

**How do attitudes to careers and employment
aspirations differ across generations?**

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Abstract

This research paper seeks to examine the reasons behind people's career aspirations and the decisions they make about careers. Through a series of twelve semi-structured interviews I have identified a range of factors which have shaped the direction of travel in both education and careers. By working with participants from across four age groups, ranging from 11 to 70, I have also been able to identify which of these factors varies across generations and which remain the same.

The factors which affected aspirations and choice of careers could be categorized under six themes:

- Social position
- Family
- Friends and peers
- Teachers and school environment
- The media and role models
- Other factors

The most significant factor in shaping career choice was under the theme of the family. The nature of this influence was complex and involved both positive factors such as encouragement and practical support, and negative factors such as excessive pressure to succeed.

Despite existing research suggesting that friends and peers play an important role in shaping the choices young people make, there was very little evidence of that in this study. Similarly participants felt the media had very little influence on their

career choices, however there was a marked difference in access to the media across the age groups and this presented some interesting findings.

By comparison the role of the teachers and experiences of school consistently influence people for the future although, for the participants in this study the practical application of careers education and guidance appears to have had very little effect.

Perhaps most interestingly the study highlights an apparent incongruence between a continued focus on guiding young people towards making comprehensive and structured career plans, whilst recognizing that for many people the career path they take in life is not rigidly planned but often arrived at by chance and shaped by a host of unpredictable life experiences.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The thesis investigates people's attitudes to careers and employment, particularly how these may have changed across successive generations. Work represents one of the most significant and enduring activities in our lives and education is often seen as a preparation for it. As such, it is important to understand the transition from education to employment – how people get from school or university to their first job and how the consequent path of their career evolves. Changes to the economy, education and society over the last 50 years are thought to have affected the nature of this transition. In particular, young people today are often held to face greater choice and opportunity in their careers; however this is frequently presented as troubling and bewildering. My research is an attempt to investigate people's attitudes to their career choices, how they make or made sense of the choices open to them and how they decide(d) to proceed.

Having spent the past few years working within the 14-19 education system I have become familiar with the development of new curriculum initiatives, enterprise, personal and social skills and careers guidance. The Tomlinson Report in 2004 recommended a host of developments linked to extending options for young people, particularly around choice in relation to vocational education and skills. Following this the Government produced the 2005 *Education and Skills White Paper*, and the *14-19 Implementation Plan*, which set about initiating major curriculum reform, strengthening partnerships across institutions and providing greater access to a much broader range of subjects. We saw the Increased Flexibility programme providing college courses and work based learning provision for 14-16 year olds, nurturing skills and providing alternative pathways for young people. The development of the 14-19 Diplomas was a significant focus for the previous Government, with the legacy still in existence and the first

diplomas now being taught through 14-19 consortia across the country since September 2008. The new coalition Government has just completed a curriculum review introducing greater flexibility in the curriculum and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate. The range of options for young people has never been so broad, and weaving a path through the complex system is an interesting challenge.

The boundaries surrounding the function of the education system and the role of the family are becoming increasingly blurred. The education system is now required to provide life skills, awareness and social development for young people (PSHE), whilst also taking some responsibility for the physical, emotional and social welfare of its students through the introduction of Every Child Matters: Change for Children (2004). The two key drivers behind this initiative were the Children Act (2004) and the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services. This is moving into territory which previously may have been perceived to be the responsibility of the family. Alongside this the family is a changing entity and is being encouraged to interact more closely with education through the implementation of new initiatives such as the Extended Schools Services. The changing remit of the education system and the developing structure, function and position of the family alongside this means that young people's ideas and opportunities are influenced in a number of different ways. The "family trade" and the notion of a "job for life" are becoming increasingly rare and the economy, political and education systems are changing policies to reflect a changing world. My research focuses on comparing two generations of adults and young people (11-18) today through the case studies.

Working alongside industry partners it becomes clear that the skills that will be required in young people in the future for so many of our industries often do not match the skills that young people leave the education system with today. This raises questions around how the transition from education to employment is made

and what exactly is influencing young people today in the decisions they make about careers and employment.

We now live in an age where technology dominates access to information and the media has taken advantage of the information highway to provide young people with images, stories and examples of a host of different celebrities and lifestyles. Awareness and understanding of the world around us is now shaped as much by what is portrayed within the media as it is by real life experiences. Notions of careers and success are increasingly influenced by the media, which has a significant impact on aspirations.

Traditionally the family and peer play an important role in shaping how young people view careers and employment and how they approach the task of career development. We know that many people will have a number of different careers within their lifetime so the importance of transferable skills increases.

The need for access to impartial information on careers for young people was highlighted in the Green Paper 14-19: *Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards* (DfES, 2003a). Following the Education Act 1997 the education system in England has developed statutory careers education and guidance for all young people over the age of 13, which is designed to provide information and support to young people in shaping their career choices and accessing appropriate education and training to reach their goals. The intention is that the curriculum and careers education and guidance now work hand in hand, providing a complete package of personalized support for young people. This has been developed within the Green Paper *Youth Matters* (DfES 2005b), which was based on a complete review of the CEG system within schools.

Careers education and guidance now has to take into account the changing social and economic landscape as well as the influence of the family and media on young

people's lives. So how far is this achieving the aim of reducing the skills gap and how are young people today approaching and making choices about careers and employment? My research will answer these questions by considering how choices are made today, and how they may have been made in previous decades.

The research is based on answering the following question:

How do attitudes to careers and employment aspirations differ across generations?

In order to answer this question I will be examining a number of aspects to this, namely;

Sub-questions

- a) Do people of different generations view careers and employment in different ways?

- b) How far are career choices of people from different generations influenced by:
 - Social position
 - Family
 - Friends and peers
 - Teachers and school environment (including structured Careers Education and Guidance)
 - Media and role models

The research involves the collection of qualitative data from a total of 12 biographical case studies. The case studies will take place with people across a varied age range:

- 3 x Year 7 (11 year olds)
- 3 x Year 12 (16 year olds)
- 6 x adults aged from two age ranges (25-30 and 60-70)

The participants were a mixture of males and females and were chosen using purposive and non-probability sampling based on the themes identified within the research question. The six participants aged 11 and 16 were all from the same school and lived in the same area. This was intentional and designed to limit the number of external variables and therefore allow results to be more easily compared. For this reason all participants were also white British.

The participants all took part in interviews which lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and covered the same areas across all age groups, with some minor amendments to the questions to cover experience of work for the adult participants. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for greater discussion and were recorded using a Dictaphone.

In addition to the 12 case study interviews I also conducted two further interviews with careers professionals. The first was with the Head of Careers from the school that the students in the study came from. The second was with the Careers Guidance Manager working for the Connexions Service in the same area. The purpose of these interviews was to provide some historical perspective on the requirements and content of the Careers Education and Guidance programme within the area. The results of all the interviews were written up according to the themes identified above.

The structure of the thesis

This study and thesis includes the following information. This chapter seeks to identify the source of the research, how it came about and what I intended to

achieve in undertaking it. It summarises my own reasons for focusing on the topic of careers and aspirations and goes on to identify the research methods used.

The second chapter provides a detailed analysis of the literature which already exists on the subject of careers, employment and aspirations. This is a mixture of sociological research, educational research, policy documents and facts and statistics relating to trends over time. The structure of the literature review reflects the themes used for analysis of the data, which enables the key aspects of each theme to be explored in turn. Chapters 4 and 5 then return to these themes and compares the results of my research with those findings discussed in the literature review.

Chapter 3 records the methodology used for the research, recounting the key decisions that were made, particularly around the use of qualitative research and semi structured interviews. Within this chapter I also discuss how the sample was chosen and the reasons for focusing on differences across four age groups. There is reference at the end of this chapter to the need to ensure validity and the caution exercised in making generalizations from qualitative data. I then go on to highlight the importance of ethical considerations, particularly when working with minors.

The main findings of the research are presented in the fourth and fifth chapters. The chapters are split into six sub sections, each of which focuses on one of the themes identified. The sub sections are:

- Social position
- Family
- Friends and peers
- Teachers and school environment
- The media and role models

- Other factors

This section seeks to find interesting and illuminating examples of where each of the themes has been identified as having a significant influence on careers and aspirations through the case studies. Where possible there are comparisons across generations in the data for each theme, and this is related back to the literature review. To provide evidence and support the discussion I have included several direct quotes from interviewees.

Chapter 6 draws together all the conclusions from the research. Again I have been careful to ensure that I recognize that given the nature of the research I cannot seek to generalize, however where my findings support those of the existing research I have indicated that this may support that data. My conclusions summarise the key points from each theme, identifying where factors influencing career choices and aspirations do differ across generations, and where they stay the same. I have then identified where these findings have supported my work and how further research could enhance our knowledge and skills in this field. Relevant references and appendices are included at the end.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Relevant literature selected for this thesis includes existing research on the factors influencing careers and choice based around the different aspects I have studied. This includes a significant amount of sociological literature including work by Foskett and Helmsley Brown (2001) on social class, research by Modood and Acland (1998) on race and ethnicity and findings from a study conducted by Chevalier (2001) on gender influence on career choice in different professions. I identified this by conducting relevant library searches focusing on the main sociological texts. Following this work I then started to look at this question from a more psychological perspective and conducted largely internet based searches for literature on career development theory.

Much of my research was also done using my existing knowledge of key Government documents, including policies, evaluations and exploratory research done to inform decision making around curriculum and careers education and guidance specifically. Through the interview with the Careers Guidance Manager I was able to locate much of the background work done around careers education and guidance.

In the past 20 to 30 years there has been a clear focus on redeveloping and structuring education and guidance to create a stronger workforce and promote greater economic prosperity for the UK. Studies such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) conducted most recently in 2007 by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement indicate that achievement in Year 8 in England is still far below that of Asian countries such as China, Japan and Singapore. As the international economy and marketplace continues to thrive it has become increasingly important for the UK Government to ensure that young people maximize their potential and are guided effectively into filling skills gaps in the work place.

Over the past 50 years employment patterns have changed significantly and Government policy and employment law have developed in response to this, which has in turn led to further changes. There has been a significant increase in the number of women in part time employment. Dex (2003) states that since 1979 the number of families where only the husband works has halved. Women are largely employed in jobs which are an extension of their traditional caring role. Changes in industry have meant a rapid increase in the number of jobs within the financial, business and service sectors and a steep decline in agricultural and manufacturing roles. Figures taken from the official Government Statistics website demonstrate the scale of change in the last 30 years:

Table 1 UK Government Statistics on Employment by Sector

Sector	1978	2010
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	575	449
Manufacturing	6643	2514
Services	16,847	25,320

Figures above are in thousands

(www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/TSDownload2.asp)

The composition of industry and employment patterns at any time will influence how young people make decisions about careers. This is particularly evident in sectors such as agriculture where there is a strong tradition of generations of family employment.

The influence of the family on employment and career choices has also changed in the past 50 years. A number of new laws have been implemented to make it easier

for families and particularly women with childcare and other family commitments to work. These include the National Childcare Strategy which has provided free childcare places and the Employment Act (2001) which entitles parents of young children to flexible working options where possible and has extended maternity leave pay and conditions. The culture of careers and employment has shifted and it is now made possible for women to have careers *and* families, which will inevitably affect how they make decisions about career choices.

As a result of the rapidly changing economic environment, there has been a significant amount of research conducted into how young people make decisions about careers which has been used to inform and structure careers education and guidance in schools and shape educational policy for the future. Much of the research was commissioned by the Government Department for Children Schools and Families (or its predecessor the Department for Education and Skills). This literature review will examine the major influences on career decision making for young people in turn, then identifying how these influences have shaped careers education and guidance and how they have shaped educational policy.

Perhaps the strongest message which comes across through existing research is that young people make decisions based on a complex range of interrelated factors. Some factors are internal and relate to the nature of a particular young person, their own perceptions, ideas and preferences, whilst others relate to specific events, activities or individuals that have directly and overtly shaped young people's views. Hodkinson (2004) conducted research on young people's experiences of education and employment as part of the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and concluded that

very similar barriers or problems can impact very differently on different individuals... some individuals face many more or more severe problems than do others, even those from similar backgrounds and positions. Often

barriers lie outside educational provision, and often they lie within it. (p. 13)

Many theorists and researchers have tried to develop models of decision making to better understand this labyrinth of influencing factors. In order to begin to understand how young people make choices we must first understand what these influences and barriers are, and in what ways they are likely to have an impact.

Career Development Theory

The area of career development has been widely researched from both psychological and sociological perspectives. Sears (1982) states:

Career development is the total constellation of the psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic and chance factors that combine to shape the career of an individual over the lifespan (p.139)

Career Development Theory is a relatively new area of study, developing rapidly since the early 1900s. Parsons was the founder of much work on career development theory, essentially focusing on how the skills of individuals matched the skills required within different occupations:

He identified three elements of career selection as being self knowledge, knowledge of the world of work, and “true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts” (Parsons 1909, p.5)
(cited in Patton & McMahon 2006, p.3)

Rooted in the principles of social reform, much of Parsons work was the basis for the development of careers guidance, many of the key elements of his work can still be identified in today's careers guidance programmes. Understanding

yourself, your own personal skills and abilities, and understanding the requirements of different jobs is evident through activities such as use of the careers database, practice interviews, careers fairs and work experience.

The evolution of Parsons' work was known as Trait and Factor Theories. These theories became increasingly scientific, identifying ways of measuring personality and skills by means of providing a quantitative mechanism through which career suitability could be measured and therefore directed. John Holland is one of the most influential researchers in this field. Patton & McMahon (2006) state:

Holland's work has influenced the development of interest inventories, career assessment, the classification of occupational information, and career counselling (p. 28)

Holland's work is based on the notion that there are six broad categories which individuals fall into, and the same six categories which describe the environments which individuals can work in. These categories are "Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional" (Jones 2011).

The assumption is that the individual should be matched to the environment and success in a job depends on appropriate selection against skills. Whilst this is broadly accepted, there is criticism of this theory on the grounds that this enforces gender stereotyping.

There are also more process driven approaches within career development theory. These differ from the content based theories in that they view career development as an ongoing process which is not completed once you enter a specific career route. This theory is perhaps more appropriate for modern life, given that it reflects the regular change and fast paced development which most people entering the world of work can expect to experience now. This has a knock on effect on the provision of careers guidance, Herr (2011) states:

The possible recipients of vocational guidance have become increasingly comprehensive in the range of problems that they present and in their ages and settings rather than being primarily adolescents in schools or settlement houses, as was true at the beginning of the twentieth century (p.4)

Eli Ginzberg (1951) initially identified three main life stages, each containing difference phases of development which corresponded to specific changes in thought and experience in relation to career choice. Donald Super (1957) built on this work identifying 5 stages (taken from Bimrose, 2011);

- Growth
- Exploration
- Establishment
- Maintenance
- Decline

Essentially transition through each phase was dependent on a number of factors which clearly identified the link between personal development and career development. In contrast to Holland's theory, this model has the advantage of recognising the broad range of factors outside of an individual's skills and attributes which will inevitably affect their views on careers and the choices they make. This could include issues of location and availability of employment for example. There are some who would argue, however that Super's theory does not fully take into account the different starting point which comes from an individual's economic position.

Brown (1990, p.355) also specifically criticises the theory for it's failure to account adequately for the career development of persons from lower socio-economic groups (cited by Bimrose, 2011)

In conducting my research I recognise the importance of existing career development theory, not only in explaining how individuals approach their careers but also how they are likely to continue to change over time.

Internal influences - image, perception and personal positioning

Whilst it is important to realize that external influences are crucial to decision making, it is also likely that in many ways we are all predisposed to certain ways of thinking. These predispositions are shaped by a number of factors including geographical location, ethnicity, parental position and social class. These factors may be historical, in the sense that this is the particular family and geographical position in which we find ourselves. They can also be structural, in terms of the norms and traditions which exist within a society, and they may also be individual, shaped by ourselves and our own psychologies. These influences are not discrete but interact consistently to shape our experiences.

The confidence and attitudes young people have to life and work are shaped by their immediate surroundings and are by nature linked to social positioning.

