the other course?*

*G.....Vlth Form do not offer Vocational courses do they, is this your advantage and their disadvantage, or the reverse, how do you see it?*

I would like to say that we cash in on it, and that it has advantages in attracting students, but I am not sure that in reality it actually does. Most students have decided before they apply what course they are interested, though some do change.

*They make up their own mind before they arrive then about what course they want before they speak to you to get advice?*

Yes.

*What qualifications do they require to do 'A' levels - are they the same requirements as the other colleges?*

At the moment it is 4 Grade 'C' GCSEs - but we are increasing it to 5 next year.

*Why? Does it give a better impression to have higher entry qualifications?*

I think it does but that is not important. But point scores and exam results are vital. G.....Vlth Form College is a successful sixth form college, and our pass rate was only marginally lower than theirs this year. About half a per cent below that's all.

*But you have only been a percent apart anyway in the past haven't you?*

Yes, the pass rates are not very different. However the point scores are significantly different. They have several students who do four A levels which helps, and we have some who take just one 'A' along with Secretarial. This in the past affected our score. Lets be honest though, we have had to change because its now easier in our view for a weak student to get four 'C' passes at GCSE than it used to be at 'O' level, and they find it harder to cope with an 'A' level course. We encourage them to retake or do another course. BTEC National for example. 'A' level still has the status though, and they often want to take 'A' level rather than vocational courses.

*Do you often see people or interview people who in your view would do well here, and for whom your courses are appropriate, but who choose to go to one of the other institutions for their own reasons?*

No. This does not happen, because we don't know any individual sufficiently well. We encourage the ones who are keen to come here or who show an interest and we don't find out about people who choose one of the other colleges. We are a large college and we offer special needs as well to ensure that we cater for all those people who want to come here.



*Do you get your share of the 'good ones' out there?*

We don't. We get a small number. We don't get as many as G.....Vlth Form. We don't get the ones with 8 'A's at GCSE.

*So your getting people with the qualifications to do 'A' level but how would their entry qualifications compare with G. ....Vlth Form?*

They are not as high. We know that. We start with lower qualifications. We get very few people doing three or four sciences like G.....Vlth Form. We are torn a little bit between pushing ourselves as an 'A' level college, and a sort of comprehensive college, and perhaps in previous years we have emphasised the vocational courses a bit too much, this affects 'A' level. We are redressing this balance a little bit and pushing the 'A' level.

*But how does this affect your competition with G.....Tech. - you are in the middle aren't you, how do you compare with them?*

In practice we are less of a competitor with G.....Tech. than we are with G.....Vlth Form. There are a lot of 'A' level students who apply to both G.....Vlth Form and G.... College, and then decide in August when they get their results. Half go to G.....Vlth Form, and half come here. We tend to have about 250 or so a year its been the same for a long time now. Thats fine. Because both institutions are actually quite good.

*So you are competing in the same area are you? You decide which ones are more appropriate for here do you or.....*

No, they do that. They sort themselves out. Not us.....

*So the way you present yourself doesn't sort that out.....*

No. For example, sometimes someone might come for an interview here and out there waiting to be collected are the Downs Syndrome class, they come here every week. Well maybe at G.....Vlth Form they go for an interview and they are not there, the people are different, so they go there.....

*But then, should you have a conscience about those people as well, should you cater for them and for the ones who can get their five 'C's at GCSE? Why do you need to have a conscience about every one at every level of ability?*

I would sack anyone in my department who said that we should not have a conscience about providing for these people too. I would be the first to see him go. We offer more, to a wider range of people. We say 'No' to very few people - maybe to someone who came on a course and did virtually nothing, but we will give virtually everybody a chance.

*But its to do with what you are offering, you are sorting out or providing courses for people of every level is that true?*

Yes, we have special needs, GNVQ at all levels, as well as 'A' level and short courses and evening course for adults.