Hodkinson (2004) found

through biography we develop largely tacit dispositions towards education, work/career... evidence shows clearly that dispositions to education and career are inseparable from dispositions into other aspects of life, including family, friendships, part-time work and leisure (p. 4-5).

From this we can appreciate that young people will all have a different starting point from which they are making decisions. By the time they reach teenage years many of their values are embedded and their perceptions are already shaped.

Foskett and Helmsley Brown (2001) developed a model of choice and decision making in educational markets which began to identify how these predispositions

were likely to affect decision making. In considering social class they noted clear differences in aspirations of middle class and working class children

Broadly speaking, middle class aspirations relate strongly to notions of economic advancement and social status, while working class choice is focused more strongly on the young person's own preferences and the desire to preserve social acceptability (p.3)

This however is not necessarily supported by research conducted by Atherton et al (2009) on behalf of the DCSF. The study of 610 Year 7 pupils identified that "more young people from lower rather than higher socio-economic backgrounds (85% as opposed to 66%), want to go to HE" (p.2). As these individuals are revisited later in the study it may be that these aspirations change, however it does question how far perceptions at age 11 are still being shaped and moulded.

Clearly how a young person perceives themselves and the world around them has a significant influence on how they choose to position themselves within it in the future. Foskett and Helmsley Brown (2001) have concluded that there are three kinds of images which affect young people's perceptions. "Contracted images" are those which are shaped by an individual and by the experiences within their lives. "Delegated images" are those which have been absorbed from those around them, and finally "Derived images" (p.5) which come from the media. I will go on to discuss the influence of family and the media later, however for now it is simply important to recognize that we cannot assume that external influences alone (such as media campaigns and careers education and guidance programmes) will have a universal effect as young people are all uniquely positioned and influence by other important structural factors outlined here.

Social research has often focused on the importance of geographical location in shaping young people's aspirations. It is clear from current research that the

location a child grows up in has significant implications for their future. Atherton et al (2009) identified that

aspirations for higher education differ by geography with considerably less pupils wishing to go from the rural area in this study (p.1)

This may be because of limited awareness and exposure to the range of options available, or potentially a preference for staying local and therefore sticking with what is comfortable and familiar. This theory would be supported by research conducted by Green and White (2007) on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This study involved working with 60 teenagers in 3 deprived areas of the UK and identified that there were very clear links between aspirations and attachment to place,

place shapes people and their outlooks, and how they interpret and act upon what they see. Place identity can be a source of strength, but it also appeals to the parochial (p.4)

If this is the case then we can assume that location can have both positive and negative effects, both broadening horizons and limiting them depending on the situation and the environment.

In considering the image and perception a young person has of themselves, perhaps one of the strongest influences is linked to ethnicity. A person's ethnicity defines them and their position in society and how they see themselves in relation to others. Research has found that young people from minority ethnic backgrounds tend to have higher aspirations than their counterparts, and this is particularly true in girls. Akerman and Morrison Gutman (2008) cited Strand (2007) suggest that higher aspirations in Indian and Chinese students help develop higher achievement; however this was not necessarily the case for Pakistani,

Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean children. Modood & Acland (1998) found similar results in the 1994 Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities. This is also linked to wider cultural and family influences. Allen A cited in Modood & Acland (1998) conducted a survey of British undergraduates from ethnic minorities and found that:

the general consensus was that the family is very encouraging, proud and supportive of ethnic minority students' plans to go on to higher education (p.52)

This is likely to be linked to the idea of promoting or raising the status of individuals and families from ethnic minorities. Migration is an important factor in this research; by virtue of their migration they are likely to be more ambitious. This means in considering educational policy and initiatives designed to raise aspirations we must not consider minority ethnic groups as one homogenous unit, but instead appreciate that individual circumstances and specific identity and histories are also important.

The past decade has seen an increase in initiatives such as Widening Participation and Aimhigher, designed to raise aspirations of young people from lower socio-economic circumstances and minority ethnic groups into Higher Education. It is important that we appreciate here that high aspirations do not necessarily lead to higher achievement, particularly in minority groups. Akerman and Morrison Gutman (2008) suggest that

these complexities indicate that a holistic approach to supporting aspirations is needed which acknowledges both the attitudinal and the practical obstacles to aspirations and achievement (p.5)

If this is the case we also need to understand how and why minority groups can fail to fulfill their potential, recognizing that other parts of society may present a host of other challenges. This might include the role of the media and common perceptions of ethnicity in society, which we will examine later. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) would support this notion, having found through their research with minority ethnic groups that

As subordinate minorities may feel excluded by the larger society they may develop an oppositional culture that counters mainstream value such as high educational aspirations (p. 28)

In the same study Akerman and Morrison Gutman (2008) identify similar patterns in relation to gender. Whilst it is widely recognized that teenage girls, on average, have higher aspirations than boys, statistics prove that this is not translated into the work place as men consistently have the highest paid jobs and on average earn more than women. This could partly be attributed to aspirations, partly to inherent stereotypes within society, but is also likely to be linked to the fact that women take on the majority of childcare responsibilities, often at the expense of the furthering their career. In terms of educational and economic policy we can assume that employment and career progression will not always be a priority through someone's life and that other factors will influence how they plan their futures.

Throughout the research there is a need to identify general patterns in aspirations and achievement such as those stated for gender, ethnicity and location, however it is clear that any findings and future policies also take into account the fact that all children are different and have different personalities, motivations and attitudes. The importance of attitudes and motivations is clearly stated in the literature. In a report produced by Johnson et al (2009) for the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills several key personality traits of young people were

identified as influential in aspirations and success, including interests, attainment levels, confidence, motivation, learning styles and knowledge and understanding of the options open to them. In many ways this should not come as surprise.

Aspirations will generally be developed according to what is achievable. The most able pupils will clearly achieve better and have more options available to them in terms of further and higher education. In addition to this they are also more likely to have better relationships with teachers and therefore better experiences of education overall. The level of motivation a young person has for work and school affects how well they are likely to achieve. This may be because they are more willing to work hard and overcome obstacles to be successful. This implies that there is a perpetuation of higher achievement leading to higher aspirations, which in turn leads to greater achievement and so on. Findings from Akerman and Morrison Gutman (2008) would support this view,

young people who believe they have the ability to achieve and who attribute their success to hard work rather than luck or fate have higher aspirations than their peers (p.3)

Evidently confidence and self belief are essential in forming aspirations. Hodkinson (2004) would also enforce this theory

we possess horizons for action, which enable and constrain our actions....people make sense of and act upon their lives and opportunities within these horizons...they construct their own studentship (p.6-7)

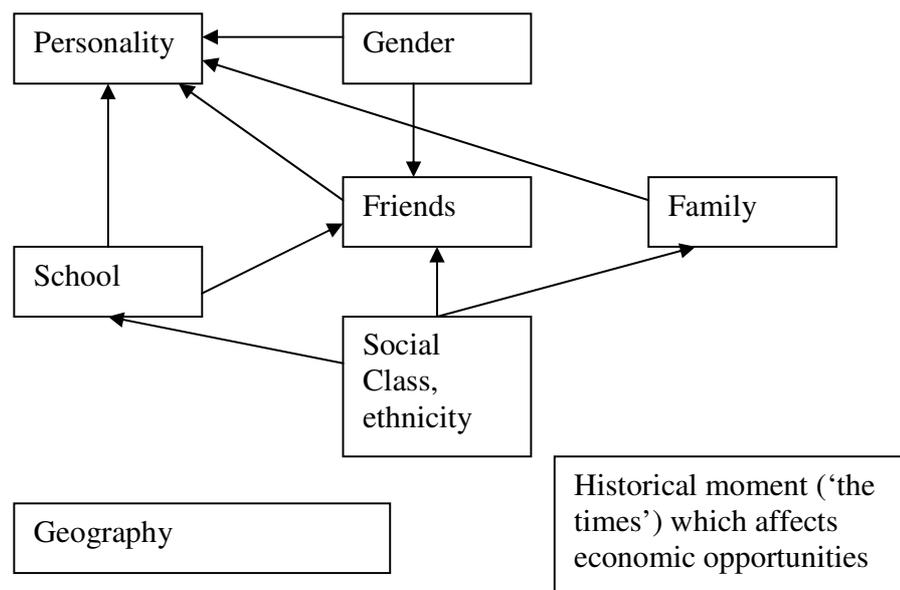
This implies that people shape their futures and their choices based on what they believe is possible. If they are confident and positive about the future and believe they have the ability to change it then their goals will be set accordingly.

The education system in the mid 1900s perpetuated this shaping of horizons through the introduction of the grammar school system. Young people were streamed through the 11 plus tests and it was likely that the subjects they studied and their future goals were shaped through this process.

External influences – family, peers and the media

We have identified that young people are all individuals and as such have different starting points in making decisions about the future. Some of these such as location, ethnicity and gender are difficult to change and influence directly, however programmes such as Aimhigher do strive to balance out some of the potential inequalities. Perhaps of greater interest to wider social, economic and educational policies are those areas where external factors shape personality, choices and decision making. For example the role of the family and friends, school policies, support and careers education and guidance are all key to encouraging and enabling young people to achieve their potential. There are several levels of influence on personality at work here.

Figure 1 Influences on Personality



Alongside this the Government will use these mechanisms and others such as the media to steer young people towards exploring career options which are linked to current economic gaps. For example there have been media campaign to encourage young people and their families to consider options in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Research suggests the single greatest influence on young people's choices is their family. Willits, Anderson, Tait and Williams (2005) cited in Akerman and Morrison Gutman (2008) found that:

78% of parents in the highest income quintile wanted their children to attend university whereas only 43-46 per cent of parents in the two lowest income quintiles had similar aspirations (p.7)

What parents want to see for their children clearly has a strong impact on what they choose to do. This provides an interesting comparison when we consider again the statistics on student aspirations cited earlier by Atherton et al (2009), where 85% of young people from lower socio economic backgrounds aspire to higher education at age 11. We know that statistically fewer young people from lower socio economic backgrounds attend university, therefore it may be the case that parents are influencing decisions between the ages of 11 and 18. In lower income families research has shown that concerns over the financial burden of higher education are significant for parents and this has been shown to cause them to steer their children away from this path. Johnson et al (2009) interviewed teachers to find their perceptions of influences on young people's decision making and found

there is persistent concern amongst teachers that families who are less well off tend to be debt-averse and intimidated by perceptions of the financial outlay required to support higher education (p.25)

In some circumstances families may be a positive, driving influence on young people and in other cases they may limit their horizons. Achievement is the biggest influence on educational progression, and this may be linked to ability or it may be linked to attitudes, or a combination of the two.

Looking beyond further education and considering the workplace and employment, the family does have some influence on career destinations of young people. Chevalier (2001) conducted a study of graduates and found that

10% of graduates are in the same occupation as their father 6 or 11 years after graduation. Males graduating from medicine or agricultural studies are more likely to be followers but the main observable determinants of the decision to follow appears to be father's occupation and education. (p.1)

This clearly demonstrates the importance of parents as role models. Where children feel their parents have been successful and they find their career choice interesting, they may choose to follow this same route. Chevalier (2001) also cites findings from Checchi (1997) that "...for the US, Germany and Italy, half of the intergenerational immobility in income is due to the lack of opportunity in education" (p.4). There is evidence here that those in lower income families are more likely to enter lower income jobs because of limited access to the means to progress and achieve further. In terms of developing policy this has clear implications for breaking cycles of underachievement caused by poverty and limited options.

Ball (2003) cited in Brooks (2004) also indicates that there is a significant difference in the way that mothers and fathers are involved with their children's decision making about the future. Mothers are far more likely to be engaged with discussions and with practical aspects of decision making such as visiting universities than fathers are, and this is particularly true of mothers and daughters. Brooks (2004) also identifies the father's main role is often to be involved in later stages of the decision making process, approving or reinforcing choices.

In considering the role of the family here there is evidence that as well as parents being the main influence in decision making, other family members will also play a key role. Blenkinsop et al (2005) conducted research with 14 and 16 year olds for the DfES and concluded that young people frequently consult with other members of the family when making decisions, such as aunts, uncles and grandparents. They also highlighted the importance of older siblings particularly in making choices on progression within education. They were seen to have some insight and experience which was useful in informing decisions. In this study there was also evidence that the role of the family can be both positive and negative

in year 11 there was a clear belief that 'at 16, family history plays a big role' in shaping expectations and influencing choices. This sometimes posed a problem for schools, whether in terms of expectations that were too high, too limiting or too low (p.53-54)

In shaping educational policy and careers education we begin to see how important it is to educate, motivate and inspire young people themselves and their families.

Throughout their teenage years young people are strongly influenced by their friends and peers. This may have a significant impact on educational choices, although it is less likely to have a direct influence on career choices. When

interviewing teachers, Johnson et al (2009) found that “different student bodies have different social norms and expectations, which can feed through into progression choices” (p.20). This implies that where there is a culture to succeed amongst young people then this will have a positive impact, whereas the opposite might occur if the culture is towards low achievement and low aspirations. In terms of making individual decisions, Blenkinsop et al (2005) found that this was not necessarily the case, and that students had a more measured view about the role of their friends in making decisions;

many young people suggested that, while they talked with their friends about their choices, they did not simply pick subjects that their friends were doing and few located their friends in the centre of their circle of influence (p.54)

In contrast Brooks (2005) identified that friends play an important role in structuring young people’s views of themselves and their position within and amongst their peers. This shapes the choices they make post-16 and is particularly true in relation to choices made regarding higher education. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that some young people will seek comfortable educational options where friends will be, this is not often the case. Blenkinsop et al (2005) identified eight categories of educational mindsets. Within this model only two of the categories would identify young people who were likely to be more strongly influenced by their peers in terms of choosing future paths which were familiar to them, these being “Comfort Seekers” and “Defeated Copers” (p.74). Neither of these categories involve young people with high aspirations and therefore we can assume that where young people follow their peers this will not necessarily enable them to reach their full potential. In developing careers education and guidance this system of categorization is important as it helps identify the kind of support which is most suited to each individual, although we must always be cautious about over generalizing through categorization.

Having identified both the family and peers as key to young people's decision making, we can now consider how far the media shapes young people's ideas for the future. Blenkinsop et al (2005) interviewed both teachers and students about how far they believed the media influenced their perceptions and decisions. Teachers clearly felt the influence was stronger than students did:

Teaching staff made frequent references to the influence of the media, claiming that young people, particularly in Year 9 were motivated by money and glamour. (p.56)

In contrast "few students shared their view of television's influence" (p.56). Perhaps young people were possibly unaware of the power of the media and how significantly it shapes their views about jobs specifically. Popular television programmes portraying the lives of forensic detectives, chefs, police officers and celebrities have undoubtedly contributed to the way young people develop understanding of careers.

This is significantly different from previous generations where such exposure to media and marketing was much more limited. Young people largely learned about careers when they came across them or through family and friends. It could be argued that what they learned then was probably much more realistic than is now portrayed by the media. In turn, it is possible that part of the reason why employment statistics tell us that people change jobs far more frequently is because their expectation about what jobs will be like are not met in reality.

The media does not just contribute to decision making by developing role models. Employers, the government and education providers all use the media to try to influence young people. The Armed Forces frequently use television and radio campaigns for recruitment, as do many colleges and universities. More recently

the Government has started a national media campaign to raise awareness of and promote the new range of 14-19 Diplomas and encourage more young people to study science, technology, engineering and maths subjects beyond 16. Campaigns such as these are likely to reach many young people and will certainly have a direct influence on some.

School policy, education policy and careers education and guidance

Having identified a number of internal predispositions and external factors acting on young people it brings us to question how far the role schools have in supporting and shaping aspirations, achievement and progression can really be fulfilled. We have a statutory national entitlement for impartial advice and guidance for all 14-19 year olds (Education and Skills Act 2008). This is delivered largely by schools and colleges, with the support of specialist external careers advisers from organizations such as Connexions. Schools and colleges are tasked with providing access to information, resources and personal support linked with all aspects of education and careers. This often means developing employability skills in young people (e.g. researching careers and writing CVs) as well as providing opportunities for them to interact with the adult world of work, through careers fairs, work experience and curriculum links with businesses for example. As well as this teachers are expected to nurture and motivate young people, steering them towards careers which suit their skills.

In many schools there are significant challenges which make this difficult, for example where schools have a very diverse ethnic population or have a large number of pupils with learning difficulties. In their study of teachers and schools, Johnson et al (2009) found:

The higher the proportion of pupils with additional needs or requiring higher levels of support, the less time teachers tend to feel they have to focus on broader issues of progression (p.20)

Within this study it also became evident that schools which were in 'special measures' were under significant pressure to raise attainment and exam scores, often at the expense of more tailored support relating to careers and progression. The quality of staff, leadership, school ethos and structure of careers support were also seen to be key to how far schools influenced student's choices.

The mindset of individual teachers in shaping young people's views was highlighted as influential in Johnson et al's (2009) paper. They identified different mindsets which were produced by considering a scale of how proactive/reactive teachers were, along with how far they valued academic and work-focused routes of progression. Essentially "teachers' comments reveal very different assumptions about how significant their role is, and also how appropriate it is for them to significantly influence pupils' progression choices" (p.24). Teachers are different, therefore we can assume that the level and kind of support and guidance they will provide will vary.

Having examined the research, careers guidance professionals have identified the structures within schools which are likely to provide the most significant and appropriate influence for young people. These include having a strong and consistent sense of support through the school, managed and driven by the leadership team. An acceptance that much of what needs to be achieved within schools cannot be done alone by the staff within the school is also essential. Johnson et al (2009) recommend "strong relationships with the wider community including parents and carers, other schools, FEIs/HEIs, businesses and employers..." (p.7). By broadening opportunities for young people to interact with and learn more about the world beyond school, any decisions they make are likely to be better informed.

Sherbert Research (2009) conducted a study recently on behalf of the DCSF, with young people and their parents to identify what they felt about the role of careers education with a view to shaping developments of the national CEG programme. They found “careers advice in schools seems a relatively underutilized resource that does not seem to meet the needs of young people today” (p.2). They also identified what the CEG programme in secondary schools and colleges should be broadly aiming to achieve in each year, namely:

- Year 9 – Inspire, by providing interesting varied information
- Year 10 – Bring it to life, through practical activities such as work experience and mock interviews
- Year 11 – Planning, considering the range of options, both immediate and longer term and mapping a career/progression pathway
- Year 12 – Action, revising plans based on skills and achievements
- Year 13 – Action, finalizing plans by visiting employers, researching options and/or confirming choice of university

Despite the introduction of statutory careers education and guidance it is clear that there will always be variation in the extent to which this influences young people, largely dependent on the way the school approaches careers education and the barriers they must overcome in supporting progression. Hodkinson (2004) states:

Schools and colleges need to be judged against what is possible. They have little control or influence over many of the factors that influence educational progression (p.14)

In comparing this to previous generations, the introduction of statutory careers guidance, and the extension of the role of teachers to provide wider support to young people will inevitably make a greater impression on them and their choices than in previous years. However, when we consider what influences young

people today, the role of the school and formal careers guidance is perhaps small in relation to other factors previously discussed.

In addition to the development of statutory careers education and guidance, the Government has issued a number of revisions to the curriculum, designed to ensure that young people are better equipped to achieve their potential and meet the needs of the economy in the future. This includes greater focus on literacy and numeracy in primary schools as well as developing social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL). In secondary education we have seen the introduction of the 14-19 Implementation plan which has introduced greater flexibility in options at key stage 4, namely vocational options such as BTECs and Applied GCSEs. We have seen the introduction of the 14-19 Diplomas, designed to prepare young people for the world of work, as well as new A-level and GCSE specifications and the new English Baccalaureate. This is an indication that the Government is trying to tailor both supply and demand in education, which in turn will clearly influence the options young people have available to them.

Moving forward

In order better to understand what affects young people's career choices I have examined a number of current pieces of research which have identified key factors both internal and external. What we can appreciate from examining these is that it is possible to recognize some patterns. We know that young people from rural areas are less likely to aspire to higher education, and that whilst children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are likely to aspire to higher education when they are younger, this often does not happen in practice. In turn the family, and most specifically parents have a key role to play in shaping future ideas which can be both positive and negative. Schools and the media are now increasingly drawn into providing information and direction to young people, although the impact of this is variable.

In addition to changes in the education system we can also map changes in industry and patterns of employment. The decline of manufacturing and agriculture and the increase in business, finance and service sectors means that Government policy and careers advice develops to encourage young people to fill employment and skills gaps as they stand at any given time. Opportunities for employment will have an impact on career choices.

Having identified existing trends and patterns, it is also important to realize that the development of a career is a lifelong journey. People do not simply finish making choices, progressing and developing careers in their twenties. Much of what influences us does so throughout our lives as our circumstances, opinions and experiences change over time. By comparing modern research with statistics and data on the social history of employment it has been possible to see how far career patterns have changed - and how much influence the economy and society have had on aspirations, achievement and careers. This in turn has framed the research I have done to help us understand better what impacts on people's choices of careers and how this has changed over time.

In considering the research questions I have attempted to address the factors which have influenced how people will make or have made decisions about their career paths. In breaking this down by theme, I am able to directly compare how these influences differ across generations.

Research question

How do attitudes to careers and employment aspirations differ across generations?

Sub-questions

- a) Do people of different generations view careers and employment in different ways?

- b) How far are career choices of people from different generations influenced by:
 - Social position
 - Family
 - Friends and peers
 - Teachers and school environment (including structured Careers Education and Guidance)
 - Media and role models
 - Other factors

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I will be discussing the processes by which I conducted the research, including my reasons for choosing the research methods I used. I will then go on to highlight the selection processes for my sample, and illustrate how I collated and refined the data, taking into account issues such as validity and ethics.

My research was based around the narrative life history and biographical case study approach, and therefore any results should not be considered as more than something which is related to biographical research, acknowledging the limitations of this approach.

I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with people across four age groups. The interviews were structured around the themes identified in my research questions, namely;

- Social position
- Family
- Friends and peers
- Teachers and school environment
- Media and role models
- Other factors

The sample was selected using non-probability convenience sampling. The young people also came from a single school in North Yorkshire. In addition I conducted two further semi-structured interviews with a Careers Guidance Manager and the Head of Careers at the same school.

Rationale

In considering the methodology for this research it was firstly important to address a number of questions focusing the purpose and outcomes of the research. Essentially my research needed to provide a context for understanding the

complexity of factors affecting choice of careers and employment aspirations. There have been extensive studies undertaken identifying whether various social, political, economic and biological factors affect career aspirations and choices. My research aims to demonstrate how this exists in practice by using case studies to contextualize and explore these findings. By conducting this research I also hope to be able to demonstrate, using examples, how social and educational factors interact in people's lives. For young people particularly, the world of education often does not sit comfortably with their social world, and increasingly careers education is crossing both social and educational fields. Young people learn much about themselves and the world through the society they live in and the social interactions they have, and school prepares young people academically for the future. Both the social world and educational world are expected to influence and shape young people's aspirations and career choices, and this research should enable me to illustrate how the two interrelate in practice.

The role of schools in providing careers education and guidance is significant in this study. The Government has identified clear guidelines on how careers education should be provided and this study allows me to use biographical case study examples to assess how effective careers education has been at various stages. This is particularly useful in identifying what kinds of careers interventions are most helpful and when people are most receptive to this kind of support. This also has implications for my work as it enables me to see what effect careers guidance has in engaging young people in considering their future options. This in turn identifies where we need to focus our efforts in encouraging more young people to pursue careers in industries which benefit the UK economy.

My main research question involves a direct comparison of data across generations. I am interested in comparisons across different ages because it provides context and depth to understanding how social and educational interactions have differed at various points in time. A study purely centred

around young people today would provide a snapshot which is relevant to this moment in time and the transferability of the information would have a very limited shelf life. By introducing research participants from across a broader age range this allows me to see what are the enduring influences on career planning/aspiration and what are perhaps either new or temporary.

In considering the sub questions posed for this research I have tried to provide some categorization of the potential influences on career choices as a means of structuring the responses and the findings. By organizing data in terms of family, peers, school and so on it provides a structure for the collection of data and the presentation of the results. In writing up the research I will continue to follow this framework as the categories identified are applicable to all participants regardless of age.

Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research

a) Quantitative research

Quantitative research is the collection of significant amounts of data which usually takes the form of surveys and often questionnaires. Quantitative research has a number of advantages, Babbie (2008) notes that:

Survey research is probably the best method available to the social researcher who is interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly (p.270)

The extent of the reach from quantitative research will always be greater than through qualitative means. Surveys as a means of data collection have the advantage of being able to be conducted through a range of different modes, for example by stopping people on the street, through short telephone conversations, via email or through a blog or website. They can provide quick, surface level data

from which it is possible to draw top level conclusions and usually provide statistical data which can be easily and effectively analysed. However caution should be exercised, particularly in using mixed-mode surveys. The effect of interviews, online surveys, postal surveys or telephone surveys can influence the way people respond to questions. Dahlberg et al (2010) states:

While the questions should remain the same, survey instruments should not be copied wholesale from one mode to another, but tailored so that they make the best use of the medium (p.161)

It is easy to make the assumption that people will respond in a consistent way to the same questions asked through different modes, however it is often the case that the anonymity of an online response can change how honest people are willing to be, or speaking to someone face to face means participants are possibly more likely to give the researcher the answer they think they want to hear.

Surveys may include the use of a questionnaire, and these can be used at the beginning of a research project to identify the key issues which can then be followed up more comprehensively through more in depth methods such as interviews or focus groups. This can also work conversely where qualitative research can be used to 'scope out' an issue and a survey may then be used to focus on gathering data around specific issues.

In relation to my research on career aspirations, given the extent and nature of factors which can influence career choices the potential for capturing this information through quantitative research posed a number of difficulties. Firstly, basic surveys or questionnaires with multiple choice answers could easily oversimplify these factors, and more importantly their interrelationship. For example, a person's decision to follow a career in medicine, could be partly linked to careers of others in the family, a natural ability for understanding biology and some well

structured careers interviews at a young age. Identifying which of these factors was most influential and when would be difficult with a survey. It would also not be possible to understand whether it was necessary for all these factors to be in place to reach the same conclusion, or whether each on their own could have generated the same career outcomes. Gillham (2000b) cited in Gorard (2001) states:

Surveys are generally inferior as a design ...even good ones cannot hope to establish a causatory explanation for any observed phenomenon. (p. 80)

Gorard (2001) goes on to say:

Questionnaires...are better at gathering relatively simple facts or reports of behavior than at gathering opinions, attitudes or explanations. (p. 80)

In relation to my research this would enable me to gather basic data and identify some simple trends relating to career aspirations but would not necessarily provide me with comprehensive information about how or why these aspirations came about and how they affected or were affected by key decisions in participants' lives.

Secondly quantitative data collection does not provide the opportunity to probe further when information is given. It may give us a very general idea of what impacts on career choices but is time specific and does not easily provide an opportunity to identify trends or to link cause and effect. Methods such as questionnaires can also be open to a broad range of interpretation and when looking for detailed answers it does not provide the opportunity for discussion or direction from the researchers perspective. It is likely that this would mean that unless questions were limited to multiple choice then data collected would not be in standard format and would therefore also be very difficult to analyse results and draw meaningful conclusions. One of the most important factors I wish to explore

is the complexity and interrelationship between social and educational worlds. This would be very difficult to draw out effectively using quantitative data.

In selecting the research methods I did give consideration to the cost/benefit analysis of what it was possible for me to achieve as a researcher working alone. Given the time and resources available it would have been possible to complete a relatively small scale quantitative survey which would not have provided any great depth of data, nor would it have provided a significant enough sample to be able draw any robust generalisations. The qualitative approach also does not allow me to generalize but it does provide some very detailed information on cause and effect which illustrate effective responses to the research questions.

In conducting this kind of research and interpreting the findings it is essential to remember that this provides rich information and meaningful real life examples to work with but we must be cautious of identifying and applying patterns from this. Walker (1985a) summarises the weaknesses of quantitative data collection:

The questionnaire is like interviewing by numbers, and like painting by numbers it suffers some of the same problems of mass production and lack of interpretative opportunity (p.91)

b) Qualitative research

Qualitative research is defined as “the intensive study of a few cases” (Dahlberg 2010 p.243). Essentially it is a deeper and more comprehensive means through which to collect data and methods can include semi-structured and unstructured interviews, focus groups and observation.

Qualitative data collection is a means by which we can gather much more comprehensive data by asking more searching questions or providing time for more thorough discussion of a topic, for example. It is also a good method to use

when trying to access groups of individuals who are traditionally harder to reach. In considering my research this refers particularly to young people.

In addition this approach can also enable the researcher to deal with more sensitive issues carefully and that is applicable particularly when speaking to young people. The issue of career choice is inevitably a sensitive subject as it draws on relationships with family and friends, finances, health and life experiences. This is one of the main reasons that I chose qualitative research methods for my research.

Having said this there are limitations with qualitative data collection. Most notably that it can be difficult to draw coherent conclusions and in particular conclusions that provide an opportunity for generalisation. In addition the idea of presenting correlations within data is difficult to do accurately. Gorard (2001) comments:

A correlation is the start not the end of an investigation, and its explanation is likely to involve theoretical considerations and the triangulation of knowledge from other sources (p.170)

Therefore I have been conscious throughout the study, that using a small sample for my research will make it more difficult for me to establish a meaning causal relationship. I do however recognize this as a strength of the research in the sense that I understand the complexity of the interrelationship of the different factors influencing career choice, and therefore expected this to be evident throughout.

The role of case studies

Having identified the qualitative approach as the most appropriate means by which I could collect data for my study, I then evaluated the role of case studies and whether this could be a means through which I approached my study.

Case studies are essentially a means by which we can gather in depth information relating to a specific phenomenon. Yin (2003) describes how researchers can identify either single or multiple case studies. The research question/s define the most appropriate way of approaching case studies. Yin (2003) goes on to say that multiple case studies will vary in terms of their purpose:

Multiple cases should be selected so that they replicate each other – either predicting similar results (literal replication) or contrasting results for predictable reasons (theoretical replication) (p.5)

In this context my research involved multiple case studies using theoretical replication. Applying literal replication would in some ways have made it easier to identify theories and potentially make general observations about career aspirations however it would not have demonstrated the richness and variety of aspirations, experiences and attitudes which I felt the research questions called for.

According to Yin (2009) there are three kinds of case studies, 'exploratory', 'descriptive' and 'explanatory'. Exploratory research is concerned with testing theories or questions to inform a future study. Descriptive research is designed to encapsulate a complete picture or a story at a specific time and explanatory research attempts to study cause and effect and identify the reasons why specific things have happened or events have occurred. Given the nature of my research questions, my intention was to understand what affects career aspirations and choices, and in that sense I had identified specific themes under which I wanted to begin to find some reasons or explanations for why and how people formed particular views about careers and followed particular paths. For this reason my approach is really a multiple explanatory case study approach.

Advantages

Conducting research through case studies has a number of advantages. Namely it provides an opportunity to explore a subject in a single example (or multiple examples) in a level of depth which provides opportunities for comprehensive understanding. Yin (2009) comments:

The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events (p.4)

In terms of my research this is particularly important because I am trying to establish what “real life events” have influenced the choice of careers, whether this is related to family, social position, friendships and so on.

In selecting the case study approach it is particularly important to revisit the research questions and identify whether the case study approach actually provides a structure from which the answers to those questions will be found. Yin (2009) believes that case studies are particularly helpful when we are trying to establish why a particular event has occurred.

‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case studies, histories and experiments as the preferred research methods....such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence (p.9)

My research is very much concerned with trying to understand the reasons why people end up following particular career paths and therefore the case study approach seemed relevant and appropriate.

There are a number of different ways in which case studies can be useful in terms of gathering data. Stenhouse (1988) identifies categories of case studies, of which my research fits directly within two of these categories. The first is “evaluative”, in

the sense that it provides information from which decisions can be taken and policies can be made. The purpose of this kind of study is to research situations with the intention of gathering information to make organizational changes. This links to my work with education and teachers' continuing professional development. It enabled me to identify the significance of the role of schools and education in shaping young people's decisions about the future. From here there are clear implications in considering how far the curriculum and the pastoral support systems within schools are exposing young people to adequate information and experiences to make informed decisions about their futures in the longer term. This links to the second category which is "educational". The individual case studies enabled me to draw conclusions about educational activity linked to careers. It is particularly interesting in considering the interaction between education and social systems and where responsibility and influence lie.