*Does the variation in levels affect the kind of people choosing to come to this college, and who want the higher level courses?*

Well, we can't be certain that some of the ones in the private sector for example might say 'I don't want to go there, there are hairdressers there - and caterers....' I can't deny that that doesn't happen, but if they say that, then 'stuff 'em' (sic)

I think that may happen. They look at the brochure, and see all sorts of courses that their sort of kids aren't going to do. There are also lots of adults here. For someone fifteen and a bit shy, ' been to R..... school (the private school), its too adult.

*What kind of publicity do you do?*

We have a formal link with each of the schools in city and G.....VIth Form. We arrange 'tasters' in year 10. open evenings in October/ November. We advertise in the News, we also write to every child in year eleven to the home address, and send an invitation to the open evening, and a brochure. One problem you may not have come across - two or three of the local schools have sixth forms - St....., H....., J..... So they won't let us in.

*St..... is very near isn't it?*

Yes, only along the same road, its a catholic comprehensive school. They put horrendous pressure on them to stay. They will not let us near the place.

*Do you get any pupils from there?*

They are happy to let us have the catering and hairdressing ones, but it's the 'A' level they make the fuss about. I had a father in yesterday, whose daughter was at St.... - wanted to stay at St...., but the 'A' levels she wanted to do clashed, so she was looking for somewhere else to go to. They were unhappy about leaving, but she wanted to do certain 'A' levels. So we get some.

Here is one of our brochures about the courses - you may take with you. It has details of every course.

*You deliberately produce one brochure with all the courses together do you? Rather than separate the 'A' level from vocational?*

Yes, we run both sorts of course here and see no reason to separate them when sending out promotional material. People need to see what we do.

# Appendix v

## Appendix v

### Interview with Vice Principal responsible for marketing at Sixth Form College November 1993

*Have you defined who the people are whom you are aiming at here. Not everyone, of all ages. for example....Whom do you target in your marketing?*

A level and GNVQ level 3.

*Age group only, or all ages.*  
Targeting 15 to 16 year olds.

*All the marketing you do is aimed at 15 - 16 year olds exclusively?*  
Well no. We target parents, through media articles, - parents of 16 year olds, or any other opinion formers. For example, I mean careers and guidance service people. We wine and dine them here. We hope to invite the college and school careers officers here as well, but we might have to invite them here one at the time. We hope to influence all opinion formers. Teachers in schools, heads of schools, our own staff.

*So you are targeting all these people with a view to gathering 15 or 16 year olds here. You don't anticipate having any customers who don't fit into that category?*

Yes, but these are our - what I call, 'core' customers. We rely on these.

*The 15-16 age group whom you target, you partly do through media, and speaking the teachers in schools and careers guidance counsellors, do you only spread yourselves around the whole local area covering all schools, evenly or do you target certain schools.*

I have a list of how many people have come here from all the local schools, and kept lists of these figures over the last three years. Actual figures of recruitment, the numbers of A-C grades with the number of year 11 in each year group in each school. (provides the list)

*So here for example they had 136 people in Cowplain year 11, and they had 46 candidates who gained 5 or more A-C grades, and 14 of those pupils came here. So are you saying that you are aiming at attracting only these candidates, the candidates who gained 5 or more GCSE grades A - C and you are not interested in the others?*

There is no doubt about it, the 14 we got were not all in the GCSE 5 or more grades A - C category, but there is no doubt about it, the course portfolio is heavily geared towards A level, and therefore, these people are our target market. The GCSE retake course people are residual.

*So what do you do to contact those 46 people at Cowplain?*

Those specific 46 very little. They would get a presentation from a link person. The whole 136 get that talk. Nothing specific for the 46.

*So what about the 90 others. The ones who will not get 5 GCSEs grades*

*A-C? Do you believe that these people are outside the target market?*

Yes, Because we have decided on our niche market, we have our course portfolio. and they fall outside that. From a strict marketing point of view I am not concerned about them.

*And you don't feel that you should be offering anything for this group of people?*

No.