Disadvantages

I have explored the structure and purpose of case studies and identified why they are applicable to my research questions. However, it is also important to recognize that there are some limitations with the case study approach. The most of obvious of these is that it is quite an intense method of data collection, and is therefore relatively time consuming. This means that the sample is going to be relatively small. With a small sample of 12 case studies I have been careful not to over-generalize when interpreting the results and findings. Wolcott (1995, p.17) cited in Wellington (2000) summarises one position in terms of generalization;

'What can we learn from studying only one of anything?' The answer: 'All we can'. He later elaborates on this by arguing that ' Each case study is unique, but not so unique that we cannot learn from it and apply its lessons more generally' (p.99)

This is a comparable approach to the one used in a study conducted by Burgess et al in 1987 in Warwickshire studying the impact of Records of Achievement in Schools. Four schools were chosen to participate in the study, each as individual case studies, however the areas of interest were established through conducted thematic analysis across the four case studies (Bryman et al 1994).

The data in each case study could be compared with that in the other case studies, so as to produce four studies in one and one study from four (p.143)

Whilst recognizing the limitations of a small sample, by consistently including the themes from my research questions within the case studies I am able to maximize the lessons learned across the different cases under those themes.

Case studies have also been criticized by researchers in the past for not being as specific or scientific as other methods of data collection. Yin (2009) comments:

Too many times the case study investigator has been sloppy, has not followed systematic procedures or has allowed equivocal evidence or biased news to influence the direction of the findings or the conclusions. (p.10)

It is important to recognize that the flexibility afforded through a case study can lead to sub standard research and questionable results. In considering how I might use case studies I was aware of the need to be robust . In deigning my research I was careful to consider who the participants would be and how they would contribute to the study. I also then went on to explore how the individual cases could be approached to draw together useful collective findings, highlighting the main issues for discussion. I was aware of the difficulty of drawing out meaningful conclusions from case studies which by their nature contain extensive data.

Narrative/biographical approach

Having identified the opportunities which the case study approach provided, and noting the importance of cross-generational participants within my research, I then considered what the focus of the case study participants would be.

The narrative/biographical approach is a means by which individuals reflect on and discuss events, issues and experiences which have occurred in their lives. It is a potted history which can draw in a range of events which have had led to one or more specific outcomes. This is particularly useful when working with older participants who have significant life experience.

The explorative qualitative study I conducted was based on research with fourteen different individuals. Of those fourteen, twelve of the participants were studied using a biographical/narrative approach. The participants were essentially biographical case studies and their experiences are considered in the context of their own unique life histories with the discussion and analysis organized by theme.

Stake (1994) describes this approach as the 'collective case study'. In this sense by conducting a number of case studies on the same subject I am seeking to test or create theories around career aspirations, and therefore the interpretation of results is very different because it draws from a number of examples rather than one or two individual cases

Through the narrative life-history approach, participants were able to recall information chronologically and this provides a sequence and logic to the data which would not have been possible through quantitative data collection methods. This is described by Bogden and Biklen (1982, p 61) as "life history – one person for the purpose of collecting a first person narrative". Through the sample of participants I have chosen, I have aimed to work with people who have very specific circumstances which have shaped their lives and choices. By being

selective I have found case studies which illustrate as widely as possible the complexity and diversity of individual circumstances. Cohen et al (2006) identify this as “presenting reality”.

The role of interviews

Interviews are useful means by which a researcher is able to either meet with a participant or speak to them over the phone to gather a pre-defined level of information on a one to one basis. Structured interviews follow a set script and often limit questions to short closed responses. Semi-structured interviews are usually based around a set of prompts or themes but allow a level of flexibility in the discussion which enables more of a natural flow. Unstructured interviews are often much less formal with little or no standardization of questions between participants. Richie and Lewis (2006) explain that a qualitative interview schedule:

Should be seen as a mechanism for steering the discussion in an interview or focus group but not as the exact prescription of coverage (p.115)

As a qualitative technique, the semi-structured interview was the most appropriate method of conducting the research because it enabled free discussion whilst also maintaining a level of focus which was essential for ensuring that data across different participants could be effectively collated and compared. If I had selected a more structured and formal approach I feel this could have resulted in participants being too restricted in their answers. It is also possible there could have been a potential misrepresentation of information in that the opportunity to explore and probe around certain issues would not have existed so clarity of information would be questionable.

In selecting the semi-structured interview technique as opposed to questionnaires for example, it allowed a much greater depth of information to be collected. As the interviewer I can identify which areas of the interviewee’s story require further

investigation and which aspects of their career choices were most influential for them. Wellington (2000) comments:

We can probe an interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives. We can also elicit their version of their account of situations which they may have lived or taught through (p.71)

Wellington (2000) goes on to describe the role of interviews in drawing out unique and different social histories within the samples

Given that interviews are designed to elicit views and perspectives it follows that their aim is not to establish some sort of inherent 'truth' ...there are only multiple truths (p.71)

In order to achieve this it was necessary for me to have some background knowledge of the participants before the interviews. My purpose as an interviewer was to draw out both factual information and opinion, which at times is a complex process when people are recalling information from their lives.

Yin (1984) describes the "interview guide approach" which I chose to follow for my research. Questions were designed to be open ended and discussion informal and conversational. There are no fixed response categories, which although more complex in terms of data collection did allow the necessary flexibility. The interviews are also directive as they were generally organized around the themes listed under the research sub questions and this enabled more direct comparison of data across participants. Having said this there was considerable variation across participants in the way they approached responding to questions and providing information, which means much of the information crossed over within and between the identified themes.

Yin (1984) also provides guidance in terms of 'focused interviews', which again is the method I chose to follow. A focused interview in this case is where individuals are selected to take part because of their specific circumstances. I go on to describe this in more detail in the following sections. Existing hypotheses and theories have been identified which can be tested through questioning and through the case studies presented. For example, Atherton et al (2009) stated that young people from rural backgrounds were far less likely to aspire to higher education than young people from urban areas. The interviews were structured around themes including social histories and location which enabled me to identify where this is the case, why and how this mindset was developed.

I collected the data through a series of interviews with each of the twelve case study participants, with the Careers Guidance Manager and with the Head of Careers in the school. One interview was conducted per participant and this interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes in most cases. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and written up according to identified theme headings immediately following the sessions. I conducted the interview with the Guidance Manager first and treated this as a pilot session, analyzing the value of the data gathered and seeking feedback from the interviewee to identify whether it was necessary to adjust my methodology. This was followed by the interview with the Head of Careers which set the context for some of the questions I would go on to ask the young people.

I chose to record the interviews for a number of reasons. Firstly it meant I had a more accurate record of the conversations which meant I could focus more on the discussion than on taking extensive notes. This helped the flow of the discussions. Dahlberg (2010) highlighted a problem with this approach however, which is something I particularly noticed with the young people:

Some participants may be alarmed at the thought of their voices being recorded... and this could have an effect on the content of the discussion
(p.142)

I tried to ensure the Dictaphone was as unobtrusive as possible, and reassured participants that it was being used simply to help me remember the content of the discussions.

I gave careful consideration to the setting of the interviews. Babbie (2008) comments:

If participants are in surroundings that are familiar they may feel more at ease, for example, in their own home, and this may result in more in-depth lengthy information being gathered (p.137)

I was very keen to ensure that participants felt comfortable enough to have a free discussion, so with the adults most interviews were conducted in their home or in a mutually familiar venue with myself as the researcher (such as the home of a mutual friend). The students were all interviewed in a classroom in the school they attend.

The sample

One of the most complex decisions in developing my research was to consider my sample. In considering this position, the nature of my research cannot possibly be as accurate as interviewing the whole population of the UK, as what I am looking for will often be unique to each individual case. My main concern was to ensure that the compromises mentioned were ones which were realistic but also allowed the research to be accurate and valid.

The research focused on twelve case studies, based on individuals from four age groups:

- 11 years olds (Year 7)
- 16 years olds (Year 12)
- 25-30 year olds
- 60-70 year olds

The reason for choosing these age bandings was to present a series of stages across time which could provide some chronological and historical context to the data. In determining the appropriate number of case studies I was looking to achieve a balance of gathering a high enough quantity of data, whilst also appreciating that this method of data collection and analysis is extensive and time consuming. I felt that twelve case studies was realistic, effective and manageable.

There are three case studies from each age group which include a mixture of males and females. There is also some diversity across the group in terms of social class and location. I chose not to select an ethnically diverse sample as I felt this would add too many different characteristics to the data and it allowed me to focus on the other factors such as gender and location which were of greater interest to me for this study.

Although existing research, namely by Akerman & Morrison Gutman (2008) and Modood (1998) cited in chapter 2, identifies the significant influence of ethnicity on career choices, particularly in progression to higher education, I felt was also compelling evidence in other research which encouraged me to focus on other factors such as the role of the family and the impact of experiences of schools. Willits (2005), Ball (2003) and Blenkinsopp (2005) again provide interesting evidence of the correlation between parental experience and expectation of young people and their expectations of themselves. This is something I was particularly

keen to explore further, particularly in relation to the role of the careers service and the structure of support and guidance provided to young people through school. Given the time and scale of the study this meant I had to prioritise the range of variables included in the study and identifying differences due to ethnicity was not therefore one of the main areas of focus.

The sample was selected by considering the themes listed within the sub questions of my research. I used non-probability and purposive sampling to select the participants. Essentially all participants are deliberately selected because of specific characteristics in their lives which make their stories unique. This may be the career choices they have made, their motivations or events which have happened in their lives which demonstrate effectively how different factors influence choices and aspirations. This is different to probability sampling which, if I had chosen this method, would have meant that participants were selected entirely at random and I had no prior knowledge of their background before interviewing them. This would not have been particularly effective for my study as I am conducting research largely to test and explore the range of factors influencing career choices – random sampling could not guarantee cases which demonstrate this. Denzin (1994) summarises the method I used to select case studies:

The researcher examines various interests in the phenomenon, selecting a case of some typicality, but leaning towards those cases that seem to offer the opportunity to learn (p.243)

In selecting my sample I was certainly aware of selecting individuals where I felt they had an interesting story to tell. I did explore the possibility of using probability sampling to get a more representative picture of career aspirations, possibly through a survey or questionnaire. This would have enabled me to gather a different sort of data, which is possibly more extensive in terms of the scale of the

sample but less informative in terms of content when considering the complexity of the affects on careers choices.

To some extent my research is also a convenience sample, taken from a range of individuals known to me or to people I know or have worked with. Bryman (2001:97) cited in Hall (2004) makes the following observations about how convenience sampling can be beneficial:

To initiate preliminary analysis and....where the opportunity of conducting research is too good to miss (p.134)

I am also aware that people who are willing and able to participate in this kind of research study may be different in important respects from people who are unwilling or unable to take part.

Having identified the age groups of participants which would provide the best cross section of data to compare attitudes and factors across generations, I then selected participants based on their individual circumstances. I chose people who had very individual experiences because of their upbringing, experience of education, health and lifestyle. By doing this it enabled me to identify the extent of the complexity of factors involved in career planning and development.

a) The School

The sample of young people was selected from one school. I did consider taking the sample from two or more schools and this would have provided greater diversity in participants in terms of their social, educational and economic background. I would also have been able to compare and contrast participants from urban and rural areas. However, considering this further I felt that although the case studies are attempting to showcase different experiences in order to draw meaningful conclusions and comparisons as far as possible certain characteristics

would need to be standardized. Selecting participants from one school enabled me to do this whilst also ensuring each participant had unique qualities and histories which I could focus on through the research, namely;

- Social position
- Family
- Friends and peers
- Teachers and school environment
- Media and role models
- Other factors

The students are from an 11-18 comprehensive secondary school in a small town in rural North Yorkshire. The school has approximately 1200 pupils on its roll and is one of the largest schools in the county. The Head of Careers describes the families in the area as “conservative” and in most cases affluent. Considering the rationale outlined above, this school was ideal for selecting students for a number of reasons. Firstly there is consistency in the sense that the school population is not particularly ethnically, socially or economically diverse. This limits the number of different characteristics to consider within the findings. It is also easy to find students with unique stories as there are certain occupations and industries which thrive within the area. A significant proportion of students are from farming backgrounds and a large number have lived in the same area for a long time. There is also a large RAF base within the catchment area which means a small proportion of students are from a forces background. The area is within commuting distance of a number of cities and there are examples of families that have moved to the area because of career opportunities. I worked with the Head of Careers in the school to identify students with diverse backgrounds to be within my sample.

b) Working with young people

Tisdall et al (2009) clearly describe some of the key issues which I was aware of in conducting interviews with young people (some of whom were minors). Firstly I was aware of my own personal position and my assumptions about young people, what they do and how they think. It was also important not to try and remember how I might have felt at that age as this could also add bias to the questioning. Tisdall goes on to expand on the issue of questioning young people

What one child understands wont be what another understands, so be versatile in finding ways of saying the same thing (p.76)

Interestingly I was aware of this throughout the study. I was conscious particularly that their understanding of the language I used varied, and despite trying to use the same language throughout when asking questions I realized this would not be strictly possible or necessarily appropriate.

The research with the students were structured in a very similar way to the interviews with the adults, however the conversations were quite different. Despite having being approached by the Head of Careers to take part in the study, and receiving written notification of what the study involved many of the young people were unclear about why they were there. I spent some time at the beginning of each interview explaining what the study was about and why they had been approached to take part. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions at the beginning and I checked with them that having understood fully what they were taking part in, they were still happy to continue.

At least three, if not four of the younger participants could be described as quite shy and self conscious. I felt that initially they were trying to ensure they gave the “right” answer to the questions, rather than it being an exploratory discussion where there was no right or wrong answer. There was also one participant in particular who struggled to understand some of the questions and those he did

understand he gave very brief, but honest responses to. I found the interviews with the young people generally lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

Perhaps one further point worth noting when comparing how young people answered questions compared to adults, was that much of the adult interviews were spent discussing the career paths they had followed, in a historical or chronological format. This was necessary to provide information on how and when crucial decisions were made about careers. For the young people, both the 11 and the 16 year olds, it was very much about asking them what they might like to do and where they could see themselves in the future. Tisdall points out:

Children can only talk about what they know, so you need to empower them to think outside their normal experience (p.70)

As a researcher, it became obvious to me that asking young people about events which had not yet happened was very challenging for some of them. Having no experience of the world of work or of adulthood with its associated responsibilities is like, it is difficult for them to imagine or foresee their place in it. I dealt with this by asking the children to imagine where they would like to be, and consider how they might achieve this and who they might look to for information or support – rather than focusing specifically on the career outcomes.

c) Working with adults

I decided it was also beneficial to complete an interview with the Head of Careers in the school where the student case studies were selected from. In particular this allowed me to qualify some of the experiences of the young people in terms of their careers education and guidance. In addition the Head of Careers has several years of experience and has tried a number of methods to inform, educate and prepare young people for the world of work and can provide a contrasting viewpoint regarding what affects their choice of careers.

As the Head of Careers was my route into the school and accessing appropriate students to interview, I was conscious that it was necessary to be quite clear in the consent letter and in my introduction at the beginning of the interviews that I was not employed by the school or working for the school in any way. Christensen (2004) (cited in Tidsall 2009) describes researchers as 'unusual adults', who if introduced to young people by another adult, are likely to be associated with them and their values. It was important that the young people felt at ease with me and able to comment on school and their careers programme particularly without feeling there would be any negative consequences through the school.

When selecting both the adult sample and the young people I felt it was important to balance the individual characteristics which would make my data rich and descriptive whilst enabling me to capture the nuances of the personalities of those involved. Cohen et al (2006) describes this as the 'cost/benefits ratio'. In some cases it may be emotional or potentially embarrassing for people to reflect on and describe their experiences of school, family, friends and ideas or fears for the future. It was important to be sensitive of this and to ensure that participants would be happy to be involved in a fairly open discussion about these areas, particularly where it may have been necessary to probe further during the interviews. This is particularly true when working with young people.