*Is someone else, in this market then?*

The college has developed a successful market position in 'A' level and 'A' equivalent qualifications. Currently it is not in our interests both financially, and from a recruitment point of view to do anything other than what we are doing at the moment. As far as the core customers are concerned.

If we were to go 'down market'.....

*- You see catering for these lower grade GCSE people as going down market.....*

Yes.....we would have a conflict between our existing established 'core' and new business, and our market positioning would be under threat. At the moment, its not under threat because it is very clearly identified by our customers where we stand in the market.

*Now I know from my interviews, that you also have a number of pupils from the Grammar School. They are not on this list.....*

No I have a further list, that is only the state school list.

*Are you able to gain access to these independent schools. are you prevented from gaining contact with these pupils?*

Schools with sixth forms of their own do not give us access to their students. We cannot visit or speak to them. But we seem to have more pupils in some cases from schools where we do not have a 'link' person.

*Why do you think that should be.....*

It's the 'over the hill' syndrome. That familiarity breeds contempt, and they are attracted to something further away and not imposed on them.

*So how do you get through to these independent schools - does it make a difference to you if they don't have a sixth form of their own?*

Yes. D---- for example are easy because they do not have a sixth form and they have to offer them somewhere. The year groups vary though. One of the key factors is the size of the year groups. For example D---- has a small year group in the next fifth and this will affect us. I keep a record of all applications throughout the year, every year, and see how the numbers of going. I follow them through to completion. I know that some will drop out. I can roughly work out averages for the time of year, and project to work out how many will enrol by the end of the year. We do lose some along the way, and I have an idea of the rate for each school.

*If you find you ought to have say 15 applications, and you find there are only 7 so far, what do you do then?*

Well last year I only checked this, I didn't take any action, I tracked it and kept the figures, because I had no previous figures. I now have last years and this years figures. I can check how many have been interviewed and how many are in process. I can see how our numbers are going.

*So if the numbers from a school drop suddenly, or even overall numbers were showing a drop you could do something could you?*

If I was worried about a particularly institution, then I guess at the moment I would attempt to do something.

*Is it to do with the college here, or to do with their own situation do you think?*

I think that the factors vary why applications are down from any institution. It could be us, or it could be the institution. It might be that for some reason they are sending in later applications. There are a variety of reasons. The recruitment pattern in the schools is bound to change. For example City College are recruiting more effectively this year and that is bound to have an affect.

*Are they marketing within your target area then? Did they not share your market before?*

Yes I think they are. This year they have go the addresses of all the 'kids' in our traditional feeder schools and directed their promotion at them.

*So before they were attracting different types of students from you were they, were they catering for a different market?*

My perception is that last year, they heavily promoted GNVQ and one year courses. This year there is no doubt about it, they are promoting 'A' levels. There is no doubt about it, they have gone for the same students at us this year, which they did not do last year.

*Has that affected your numbers.?*

No, its just that I went to their open evening this year and last year. I went to the careers fair in both years, and looking at the two years, there is no doubt about it, the literature has changed and they present themselves differently and better. They are, from a marketing point of view, they are marketing themselves very well now.

*Do you have any numbers going up in markets you had not been promoting, for example the one year sector, you are not increasing numbers there and in danger of 'moving down' market, by increasing numbers in this area.*

We are not in danger of that. We don't promote this area. The numbers are residual. They are people who came here without knowing what their results would be. There is no attempt to market the one year courses. These people are people who wanted to do A level, and might stay for 3 years.

*If you market GNVQ then do you think that this will change the type of student who you attract to the college, how will that affect your market identity as an 'A' level college?*

I don't think so. Those who want to see GNVQ level in our market will

see it. Others will not see it as significant, and so will not be affected by it. We are not promoting level 2, only level 3. It is the higher level that we are promoting it as an advanced vocational course.

*Are you increasing the number of schools who send people here is the net spreading wider and further.*

No, I think that is fairly steady now. We are not now targeting more institutions. What might be happening is that more people are coming from some institutions now. Places where we only had one or two students are sending a few more. We watch the number with care.

*If your numbers increase from one school for example. Do you think its because you have successfully attracted people away from their sixth form because its better here - is that why they come here and leave their school?*

No. From the interviews we have here, it seems that students coming from a 12-18 school may find that there is a greater choice of subjects, or they may want to go somewhere without the younger children around, they see colleges like this as a better transition between school and university than a school sixth form. Parents have found that the pastoral care at H----- is better than other colleges and they need that. - parents don't have that much influence on children at that age, although some do - especially ones from the private sector where they have often chosen the school for the pupil.

Although we are directing marketing to parents as well, they do not have that much influence. I read what the key factors were in your previous study and I used those in the new brochure. They are on the first facing page, some of those points are ones that you made in the previous study. I have looked at other studies, as well, for example the TVEI study, and I tried to include some of those. We need the parents support more than anything. They feel they need to take a role in choosing where the kids go.

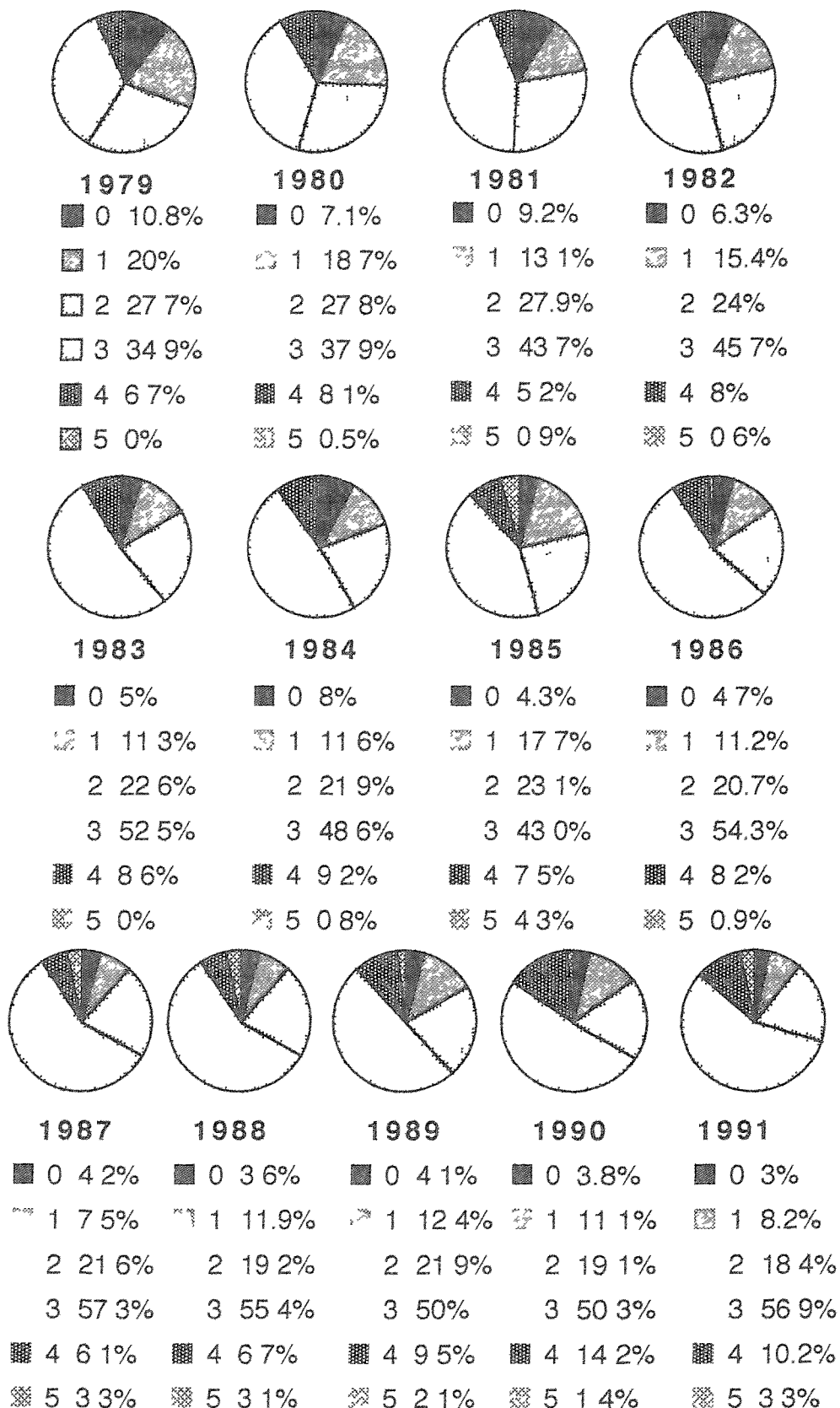
There has to be a multiplicity of messages going out. They are not conflicting messages, but they are actually being received by different people - people who are opinion formers in the future about the college.