The interview with the school Careers Guidance Manager was planned as part of the research as it enabled me to explore further how careers guidance exists now and has changed over time. One of the key aims of my research was to enable me to assess how effective careers guidance in schools is, and what role the education system has in shaping and developing young people's views about careers. Having completed extensive background reading around the current careers guidance system the interview enabled me to gather more in depth information about evidence of the impact of careers guidance, changing trends and

Government influences over time. The Careers Guidance Manager was selected because her role involves overseeing the implementation of careers education from the perspective of maximizing the impact of the internal systems within schools and specialist careers advisors brought in to support schools. She has worked within the careers guidance sector for over ten years so can also provide some historical context.

Ensuring validity

In qualitative data validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved

Cohen et al (2006 p.105)

Ensuring validity in quantitative data involves effective distribution of research tools such as questionnaires and surveys and well structured analysis of statistics to ensure data is appropriately coded and presented accurately. In considering the validity of qualitative research Maxwell (1992) defines areas to focus on, as:

- a) Representing facts accurately
- b) Capturing the appropriate meaning of the discussion
- c) Being realistic about the extent to which the research supports or disproves theories from previous research
- d) Understanding how far the findings can effectively be applied to other situations
- e) Appreciating how the case studies enable us to draw conclusions rather than simply describing scenarios or individual situations

By using case studies and semi structured interviews and a relatively small sample then validity was a very important consideration. In categorizing the answers people produced to draw conclusions under the themes it was important not to

over-simplify or over-generalize the findings. Hall (2004) describes the key difference in the purpose of generalization in connection with quantitative and qualitative research. In quantitative research the aim is to “make valid generalizations from the sample to the population” (p 129). By contrast qualitative research does not aim to do this, “but to ensure that the same is representative and encompasses the range of views held” (p.129). My intention in conducting this research was never to draw conclusions which easily transfer to other people, but rather to explore and understand the range of factors that affect choice of careers. Denzin (1994) adds:

Damage occurs when the commitment to generalize or create theory runs so strong that the researcher’s attention is drawn away from features important to understanding the case itself (p.238)

I was careful to ensure that during the interviews and in the analysis of the data I was aware of these issues. To help my do this, I used probing questions which were designed to ensure that they enabled me to understand and take away the appropriate meaning and importance of all aspects of the discussion, particularly when looking at historical influences and these can be clouded through time. Ritchie (1995) raises the important question “Isn’t oral history limited by the fallibility of human memory?” (p.11). Of course any researcher is aware that oral histories are only as reliable and accurate as participants make them. In many cases researchers have no choice but to treat the information that is given to them as the truth. However, as Denzin (1994) comments, this can often be established by examining the context in which information is given:

Illustration as to how the phenomenon occurs in the circumstances can be valued and trustworthy knowledge (p.242)

In the context of my study, this could be illustrated by a participant describing the circumstances under which they were made redundant, how they felt, what their actions were and therefore how their future career choices were shaped by this event. This is all valuable information.

Mertens (2005) goes on to add:

People tend to remember events that had importance for them personally and to forget those activities that were more mundane or routine....memory is selective and constructed by the person (p.279)

This was particularly important when I was dealing with adults over the age of 60 who were recalling their views on education which took place over 50 years ago. In my questioning, I was also aware of the difference between prompting and probing, as defined by Atkinson (1986);

Probing is...any stimulus which is not a prompt, applied in order to obtain a response from an informant or a more extensive or explicit expression of it (p 89)

For this reason my questions were open ended and I did not try to summarise what I thought participants were trying to say, rather to ask for further detail or for further clarification. Where possible I have always tried to represent the facts rather than just opinion and be aware of the range of conclusions which could be drawn from the data.

When asking questions I was aware of the need to avoid both 'transference' and 'counter-transference' as described by Cohen et al (2006). By this I mean I was clear about how during the interviews I was not projecting my own opinions, expectations or feelings onto the participants in a way which could change the way

they answered the questions or reflected on their ideas. In the same way I obviously have my own personal career ideas and history and it was important to ensure that I did not consider my own personal reactions within the discussion but rather maintained an independent position as a researcher.

Whilst being aware of my own position and reactions, it is also useful at this stage to consider the concept of 'tacit knowledge'. Denzin (1994) describes this as:

The ineffable truths, unutterable partly because they are between meanings and actions, the glue that joins human intentionality to more concretely focused symbols of practice (p. 491)

Whilst conducting interviews there was much that could be understood from the way the participants conducted themselves, their body language and their tone of voice. Being able to interpret this effectively, and to ask appropriate questions and respond in appropriate ways is essential to building the true and completing the story. As a researcher I recognized the value and limitations of tacit knowledge and attempted to ensure it was represented accurately.

As I completed fourteen case studies and interviews in total I was also aware of the potential to become complacent about the discussion and the answers I was hearing. It was important for me not to try and predict people's responses or make assumptions about their meaning based on discussions with previous participants. This would have generated patterns and data without it having been clearly presented by participants. In addition I was conscious of completing several interviews in a row, all asking very similar questions and hence a danger of losing focus, which Smith (1972, pp.19-26) describes as "an overlong schedule leading to inattention and fatigue". To try and limit the chances of this happening, I spread the interviews over a period of weeks to ensure that each conversation was fresh.

Ethics

The ethics of research is what defines what is and is not acceptable in terms of conduct before, during and after research takes place. In a study such as the one I completed I was aware that much of what I was asking people to do involved sharing information which is personal to them, often with a complete stranger.

Most importantly all participants took part in the research on a voluntary basis, nobody was forced or even persuaded to take part, they needed to be willing and happy to be involved. This does pose some problems in terms of the nature of participation, Babbie (2008) comments:

The scientific goal of generalisability is threatened if experimental subjects or survey respondents are all the kinds of people who willingly participate in such things (p.68)

I was aware of this as a potential issue in my research, but given that my research was not intending to make generalizations I felt this was not enough of a concern to warrant changing the research strategy.

Ensuring ethical practice when researching with children and young people is particularly important for a number of reasons, most importantly because they are more vulnerable to abuse than adults, but as Tidsall (2009) points out “this sits uneasily with attempts to treat children as competent social actors” I was keen for the young people to recognize that I valued and respected their views so this was a balance which I was aware of throughout the interviews.

In my briefing meeting with the Head of Careers at the school we discussed guidelines for working with students, particularly on a one to one basis.

Obviously I adhered strictly to these guidelines. I was very careful to ensure that I

got informed consent from all participants. Richie and Lewis (2006) describe informed consent as:

Ensuring that potential participants have a clear understanding of the purpose of the study, the funder, the organization or individuals conducting it, how the data will be used and what participation will mean for them (p.76)

This information provided the basis of the written consent sought from the young people and their parent's as well as the introductory discussions with all participants.

Before conducting the interviews I described in detail what would be required and provided copies of the interview schedule to participants in advance.

I then produced a disclaimer for adults and parents of young participants to ensure that everyone was clear about what the research was for, where and how results would be published and that the interviews were being recorded. As described in Cohen et al (2006) the process focused on 'informed consent'. At all stages it was important to identify what was going to happen and give participants the opportunity to withdraw their consent at any time. Tidsall (2009) makes a valid point about young people's understanding of informed consent:

Children, as minors, are likely to have limited experience of using such explicit devices to formalize their relationships (p.17)

This was why, in addition to the parental letter of consent, I also described the purpose of the interviews and the study clearly to young people at the beginning to ensure they understood aside from the more formal written approval.

I was also aware that I was asking all the participants to share potentially sensitive and emotional details of their lives with me. In doing this I decided it was important to have a very informal discussion at the end of the interview to enable the participants to air any concerns and for me to check they were alright. Barbour (2008) describes this process as debriefing:

This involves giving participants a chance to talk about their contribution immediately after the event (p.82)

This debrief was also an opportunity for me to reiterate the purpose of the study and address issues of privacy and confidentiality. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained by assuring participants that we would not use their surnames or any personal details which could identify them easily in any of the literature produced. Wellington (2000) states that “respondents have a right to receive these assurances and to have their questions answered, even if it adds a few minutes to the time required” (p.67). All participants were given the opportunity to ask questions at the beginning and the end of the interviews.

Conducting the research and interpreting the findings

Once the research questions had been finalized and I had decided to conduct semi structured interviews to draw together the individual case studies I considered the characteristics I was looking for in the individuals and approached a number of potential participants, starting with the adults. I decided to begin with the adults because I felt that their interviews would provide the greatest amount of diversity, simply because of their age and experiences. This would give me a better context for structuring the questions to young people in terms of getting them to reflect on things which could potentially influence their careers in the future.

At the same time as conducting the interviews with the adults for the case studies I also conducted the interview with the Careers Guidance Manager. Despite having

read extensive literature on careers guidance I felt that my knowledge of this was fairly limited in time in the sense that I have worked in this sector for less than ten years so I had no historical context or knowledge about how careers guidance may have worked when discussing it with the adult case study participants. This provided me with background information which was very useful when drawing out information about school and careers guidance in the interviews with the adults.

The interview with the Head of Careers at the participating school was completed before any of the interviews with the young people to provide some context in terms of the discussions around the influence of careers education and guidance in particular.

Collating, analysing and presenting the findings

During the interviews I took very basic, limited notes essentially ensuring that we had adequately covered all of the themes. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and the notes of each interview were written up within 24 hours of the interview. The interviews were written up individually with the key points organized under each of the theme headings. Significant and useful quotes were also then transcribed under each of the headings.

Transcription

Transcription is a means by which interviews can be written up, word for word. For semi-structured and unstructured interviews it can provide a valuable opportunity to review and select specific information, coded appropriately for analysis, however it can be extremely time consuming and labour intensive. Hall (2004) comments:

Many research projects are carried out within tight timescales and verbatim transcription may be a luxury (p.192)

Hall (2004) goes on to add that transcription can take anywhere between three and ten hours per tape of dictation. I was also aware that transcription is also not ideal in the sense of capturing the true essence of the discussion, as Poland (1998) indicate, transcripts are:

Silent about body language, such as gestures and facial expressions...and positioning (p. 302)

Conscious of the need to accurately reflect the discussion, and aware of the time required to effectively transcribe the interviews, I felt that comprehensive notes written up by theme would be perfectly sufficient.

The matrix

To draw the findings together, I created a matrix, taking the main points from the adult interviews initially, compared the results by theme and then identified the best examples from the individual case studies. I then did the same with the student interviews. Once I had this information, the next task was to compare the results across the four age groups and see where the main differences and similarities were across generations. Again these points were all organized by theme and were focused on the outcomes from the narrative/biographical approach.

Hall (2004) indicates that a matrix is particularly useful because:

This then permits an overview of the total number of interviews, although the amount of detail given by different interviewees on the same theme will vary (p. 154)

It was important to be able to see visually how the responses of different individuals varied and this enabled me to decide where to focus the analysis.

Coding

Having completed a comprehensive matrix of responses, organized by theme, it was then necessary to draw out the main points by using a coding system. Gibbs (2002) highlights the purpose of coding in qualitative research as being to “manage the data” (p.4). The themes were essentially the codes, and some of the data from the interviews crossed themes, and I was able to code these different themes using different colours.

Before completing my research I did consider using a computer programme to code my data. The most frequently used systems for qualitative research are NVIVO and ATLAS-ti, which could potentially speed up the process of coding the data. However, it is important to note that there are limitations to computer packages, namely:

Analysis still depends on the skill of the researcher in developing codes to apply to text, in generating categories to link codes together for explanation and in interpreting the information (Gibb 2002 p.157)

Given that my research was conducted on a relatively small scale, and the way the interviews were conducted made the analysis of the data by theme relatively unproblematic I chose not to use a computer programme for coding.

A provisional coding frame was developed and the main points were then compared and scrutinized to further identify key points and patterns. Barbour (2008) describes this as the ‘constant comparative method’ which involves

“constantly comparing and contrasting...looking systematically at who is saying what and in what context” (p.217). This enabled me to identify patterns within themes, to see whether something was true of all participants, none of them, or a selection.

Having identified the main points, I then referred back to the literature review and the existing research and highlighted areas where my findings supported existing research and perhaps where they also questioned it. In looking at this I tried to understand why in specific situations these cases had been different or unique.

Finding patterns and drawing conclusions

Studies such mine can take either a nomothetic or an idiographic approach in terms of research and analysis. Babbie (2008) describes a nomothetic approach as something which:

Finds a few factors (independent variables) that can account for many variations in a given phenomenon. (p.99)

This is useful when attempting to identify a correlation between cause and effect or trying to find patterns of change. Contrastingly an idiographic approach:

Seeks a complete, in-depth understanding of a single case (p.100)

My research and analysis favours the idiographic approach as influences on career aspirations are all interlinked and cannot easily be defined as “independent variables”. By studying a case in its entirety we can begin to address the complexity of influence and assess how this impacts upon careers advice and guidance particularly. In completing the coding and analysis, whilst attempting to organize information according to the themes I was also trying to ensure that the interrelationship of the different variables was not lost.

With a wealth of data and information there was an opportunity to reflect on what I have found, but also perhaps what I haven't. There are areas where the research proved useful in my work on continuing professional development for teachers and other areas where further research would benefit our understanding and influence our practice further. I go on to discuss these in Chapter 6.

Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis: Part 1

Through a series of semi-structured interviews with young people and adults across four age groups I have formulated responses to the research questions by theme. There are references to the case studies throughout and these are designed to demonstrate issues or points raised rather than to draw any conclusions about patterns of behaviour or generalisations.

The research indicates that there are a significant number of factors that can influence career aspirations, some of which are planned activities that can be controlled and managed, and others are factors that simply occur in normal transitions through life. Although it is impossible to generalise about influences on career aspirations, the case studies undertaken begin to help us understand how these aspirations and decisions can be formed.

In examining the themes identified above, there are instances where clear distinctions can be made between the experiences of people across different age ranges. For example, the role of the media is a significant factor in understanding and recognising careers for young people (11, 17 and 30). Conversely, the oldest age group (60+) had far less exposure to the media and this was mainly focused around books, newspapers and radio. Television and the internet particularly were far less prominent and so consequently far less influential.

There are also examples in the themes of where there are fewer distinctions and differences between those of different ages. Perhaps the strongest example here relates to the role of the family. Academic literature and previous research discussed in Chapter 2 highlights the family as the single greatest influence on career aspirations (Willits et al 2005). There are several examples within the case studies of where this is certainly the case across all four age groups and there does not seem to be a clear difference across generations.

I will examine each of these themes in turn, focusing initially on generational differences and similarities, supported by evidence across the case studies.

Interviewees (by age group)

Age 11	Emily (F) Bethany (F) Danny (M)
Age 16	Amy (F) Nicholas (M) Rosy (F)
Age 25- -30	Chris (M) Trish (F) Nicola (F)
Age 60 - 70	Nick (M) Ken (M) Judy (F)

In this Chapter I will examine the importance of historical factors such as location, family background and gender. These are the factors over which we have the least control but they have some of the greatest influence. From here I will then consider the role of the family, again one of the most important factors in shaping ideas and aspirations for the future, although also one of the most complex to understand. Finally in this Chapter I will consider how the research participants viewed the role of their friends and peers, and particularly how likely they were to be influenced by their opinions.

4.1 Social position

4.1.1 Location

There are certain social factors and predispositions which affect the way people of all ages view careers. These factors include geographical location, gender, ethnicity and social class. Social factors are dynamic and constantly changing, as is their relationship to education and work.

Hodkinson (2004) noted that existing predispositions to education and work are inseparable from other aspects of life. This is certainly supported by case studies from all four age groups. Judy (64) described her childhood in a rural setting, with a relatively strict up-bringing and attendance at an all girls catholic school, which clearly influenced her choices in the future:

I wanted a career where I could move away, so it needed to be something where I could live and work in the same place. I was interested in nursing and with student accommodation at the training hospital it was ideal

Judy's desire to combine aspirations within her work and her social life meant her future was directly influenced by her existing geographical and social and educational background.

Geographical location has a significant influence on aspirations for both life and careers. Two of the younger participants Amy (16) and Nicholas (16) both have experience of moving frequently including living abroad. Their families are both linked with the Armed Forces and as a result they have found themselves regularly moving, changing schools and developing new groups of friends, hobbies and interests.

Their aspirations, whilst both being shaped by this, have been affected in different ways. Amy is keen to settle in the area in which she is currently living, moving away to study at university and then returning to a place she knows to find some stability.

When there's lots of new people around when you're young your confidence probably isn't that good....because I'm so used to it now round here I'll probably stay here

Amy's attachment to place has also directly influenced her decision to stay on in the 6th form at the school she has been at for the past five years:

I've been here for five years and know everybody here. I'm used to the teaching here as well and all the teachers that I knew I was going to have for A-Level I've had in the past few years

Although ultimately Amy's aspirations to become a history teacher do not seem to have been directly affected by geographical location, her decisions relating to studying have been affected. Nicholas on the other hand has enjoyed travelling and would like to continue to travel and have new experiences.

I think while I'm still young I'd like to continue moving around coz I've experienced living in different places and I know it's not bad, it can be good

Atherton (2009) and Green & White (2007) both recognise an attachment to place as pivotal in decision making for the future. Atherton (2009) highlights the issue of lower aspirations to higher education from young people in rural settings. This does not seem to be the case with any of the younger participants in the study. The three participants who are age 16 are all from a rural area and all aspire to

university. Similarly Chris (30), Nicola (27) and Trish (30) were all brought up in rural areas and all attended university.

However, perhaps it is possible to identify an example of where the reverse of this may have happened. Danny (11) comes from a family which has been based in the same area for several generations. He clearly finds comfort and security in his surroundings and when asked whether he would want to or be prepared to move away from the area for work reasons it was very clear that he would not. He also commented:

When I finish school I want to go to college...I want to go to York College, mainly coz I can stay near my family

It is likely that coming from a family which is deeply rooted to a single place has shaped Danny's views and ideas for the future.

By comparison, Ken (70) spent the vast majority of his career working at sea in the Navy. He spent several months at a time away, with his longest spell being 13 months away from home in a single trip. Ken thoroughly enjoyed his time away at sea and although he had a wife and family at home, he felt that his career provided him with benefits which meant he would continue to work at sea:

I loved the fact that no two days were the same. As an engineer I got the opportunity to see how things work, take them to bits and solve problems. There were also good progression opportunities, I was constantly moving up the ladder ... so I never got bored.

Geographical location therefore clearly plays a part in decisions that people make about work and careers, whether that be linked to past experiences or existing predispositions a desire to be in a particular place can drive people's choices.

4.1.2 Gender

The impact of gender and linked expectations and opportunities has also had a notable effect on people's career aspirations, although it is not always clear how conscious individuals are that the choices they are making are linked to any preconceptions about gender. This is particularly noticeable when you compare the aspirations and career paths of participants across different age groups.

Judy (64) went into nursing and described how her schooling and perception of careers was shaped according to expectations around gender:

When I was a young woman basically I had the choice of going into office work, hospitality or a caring profession, so I chose nursing.... only very bright women went to university, it was mostly for men

She went on to add...

I had one female teacher at school who was really good...and at that time it was really unusual for women to be teachers

Before 1944 women could be, and often were dismissed from a teaching post once they got married. Clearly the options she felt were open to her were limited by what was expected of women at the time.

Although the gender issue is less obvious in younger generations, there is evidence that people still move into traditional gender specific career routes. For example;

Danny (11) says:

At first I thought I wanted to be a wagon driver because I like bikes and cars and because of hanging around with my Dad and his friends (who are

wagon drivers) but then I thought I'd be better off as a mechanic rather than a lorry driver

At no point during our conversation did Danny acknowledge any kind of gender stereotype or expectations linked to male or female roles, but it is highly likely that through being surrounded by people who also work in traditional gender roles, he has certain implicit understandings and beliefs.

As a domestic abuse outreach worker, Trish (30) has also moved into a supportive and caring role which is traditionally female. It is not clear whether participants recognise that existing stereotypes may have guided their choices, whether that be at a conscious or sub-conscious level. This is supported by Government statistics, taken from 'Social Trends 38' (Office for National Statistics 2007) which identifies the following % breakdown of careers by gender:

Table 2 UK Government Statistics on male and female occupations in 2007

	Manager and Senior Professional	Skills Trades	Administration and secretarial	Personal Services
Male	18	19	4	2
Female	12	2	21	14

Certainly the statistics on the percentage of men and women entering higher education does indicate significant change over the past 50 years and any previous concerns that higher education for women was only for the most able seem to have been reduced in recent years. Archer (2003 p.41) states that in 1961 only 29% of entrants to higher education were women. According to statistics produced by Hill (2004) women now account for 58% of the university population.

Although I have briefly discussed the importance of both social class and ethnicity on career aspirations, I have not focused on either of these aspects when interviewing participants. All participants were from white middle class backgrounds, which means that the variables were consistent. This was intentional and enabled the research to be more focused on specific experiences.

4.2 Family

Willits et al (2005) found that parental aspirations for young people were strongly affected by their own income, with those most affluent being most likely to want their children to go on to university. During the interview with both the Careers Guidance Manager and the Head of Careers at the school I was working with, there was anecdotal evidence that the family was the most significant influence on career aspirations. Sarah, the Careers Guidance Manager said:

Parents are the biggest influence...particularly in the sense of passing on their own work ethic

This was supported by Deirdre, the Head of Careers who added:

Parents are the biggest influence, but often they are out of date. They often influence in terms of going to university and this is particularly noticeable if they are the first in their family to go to university. Parents in this area are affluent and often don't want their children to consider vocational routes and have a misguided view of what is available

With all the participants in this study there was evidence that the family played a significant part in shaping career aspirations. Notably the influence that the family had can be categorised under four main headings:

- a) Acting as role models

- b) Raising confidence and motivating
- c) Pressurising
- d) Directly steering people into a career

a) *The family as role models*

Chevalier (2001) identified that 10% of male graduates are in the same occupation as their fathers, which indicates that in certain instances parents do act as role models. This is however, specific to particular professions most notably farming, medicine and teaching. Being a role model can mean that, as in the cases Chevalier highlights, people follow the same career path. Alternatively, being a role model can be about demonstrating certain values and skills in relation to working which people admire and seek to replicate.

Judy (64) is a good example of where the influence has been to follow the same career route as others in the family. Judy's mother and grandmother were both nurses, and Judy went on to become a nurse. Although she doesn't recall having many conversations with her family about nursing, she does recall some influence they had:

with other people in the family already nursing I had an expectation of what it would be like....I do remember my grandmother describing what she did, which made me realise that it wasn't as glamorous as some of the books and magazines made it out to be

Similarly, Ken (70) describes his older brother and his father as the most significant influences on his decision to become an engineer:

my brother was very academic, he was an engineer and I was always really interested in what he was doing. When my father was younger he taught me to do things like soldering and using a lathe

By spending time with family members with similar interests and discussing careers, ideas are shaped from a young age and family have a role to play in modelling the options available. There are also examples with the young people in the case studies of where the family have been particularly influential as role models. The example earlier of Danny (11), spending time with his Dad and his friends and choosing to become a mechanic is a good example of how family role models can shape ideas. Conversely, sometimes people can see their parents in occupations which they don't enjoy, and can recognise the importance of following a career path which is satisfying and fulfilling because of this. Emily (11) said:

My Mum was a nurse for ten years and hated it, I don't want to end up hating a job I do

By seeing the impact that a job can have on someone, young people very quickly identify what is important in terms of making their decisions. Emily clearly recognises how much of her life will be taken up by work, and therefore how important it is that this is something she really wants to do:

I want a job where I can enjoy myself, you only live once so I'm not gonna be bored all day

b) Raising confidence and motivating

Ten of the twelve participants recall having conversations with their families, particularly their parents about what they wanted to do as a career. Part of the role of the family seems to be in listening to these ideas and providing motivation and support, and at times practical support and guidance. Chris (30) had this experience with his mother. When Chris thought he wanted to be a physiotherapist his mother arranged for him to shadow a friend of hers in the

profession for a few days. This helped Chris decide it was not what he wanted to do. When it came to applying for university, she also sat with him and helped him get through clearing, phoning up universities and discussing placement options

my Mum was very driven and ambitious, she made things happen and helped me practically to make decisions

Amy (16) also describes the importance of the discussions she has with her parents “they tell me that I can do anything if I put my mind to it”.

Interestingly though, despite obviously recognising the importance of the encouragement and support that is available from family members, none of the participants interviewed would change their career plans if their family members did not agree with them.

c) *Pressurising*

Some people feel very strongly that there are certain expectations set for them by their family, particularly their parents. This can be exacerbated if other siblings have followed the expected career path. Chris (30) said:

my brother was really academic and studied Philosophy at university....I went to university because it was expected, I didn't know there was a choice about whether or not to go

Chris found university particularly difficult and did not achieve good grades at school or at university. He has problems producing written work and struggles enormously under exam conditions, however he still went to university because it was expected. Wolf (2002) explains this phenomenon in terms of the less academically gifted now attending university:

With this many degree holders the graduate population is bound to include plenty from that large middle lump of the ability distribution. When this happens, perceptions and actions change radically (p.177)

This trend is therefore cyclical. As a degree becomes the norm for many young people, increasingly those who in previous generations might not have selected a university education feel more compelled to do so, simply to be able to compete with their peers and possibly because it is expected by their family.

Trish (30) recalls a similar experience where she felt significant pressure from her parents to succeed in the future. She describes how she now recognises how this has instilled in her a fear of failure, and a fear of non-compliance. Although she has now broken away from this expectation and is enjoying her career as a domestic outreach officer, she does acknowledge how difficult her time at university was, and how she did not finish university because of this sense of pressure.

Both explicitly and implicitly the family has a role to play in generating certain expectations. Sometimes these can be motivating and supportive, but sometimes they can have the opposite effect and can be quite destructive. Referring back to the point made by Willits et al (2005) regarding parental expectation in relation to their own achievement, I have not found any direct correlation between parents' levels of education and income and participants career paths or anticipated career paths. The young people involved in the survey particularly seemed to be making decisions about their futures based on their own choices and not clearly influenced by parental expectation. Bethany (11) describes her desire to work with horses in the future:

I love horses and I want to have a career in horses but I don't know what. Maybe own my own company that sells things that horses need, or run my own events company

Bethany goes on to describe how she intends to do her A-levels then attend a work based learning college and study for a Diploma in Natural Horsemanship but with no plans to attend university. Both her parents are relatively academic and educated to degree or post-graduate level yet Bethany is much more committed to following her personal ambitions than to seeking higher qualifications that would not necessarily support her career choices. She goes on to add:

In the end, I really want what I do in my life to be my decision

d) Directly steering people into a career

There was one case study participant who provided an interesting example of how they felt their father had actually gone out and got them a job. Nick (66) said:

I had done a course on book keeping and a job in sales for a while but didn't like it so I'd been unemployed for a few months. I think Father got so sick of me being around that he paid his friend who owns an estate agents to take me on for a while. I loved it and became qualified as a surveyor

This enforces the point that parents may feel a certain sense of responsibility for steering their children into successful careers, and this demonstrates how this could happen in reality.

From the participants in this study, it is not possible to identify any clear differences between the role of the family in influencing people today, and the

role it had in previous generations. It appears to continue to be pivotal and influential in all cases.

4.3 Friends and Peers

The role of friends and peers in shaping future career choices is interesting and variable. As highlighted in the literature review, Blenkinsop et al (2005) noted that whilst people talk to their friends about their career choices they would not generally be strongly influenced by their opinions or choices. This is certainly what I found with most of the participants in the study. In fact all of the adults in the 60-70 age bracket cannot recall speaking to their friends about career choices. Those in the other three age groups do acknowledge speaking to their friends and when asked whether they would change their plans because their friends did not think it was a good idea, none of them would.

Interestingly however, there is one case where someone chose their university purely based on recommendations from friends. Trish (30) decided to go to university in Lancaster because she had friends who had gone there and it sounded like the kind of place she would want to go to. Reay et al (2005) categorises university graduates into two types, 'contingent choosers' and 'embedded choosers'. The first group are unlikely to have parents who have been to university and will often seek out a university place based on information from peers.

Reliance on a few significant others for 'hot knowledge' is high – that is first or second hand recommendations or warnings related to specific institutions based on some kind of experience (p.113-4)

By comparison 'embedded choosers' are much more likely to be influenced by their parents and are "embedded in a deep grammar of aspiration which makes

higher education normal” (p112). Certainly in Trish’s case, the ‘contingent chooser’ seems to be an accurate representation.

Although people are unlikely to change their plans because of the opinions of their friends, there is evidence that friends can be influential by being supportive and encouraging and by simply being motivated themselves. In the literature review I cited Johnson et al (2009) who stated that different peer groups have certain social norms and expectations and these are also around future careers aspirations. Simply being surrounded by others who are motivated and driven for the future will encourage people to respond in a similar way. Rosy (16) describes how despite not knowing what she wants to do in the future, she feels she wants to succeed and is aware of the plans her friends have:

most of my friends who are in 6th form want to go to university and they want to travel. I don’t really know if I want to do those things yet but its interesting listening to them talk about it and some of them have done quite a lot of research on it as well

One of the youngest case study participants, Bethany (11), explains how one of her friends has been pivotal in shaping her decisions about the future:

I got into riding because of one of my friends is into natural horsemanship and I thought it was really interesting

Bethany goes on to describe how her other friends support her in her career aspirations:

we bounce ideas off each other about what we want to do and what we would need to do to be able to do that. It makes it all a clear picture and then it makes you want to do it even more

This would support the findings from Johnson et al (2009) that being around friends who are interested in the future does help provide encouragement for the future.

Two of the case study participants also noted how the role of communications technology had played a role in determining how influential friends can be in career choices. Nick (66) explained that once they had left school and people spread out across the country then it was very difficult to keep in touch and to know where people had gone and what they were doing now. His observation was that in the current climate with social media and the internet particularly it was much easier for people to keep in touch with friends and therefore they are likely to be influential for longer.

This was the case for Nicholas (16) who noted that because of the internet he was still in touch with his friends in Switzerland, some of whom were about to go to university in America which he was very keen to hear about and found quite inspirational. This is clearly a difference which is obvious across different generations. Access to social media and communications technology does mean that older generations were less able to keep in touch with friends and therefore less likely to be influenced by them.

It may be that friends have little apparent influence on career choices because there are other factors that affect the development of friendship groups. Individuals often develop friendships because of similarities, for example hobbies, interests and even aspirations. This might imply that what we want to in the future influences who are friends are and not the other way round.

In Chapter 4 I have begun by exploring some of the most significant factors affecting career aspirations, those which relate to social position and those which relate to the role of the family. There is evidence from across the research

participants of a number ways in which social position and the family have affected career choices, and these are both positive and negative. I have then considered how by contrast the role of friendships is apparently far less influential, particularly for people over the age of 30.

Chapter 5 Findings and Analysis: Part 2

Having studied a range of factors which affect career aspirations, including the role of different individuals such as family and friends, I will now go on to look at some of the broader factors involved in these processes. The education system and particularly careers guidance which happens through schools is increasingly seen as a place and a mechanism for encouraging the development of skills and ideas necessary to create a successful future. I will examine how the education system shapes people's aspirations and how this differs across generations. I will then look at the role of the media and particularly how the rapid developments in technology have changed the job market and the way we interact with the world. Finally, I will examine the 'other factors' which have happened more by chance than through careful planning, and how these factors come together.