All this has to be considered within cost effectiveness. I have given in to ideas others have had this year, and done what other colleges are doing although I don't really believe it's cost effective. We need to be more directed in our marketing, more specific. The essence of good marketing is not being the same as others but being different.



## **Appendix w**

Appendix w  
Percentage 'A' level achievement



# Appendix x

## Appendix x - Questionnaire Summary Sheet

Name Sebastian	
questions	answers
Examination results	HC results helped parents agree
Reputation	<u>POS</u> NEG school and Vith form
discipline	<u>POS</u> more freedom at Vith form
brother and sisters went here	POS NEG <u>Neutral</u>
size of the school sixth form	POS NEG <u>Neutral</u>
boys and girls	POS NEG <u>Neutral</u> girls at Gram
teachers very good	POS <u>NEG</u> Neutral not FE
travel to school	POS NEG <u>Neutral</u> not thought
facilities at the school, college	POS NEG Neutral ?
parents want you to choose this option	POS <u>NEG</u> -Teacher gram, Vith risk
other pupils in the school or friends	<u>POS</u> NEG Vith nearer, not vital
academic bias	POS NEG equal Vith and Gram
caring friendly atmosphere	POS <u>NEG Vith</u> Mother prefers gram
buildings, attractive well kept	POS NEG <u>Neutral</u>
wide range of courses	<u>POS Vith</u> NEG Neutral wider
effect of open evenings	<u>POS Vith</u> NEG Neutral
good, etc teachers, or not	POS NEG <u>Neutral</u> not thought
	<u>POS Vith</u> NEG Neutral
school uniform	POS NEG <u>Neutral</u>
academic or practical or vocational	<u>POS</u> NEG Neutral Acad
facilities in a particular subject	POS NEG <u>Neutral</u>
dress and behaviour of others	<u>POS Vith</u> <u>NEG PGS</u> clothes, long
elitist, or not taking pupils 'like you'	hair POS NEG <u>Neutral</u> both academic
clubs or sports activities	POS NEG Neutral ?
chance of going on to course etc.	not important <u>Neutral</u> but know friends
close to home	<u>POS</u> Sixth positive, hockey pitch don't need school activities though POS NEG not thought, but probably better to be from gramm, its up to me though not the school or college. <u>Neutral</u> but its nearer.

# Appendix y

## Appendix y

### Characteristics of Analysis

- 1 Study and re-study the raw data to develop detailed, intimate knowledge.
- 2 Note initial impressions.
- 3 List tentative categories.
- 4 Refine categories by examining the results of steps 2 and 3 and returning to the entire database of step 1.
- 5 Group data under the still-tentative categories and revise categories if needed.
- 6 Select verbatim narrative to link the raw data to the categories.
- 7 Study results of step 6 and revise if needed.
- 8 Write theme statements for each participant from my best attempt to speak from his or her point of view by linking data in and across categories.
- 9 Integrate findings about each person.
- 10 Compare findings for commonalities or patterns, differences and unique happenings.

(Bussis, Chittenden, Minarel, and Carini (1978), Ely et al., (1991) :150-151)