5.1 Teachers and School Environment

5.1.1 Higher Education and training opportunities

All individuals have beliefs and expectations about education and careers which have a direct influence on their decisions about the future, for example, people's views about university and other forms of training. Nick (66) and Ken (70) are both very bright and very able but neither of them went to university. They were both confident that they would be able to succeed in life and in work without going to university, which they did. At the time they both left school at 16 and went into work, where training opportunities were provided along the way. Ken went into the Navy initially as part of his National Service but then decided to stay:

I worked my way up, getting a new job every couple of years. I took lots of exams as I went along, but mostly you learn by just working and your manager teaching you things

Similarly, Nick left school at 16 and undertook a couple of jobs but wasn't interested in any of them. He then got a job in an estate agent's and went on to train to be a chartered surveyor whilst still working. Having found a job that suited him and which he liked, he then stayed in this profession for the rest of his working life. Ken also stayed in the Navy for almost all of his working life, except for a short spell of five years when he was recovering from a knee injury and worked as an engineer in a factory. There is a strong sense that for previous generations if you wanted to progress in a career and stay in the same field for life, then it was perfectly possible to do that. The case study participants in the older age group also recognise that this is not necessarily the case for younger people now, Nick commented:

Jobs are different now, everything changes so quickly and with so much technology around the career's just aren't out there anymore

Whilst this is generally accepted as being true, it cannot easily be discussed in the context of existing research. Interestingly, the young people in the study generally did aspire to university because they were aware that their chosen careers required degree level qualifications, or because they felt that this was their best opportunity of success. Nicholas (16) is interesting, he does not yet know what he wants to do as a career, but he does say:

I do want to go to university coz I think it will give me a better chance of getting a good job

His motivations for a career are very much driven by his desire for an affluent lifestyle and to earn significant amounts of money. With so many people now going to university he sees this as the best way to be able to compete effectively and succeed. What is even more interesting, is that in discussions about role models, Nicholas describes his uncle who is the founder of a national car repair business:

He left school at 14 and started cleaning ovens and repairing bikes and now he is a multi millionaire

As one of the people Nicholas most admires and aspires to, he still does not plan to replicate the pathway his uncle took to success. In speaking to him, there was some kind of belief that in this current economic climate, hard work and determination were not in themselves enough for success, that there was significant emphasis on academic qualifications as a foundation for the future.

This position in terms of identifying the lifestyle rather than the chosen career path is something which is recognised by careers advisers as a strong motivating factor in young people. In an interview with a Careers Guidance Manager, she commented:

often young people change their ideas about careers, or they know what kind of lifestyle they want but don't necessarily focus on jobs

By focusing on the end result rather than the career path people may follow to reach that result, they are able to keep their options open and adapt to the rapidly changing environment, which potentially means following a number of different career pathways during their lifetime.

5.1.2 Careers Education and Guidance

In addition to the interviews conducted with case study participants, I also conducted interviews with a Careers Guidance Manager (Sarah) and the Head of Careers (Deirdre) at the school where the young case study participants came from. The interview with Sarah enabled me to get a broad picture of where careers education and guidance (CEG) has come from, what form it takes and what is stipulated in terms of statutory guidance in schools. The interview with Deirdre then helped me identify exactly what the CEG programme in that specific school involved.

Significant changes to CEG in schools were introduced in the 1990s and these were further developed by the introduction of the Connexions service in 2002. Prior to this time, independent careers advisers did exist but they were often based away from schools and CEG was optional rather than compulsory. The three eldest participants in the study were all asked about their recollection of CEG in school. None of them recall any specific careers advice, although Ken does remember being involved in some activities which were related to careers:

we had one teacher who sometimes talked a bit about different jobs and we went on a couple of visits to different companies and to the college, but that was it

In the next age group (25-30) the participants do all recall some level of careers guidance, but felt that this was not helpful. All of them conducted their own research to supplement their taught CEG programme, which is expected of them. When recalling what the CEG programme consisted of, they tended to recall two aspects, a careers interview in Year 11 and going out on work experience in Year 10. When asked whether there was anything else which they remember doing which helped them prepare for the future, they could not identify any specific examples.

The careers interviews conducted at this stage often involved completing a computer based test which helped identify different career paths. Both Chris (30) and Nicola (27) recall their experiences of using this programme:

I did the computer test and it said I should be a funeral director, which is ridiculous

(Nicola)

the test said I should be a security guard or a buddy for terminally ill people, it wasn't helpful or inspiring at all

(Chris)

Sarah goes on to explain how sometimes as Careers Advisers expectations about CEG are difficult to meet.

If people don't know what they want to do, we can't tell them. All we can do is advise them on where to get ideas and information

With young people there is also an expectation that careers guidance will somehow tell them what they need to do. Nicholas (16) describes undertaking a similar psychometric test at a school he attended in Switzerland. The end of result of the test was that he was suited to a job which was dynamic and involved working with people, probably in hospitality. Whilst Nicholas was interested in the results of the test and certainly felt that he wanted to work with people, he didn't necessarily believe this would be in hospitality and was therefore slightly disappointed with the outcome.

During Key Stage 4 the vast majority of students now undertake one or two weeks of work experience. Sometimes young people particularly, look at this as

something which they don't enjoy and is therefore not helpful, however this isn't necessarily the case. Rosy (16) says:

I did my work experience in a nursery. I really enjoyed it but I realised at the end of the two weeks that I didn't want to go into childcare, it just wouldn't keep me interested

Amy (16) had a similar experience:

I did work experience in a hairdressers. I regret it quite a lot, I knew when I was doing it that it was something I would never really want to do

Although they do not necessarily recognise it at this stage, negative experiences such as these can be very valuable in helping understand what it is like to do different kinds of jobs. Actually doing the job for two weeks is an excellent way of being able to see what it would be like, and helping to decide whether that is a career they would want to follow in the future.

These findings which have emerged from discussions with the participants are also recognised by the Head of Careers (Deirdre). She commented that:

Often young people don't see how what they are learning contributes to their aspirations and career choices

Deirdre also shared a copy of the school's CEG programme with me, which from Year 7 up to Year 13 contains 30 different activities. There is extensive variety in the programme, some of the activities are incorporated into the curriculum through citizenship lessons, some are full day activities off timetable, some are evening events and others are one to one activities such as careers interviews. Both Sarah and Deirdre recognise the importance of CEG being integral within the

curriculum as well as being delivered through specific activities and this is where it is most effective. Deirdre goes on to add:

young people will only get out of it what they put into it

There is an acknowledgement that much of the work involved in planning for the future must be done independently from school, and that the CEG programme is there to support and provide ideas, but will not do the work for you. Therefore, particularly with the statutory careers programme as it is now, young people do recognise a level of input and influence which they did not necessarily do fifty years ago, however CEG has a specific role which isn't necessarily as significant as other influences such as the family.

In a recent study conducted by the Education and Employers Taskforce and Deloitte (2010) the importance of employer engagement in CEG was discussed. Employers can be involved in education and careers in a number of different ways, including at events, presentations, offering company visits and in the classroom. Deloitte identified that:

...exposure to employers when done properly motivates, inspires and informs young people, and can equip them with the skills needed to succeed in the workplace (p.1)

They go on to add:

young people who have been in contact with four or more employers in the last two years were nearly twice as likely to believe that they had a good idea of the knowledge and skills needed for the jobs they wanted to do (p.1)

The careers programme for the school in this study does involve engagement with employers at various levels, although it was recognised that because of difficulties in accessing employers, getting students out of schools and dealing with the bureaucracy around health and safety and Criminal Records Bureau checks this is not as significant a part of the programme as it could be.

5.1.3 Experiences of school

The experiences people have at school can shape their ideas and aspirations for the future. Sometimes this can occur directly, through interaction with teachers who are inspiring or develop certain skills within young people that they go on to use in the future. At other times, this influence can be less specific, but can affect people's confidence and their perceptions of what they think they are good at and what they can achieve.

The older participants in the study have the benefit of being able to look back and reflect on their time at school and their careers and make a judgement about how their time at school affected their career paths. Trish (30) and Chris (30) both describe how they found school difficult and didn't enjoy it. Chris describes how school was particularly difficult because of the problems he had with exams and written work and the fact that to succeed in the school system you had to be able to do certain things like work under time pressure in exams and write clearly and coherently in essays. As he couldn't do either of those things well, he didn't feel like he would succeed and his confidence was very low. He describes the effect this had on him in the future:

I didn't really believe I could do anything well

It was only through achieving success in other areas of his life such as sport and his social life that he managed to develop enough confidence to enable him to move forward.

Trish also lacked confidence at school. The transition from a very small primary school to a very large secondary school was extremely hard. She found it hard to make new friends and was sometimes the victim of bullying. As a result of this she had low self esteem, and as a result her response was to never challenge herself or push herself as much as she might have otherwise done. These kinds of experiences of school are crucial in terms of shaping people's personalities which has a direct impact on their future including their career paths.

In terms of the impact that different teachers and different teaching styles have on people, their willingness to learn and their engagement with education, the participants in the study do highlight instances where this has had an effect. All of the 11 year olds in the study can describe which lessons they like and which ones they don't, and usually this is because of the teacher. Amy (16) describes how she is intending to become a history teacher, largely because of the experience she had with history in school:

The history course we are doing at the moment I find it really really interesting and my history teacher last year was really good and everything he taught....I could understand it really well so I suppose he was a big influence really

Ken (70) describes a different experience. He recalls that school for him was a "waste of time" and that he felt he learned nothing while he was there. He was however, motivated enough to go to night school as well from the age of 14 where he learned engineering. He recalls the difference he felt in attending night school and how he found this a positive experience:

the teachers were different there because they actually worked as engineers, they could answer your questions and spent time explaining how things really worked

Interestingly, Nicholas (16) explained how a teacher he had during his time at school in Switzerland steered him towards studying psychology in the future:

he was a chemistry teacher but he actually kept telling us how great psychology was and how we'd all love it but it wasn't an option in my old school and when I was picking my A-levels at this school it was the first subject I chose

This demonstrates how the environment that people learn in and the teachers they have do impact on future decisions.

During the interviews with the adults in the study, it became obvious that not having clear aspirations or positive experiences of school did not prevent success in later life. Both Nick (66) and Ken (70) felt that school did not interest them and did not teach them anything and they both went on to have successful careers. When you compare this to the young people in the study, there are some who do not know what they want to do and do not necessarily feel they will do well at school. This relates back to the point made earlier about the number of opportunities available to people now, and the need for education to be broad enough to support the development of both technical and academic skills. In the 2010 Schools White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' there is evidence of a plan to provide strong support for academic routes through the continuation of initiatives such as support for Triple Science and the development of the new English Baccalaureate. In terms of technical and vocational qualifications there will be less support for already established vocational qualifications such as BTECs and Diplomas, however there is a new initiative in the form of University

Technology Colleges that involve partnerships between schools, higher education institutions and local businesses (p59).

5.2 The media and role models

The importance of role models in shaping careers aspirations has already been touched upon in previous sections. Role models are influential for all generations, and can be family members, as in the case of Danny (11) and Ken (70). Role models can also be friends, as in the case of Bethany (11) or teachers, highlighted by Amy (16). There may be other people that we meet throughout our lives who also have an impact on us and how we feel about the future.

Bethany (11) also describes how her riding instructor is also a role model for her:

My riding instructor, I like what she does, she seems to have a nice job and a nice life

Anyone can meet people at any time in their life that can have an impact on them and their ideas and this is the same across generations. Some of the people in the older age group recognise how people they met within the workplace were people they looked up to, admired and aspired to be. Ken (70) describes this experience in the Navy:

I had this one Commanding Officer, who was very dynamic and also very innovative. He wasn't afraid to try new ideas and it made things exciting

Similarly, Judy (64) describes one of the Ward Sisters that she looked up to:

she was very approachable at a time when you were terrified of most Ward Sisters, but this one wasn't, it was nice

Perhaps the influence of the media becomes more apparent in the younger participants when looking at role models. Only one of the six adult participants mentioned anyone famous being a role model for them, and this was one of the youngest adults, Nicola (27), who said that she really admired Sarah Willingham, who revamped and re-launched Pizza Express and also Duncan Bannatyne for his successful businesses, often now showcased through the media and programmes such as Dragons Den. Perhaps older generations did not have such ready access to information and therefore were not as strongly influenced by people who are famous. Additionally, all of those in the eldest age group and two of the three in the other adult age group stated that they would not be influenced by people in the media because they would not see how this has anything to do with their choices or decisions.

By contrast, when asked to name people who they consider to be role models, two of the younger participants both immediately mentioned people who are famous. Emily (11) wants to be a singer when she is older, and she said:

I really admire Beyonce, she was the first person I went to see in concert and she was brilliant.....she is good because she doesn't have to have a certain kind of look, she is just a really good singer

Amy (16) also admires Madonna and felt she was:

really driven, determined, has lots of self belief and has really influenced young people

There are several occasions where people can identify the skills and personal qualities they admire in individuals and this is true across all age groups. Perhaps what is different across the age groups is that those who are older have met and worked with more people, and so they can identify better with these people.

Younger people have greater access to the media and have had less experience of being around adults and being in the workplace and therefore they may find their inspiration in celebrities initially, and this may well change as their lives progress.

The media itself is something which is certainly more prominent than it was in previous generations, however it is very difficult to measure the influence it has. As discussed in the literature review, Blenkinsop et al (2005) highlights a very interesting difference in perception regarding the role of the media and the impact on young people. In this study teachers felt that the media and particular the desire for glamour and fame were strong driving factors for young people today. Contrastingly when she went on to research young people's views she noticed that their perception was actually very different and it was not a significant factor to them at all.

In my research during the interview with the Head of Careers there was some discussion about the influence of the media. She recognised that there had been trends towards certain subjects or careers which were popular because of certain television programmes, giving the example of Forensic Science. She also went on to say that:

universities offer courses in some of these subjects but often they don't lead them into the careers they want

This highlights the importance of what she had said previously, which is that CEG is only effective if young people also put the effort in themselves, conducting research and talking to the right people.

When asked about whether they were aware of the role of media in influencing careers, the older people all felt that they had not been influenced by the media, however they did recognise that it was now very different and they could see how

young people would. When we discussed this issue with the younger participants, most did not feel there was a strong influence on their decisions because of the media, but they could identify things they had seen on television or in magazines which they were interested in and helped them develop their knowledge which they would want to use for a career in the future. Danny (11), who wants to be a mechanic said:

I watch American Hot Rods on TV and read a lot of car magazines...I do think it's realistic and helpful for me

Similarly Bethany (11) who wants to work with horses said:

there is a whole channel on TV dedicated to horses, watching really famous riders who have done massive big things in their careers. It tells me that its hard but in the end it can be worth it

Those in the youngest age group do not seem to be as aware of the possibility that the media may not portray life in a way which is realistic as those in the older age groups do. Participants have highlighted the fact that the media is a positive influence in the sense that it provides them with information and ideas and can be inspiring. Some have also indicated that it can be a negative influence where it misrepresents certain careers and can lead to false expectations.

Nicholas (16) is a media studies student and provided an interesting perspective on the role the media could have in shaping career aspirations, using the example of city banking:

if you're a banker at the moment you can get a bad reputation and people may sway away from that even though its a perfectly good job with a good salary. Some people would choose other jobs over that just because of bad press

This is a good example of how people could be directly influenced by the media. Both the Head of Careers and the Careers Guidance Manager described how they actively promote CEG which tackles gender and racial stereotyping in careers. They recognise this as something which is enforced by the media, although often not overtly, and aim to redress this through specific activities. They use resources such as DVDs and case studies to highlight the importance of not reducing your options because of stereotypes, and also run activity days promoting opportunities for girls to take up engineering and construction. Many of these schemes are Government funded and are schools are often able to access resources and activities to help them combat stereotyping.

There is perhaps a question around whether people are truly aware of the extent of the influence that the media can have on them. Much of what occurs through the media and particularly advertising is done through subliminal messages and therefore people may not recognise how they are being affected. Again this is something which will inevitably be more of an issue for younger people as the availability of the media and access to information has become so widespread, in a way that it wasn't 50 years ago.

5.3 Other factors

In reflecting on their lives and their career choices, those participants in the older age groups were able to reflect on the things which had the most impact on their careers and in most cases these were unplanned and unpredictable occurrences. Four of the six adults in the study had all experienced redundancy in their careers, two of those people being under the age of 30 when it happened. For both Chris (30) and Nick (66) this was a life changing experience. Chris was made redundant from a job where he was working on digital media solutions as a way of engaging young adults in the world of work, he recalls how he planned to move on:

I sat with Kev (a colleague) and we said well this is it, we need to do something and we've got nothing to lose so we might as well think about setting up in business ourselves....we gave ourselves two years to make a go of it and we are still going now, four years on

Although they would never have planned to start their own business they were thrown into a situation where they had to make a decision and it was pivotal and life changing for them. Chris had said when he was younger he could never have imagined a time when he would be running his own successful business.

For Nick the outcome was less positive. He had worked for the same company all his life and for 25 years had worked his way up the career ladder to a very senior position in a national company. When he was made redundant he recalls being "absolutely devastated" and at the age of 54 he didn't feel able to re-enter the workforce in a different capacity. For a little while he became self employed and did some consultancy work for less than half of what he had previously earned. He describes it as something which he never recovered from.

Nick also went on to suffer from a serious heart condition which affected his ability to work. Ken (70) was discharged from the Navy for 5 years because of an injury to his knee which left him unable to continue to do the job he had been doing. Trish (30) also describes having to leave her job as a project manager because of illness:

we had cutbacks at work and so people were made redundant and not replaced. The work load was huge and it became so stressful I had to leave

It is clear that some of the situations people find themselves in during life are pivotal in shaping their careers. Life and work in this sense are not independent of each other and the older participants in the study recognise how this can shape the future. The younger people in the study have often not experienced this and therefore do not anticipate this having any bearing on their career pathways.

Having said this, some of the younger participants do recognise that their ideas are changing and will continue to change, and as discussed earlier some do not anticipate staying in the same occupation all their lives. When asked to consider what they felt was the strongest motivating factor for their careers in the future, all of the participants in the two younger age groups felt that it was being in a career they enjoyed. Interestingly, those in the two adult age groups could list several other factors which they felt were more important, including:

“money and success” (Nicola)

“progression opportunities” (Ken)

“satisfaction and achievement” (Chris)

“working with lots of different people” (Chris)

As time goes on and people gain greater experience of life and careers they are possibly better placed to identify what “enjoyment” actually involves, and what matters most to them based on the experiences they have had.

In terms of identifying the factors which influence career choices and opportunities, there is evidence from my research that luck and serendipity play a significant role in shaping career outcomes. Despite significant developments in the provision of structured careers education for young people, and the focus on the importance of planning, there are precious few examples of where people have followed a route which was planned from a young age. This relates back to the point made by Hodkinson (2004) in Chapter 2 that dispositions relating to careers and education are inseparable from the effects of other aspects of our lives. In this case, it does lead us to question the value of structured careers guidance and the focus which it currently has on making effective plans. Through discussions with Sarah, the Careers Guidance Manager, we could assume that those aspects of the careers guidance programme which encourage the development of job related

skills, such as problem solving, creativity and communication, are possibly more effective than the research and planning linked to pursuing a single career path.

Having examined the role of the education system, careers guidance, the media and role models I have explored how these aspects can be important in moulding ideas about the future, and shaping career paths. There are obvious differences across generations in all aspects examined through this chapter and I have also highlighted the difficulty in effectively developing plans for careers when so much of what we know and understand about careers comes from experience, luck and chance, factors which we cannot plan for and in most cases cannot predict.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

The research conducted addressed the following question:

How do attitudes to careers and employment aspirations differ across generations?

There were a number of sub questions:

- a) Do people of different generations view careers and employment in different ways?

- b) How far are career choices of people from different generations influenced by:
 - Social position
 - Family
 - Friends and peers
 - Teachers and school environment (including structured Careers Education and Guidance)
 - Media and role models
 - Other factors

Through conducting a range of biographical case studies with people across different age groups I have established a number of areas where influences on career choices and aspirations do vary across generations, and also some areas where these differences are less obvious.

In both adults and young people there was evidence that attachment to place and experience of moving frequently does have an effect on what people choose to do in the future. In some cases this encourages people to continue to travel and seek broader experiences, and in others it generates a need for stability and familiarity.

This response does not seem to differ because of any generational factors, although geographical mobility has increased and this may become evident in the expectations young people develop around education and careers. There was some evidence within the case studies that if people had experienced their family moving because of careers then they were more likely to consider it as an option for themselves.

In terms of opportunities available to people entering the labour market there is evidence through the biographical case studies that opportunities available to women have increased over the years. Both educational opportunities and work were far more gender specific in the early – mid 20th century and the options available to people were often limited by gender. Although this is not as prominent now, there is still evidence that different industries are divided by gender. Careers education also recognises that gender stereotyping is still implicit in society and aims to address some of these issues through programmes in schools. The other areas which seem to be most significantly different across generations are around role models, the media and experiences of school (including careers education and guidance).

Amongst the older participants, particularly those aged 60-70, access to the media was very limited at the time when they were making decisions about careers, and people were not easily able to identify where this had been influential in any decisions they made about the future. They all describe their choices being shaped more by their own personal experiences in their family and in the community around them rather than by any perceptions they had of particular careers as communicated through the media.

By contrast, many of the role models discussed with the younger people were famous people, whose lives and careers were showcased through the television, internet and magazines and easily accessible to young people. Their experiences of

other people and particularly adults have yet to be shaped by their interactions through work and therefore they were less able to relate to them. Contrastingly the people in the older age groups described their role models as people they met and knew, often those people they had come across as people who were in more senior positions to them in the workplace.

Although we can acknowledge there may be a negative effect of media influence on young people in providing a distorted view of reality, these participants also felt the media was a force for good, providing examples of where they felt they were more able to access information and be inspired. This is something which is certainly more prominent than in previous generations, particularly before the internet was readily available.

The internet and communications technology have also meant that people are now much more able to stay in touch with their friends and therefore are likely to be more influenced by them for longer than they were in previous generations and this is something which has been highlighted by some of the participants.

Experiences of school will always vary for different people. The school system in this country is still much more focused on academic achievement than on vocational or technical skills, despite an increasing demand from industry for people qualified in technical roles. For older generations, participants felt it was much easier to access work opportunities once they left school, and also to progress within a company, training on the job. University education was reserved for those who were most academic whereas now it is a prerequisite for many higher paid jobs which has meant that more young people need to plan to go to university to be able to access the better jobs and this was evident through the discussions with the younger participants.

This has significant implications when reflecting on the value of current decisions made by the coalition Government around education. The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper published in 2010 describes the importance of academic success and teaching subject content. The move towards raising the profile of vocational education and increasing the options available through the new 14-19 Diplomas has been pulled back and the focus moved back to strengthening academic achievement. This could make it even more difficult for young people who are not academically able to follow successful career paths.

By contrast, the Government has built in more flexibility in terms of the set up and management of schools, for example by increasing the number of academies and introducing 'free schools'. The flexibility in delivery of the curriculum may enable schools to identify and meet young people's educational needs more effectively, which in turn would have a positive impact on their options and aspirations for the future. As yet it is too soon to understand fully how this will work in practice.

Careers Education and Guidance (CEG) in schools is now structured and statutory which it was not prior to the 1990s. Careers advice is now available to all students in Key Stage 4 and is integral within the CEG programmes offered in schools from 11-18. For those participants in the eldest age group there was little or no acknowledgement of any formal or informal careers guidance, which therefore meant it had little influence on their aspirations or decisions. By contrast, the younger adults and the school age participants do recall some of their careers programme but not a great deal of it. However, they do not recall any instances where they felt their careers guidance programme had been instrumental in the decision making process. Through interviews with the Head of Careers and the Careers Guidance Manager it became clear that the programmes available are there to support the transitions through education and into careers and will only be successful if the young people put the effort and work in themselves.

There are certain areas where it is much less easy to identify a difference in terms of the influence on careers for different generations; these areas include family, friends and peers. All participants noted that the family was a significant influence on their aspirations for the future; they also all agreed that they would not change their career plans if their family did not agree with their choices. This did not appear to be affected by age.

The role that the family plays in shaping career choices has been categorised into four sections:

- a) Acting as role models
- b) Raising confidence and motivating
- c) Pressurising
- d) Directly steering people into a career

After examining all the categories in turn there does not seem to be any evidence that these factors are in any way linked to generational issues.

In terms of the role friends and peers play in career aspirations, I once again found that across all generations, whilst people would speak to their friends about their career choices they would generally not be influenced by their opinions. Younger people particularly found it easier to recall conversations with their friends and often referred to their friends as a support network, providing encouragement and advice. There was also very little evidence with any of the participants that they would make decisions about their future based on the choices their friends had made, although they would follow recommendations from older friends.

Finally perhaps one of the most explicit examples of where career aspirations and choices have varied across generations comes when comparing decisions made

after years of experience of working, against those made from people who are still at school. When asked to reflect on the factors that have been most significant in shaping their careers, the adults often referred to events that had occurred in life that were often out of their control and that they needed to respond to, such as redundancy and ill health. Young people cannot plan for or anticipate these situations and it is perhaps only after these kinds of experiences that career pathways become most clearly defined. Interestingly, none of the adults I interviewed actually knew what they wanted to do while they were at school, trained to do that and then stayed in the same industry for the rest of their working lives.

Chapter 7 Recommendations

By conducting research with participants across several generations there are numerous examples of how society has changed and continues to change, particularly in relation to education and work. There are now far more choices available to people leaving education, greater social and geographical mobility and increasing financial pressures. As a result measures need to be taken to better understand the impact this has on career choices and to be able to address some of the difficulties and challenges in this area.

The media is increasingly prominent in everyday life and the internet is a key mechanism for communication, work and leisure. It is important to recognize that many judgements and beliefs about work and careers will be developed through the media and it would be beneficial to use these tools to portray balanced and accurate images of the world of work. This may include challenging gender, racial and class stereotyping, providing positive role models and accurate information about careers. There are already a handful of dedicated websites and other tools which have been developed for this purpose (such as FutureMorph and CEGNET) and it is important that these become integrated within education.

The increasing emphasis we place on structured careers education and guidance raises important concerns around the value this investment will have. It is designed to try and ensure people maximize their skills and potential for themselves and for the benefit of the UK economy. My research indicates that life experiences, chance encounters and factors which are out of our control (e.g. health & redundancy) are far more likely to dictate career patterns than time spent carefully planning whilst at school. We can surmise from this that certain aspects of career planning guidance are likely to be more useful and effective than others. Developing research skills, confidence and creativity will always be beneficial, but given the results of my research, we have to question the value of mapping out a

single career path. Identifying a range of areas young people are interested in, encouraging them to explore and understand them in more depth and providing them with strategies which enable them to plan, but plan for change are essential. Patton & McMahon support this view, (2006)

Individuals need to focus increasingly on employability rather than job security, and learn the skills which will assist them in taking responsibility for the direction and evolution of their own careers (p.6)

There may also be work to be done across education but also in society more widely to address some of the negative perceptions around unemployment and sickness particularly. Recognising that the research highlights redundancy and illness and barriers to employment and realizing that many people in their lives will face these challenges increases the importance of providing an effective support system within society and equipping people to deal with these kinds of problems without judgement or criticism.

Alongside education, family and friends also have a role to play in enabling change. They are instrumental in shaping ideas and beliefs from an early age and raising awareness of the impact they can have and providing advice and guidance on how to support career development would be beneficial. Perhaps the first stage on this journey is to help people to understand how career choices are formed, promoting a similar message to that which would be recommended from schools, enabling research and exploration, creativity and confidence. Life skills will inevitably be an important factor in navigating a successful career path, dealing with the difficulties which emerge and changing direction as required. Further research which trials different approaches to career planning and development with young people, both through schools and through the family would be highly beneficial in identifying specifically what can be done to support people in making the most of their careers.

Appendix 1 Interview Schedule: Guidance Manager

The interview will begin with an overview of the purpose of the research and an explanation of how the interview will take place. The interview will follow the schedule of questions set out below and will be recorded using a digital Dictaphone.

Section 1: The history and background of careers education

- Can you provide a brief history of careers education – identifying how this has changed over the years to illustrate how it may have had a different impact on the adults and young people in the study?

Section 2: What does careers guidance look like now?

- In the current careers guidance framework:
 - What is included?
 - Who delivers it?
 - Who funds it?
- Is careers guidance based on research/data on what affects career choices?
- Is there any evidence of the impact of careers guidance on career choices?
- Are there different models of careers guidance?
- How does the support available acknowledge/complement other influences in young people's lives?

Section 3: Political influences

- How far is careers guidance shaped from the top down in terms of meeting national and international economic and political priorities?

Appendix 2 - Interview Schedule: Adults

The interviews will begin with an overview of the purpose of the research and an explanation of how the interview will take place. The interviews will follow the schedule of questions set out below and will be recorded using a digital Dictaphone. The interviews will be semi structured, the purpose of the questions being to provide prompts and ensure all aspects are covered rather than to provide a strict framework for discussion.

Section 1: Profile of the participant

Questioning will focus on identifying characteristics of the interviewees based on the following criteria:

- Location (rural/urban)
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Parents jobs & education/class
- Sibling education/ employment routes
- Community involvement and influence (are you actively engaged with your local community, do you feel part of a wider network?)

Section 2: Geography

- Have you always lived in the same area?
- Did you move to take up different jobs, or move for other reasons then seek work?
- What is your approach to geographical mobility and employment – have the two been linked?

Section 3: Early experiences of school

- Did you enjoy school?

- Did you feel motivated to learn at school and what were the reasons for this?
- What were your aspirations at school and did you feel as though you achieved much at school?
- How well did you relate to the teachers in school? Did any of them have an influence on your education or your career aspirations?

CEG input

- What did it careers education and guidance consist of whilst you were at school?
- Who delivered CEG (e.g. teachers/careers staff/external people)?
- Was CEG useful did it have an impact on the choices you made about careers? If yes, how? If not, how could it have been better?

Section 4: Employment history and current plans

- Can you provide an overview of your employment history including details of key decisions that were made and routes followed?
- When you were in your teens what were your career aspirations? What are they now, and have they changed? Do you expect them to change in the future?
- What appeals to you about that career/s (ie. money/skills/environment/working patterns/conditions)
- How did you arrive at these decisions about your career/s?
- How did you know what a career would be like?
- What do you think the major influences on your choices have been?

Section 5: Friends and peers

- Do/did you discuss career plans with friends?
- Do/did you know what choices friends have made/will make in terms of their careers?

- Would/did you choose subjects/routes your friends have chosen – why?
- Can friends be role models? Are there any examples of this in your life?
- How much importance would you put on the views or advice of your friends when it comes to careers and education?

Section 6: Role models

- What kind of people have had an influence on your life?
- What kind of people would have had an influence on your career choices (ie. friends/family/famous people)
- What kind of people/careers do/did you admire, and why?

Section 7: Family

- Who in your family would you or did you discuss your career/education choices with?
- What role have different members of the family had in being involved in career/education choices? (ie. mother, father, siblings, grandparents, aunts/uncles/cousins)
- What level of importance did you put on the views & involvement of your family?
- What would have happened if what you had decided you really wanted to do was not accepted by other members of the family?

Section 8: The role of the media

- Are you aware of advertising campaigns run by the government to promote specific careers?
- Do you feel you got a better idea of what careers were like from television and the media? Can you provide examples and do you feel these represented accurate images?
- Have you been influenced by how careers are portrayed in the media? Are there examples?

Section 9: Conclusion

- Following this discussion what would you highlight as the most influential or significant factors in making decisions about your future career/s?

Appendix 3 Interview Schedule: Young People

The interviews will begin with an overview of the purpose of the research and an explanation of how the interview will take place. The interviews will follow the schedule of questions set out below and will be recorded using a digital Dictaphone. The interviews will be semi structured, the purpose of the questions being to provide prompts and ensure all aspects are covered rather than to provide a strict framework for discussion.

Section 1: Profile of the participant

Questioning will focus on identifying characteristics of the interviewees based on the following criteria:

- Location (rural/urban)
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Parents jobs & education/class
- Sibling education/employment routes
- Community involvement and influence (are you actively engaged with your local community, do you feel part of a wider network?)

Section 2: Geography

- Have you always lived in the same area?
- Do you intend to stay in this area?
- Would you consider moving to pursue education or a career?

Section 3: Current plans

- What are your career aspirations?
- How did you arrive at them?
- How do you know what a career is like?

- What do you think the major influences on your choices are?
- Have they changed over time and do you expect them to change?
- How certain are you about these plans?
- What appeals to you about that career (ie. money/skills/environment/working patterns/conditions)
- Do you know what educational route you need to take to reach these goals?

Section 4: Experience of school

- Do you enjoy school?
- How motivated are you to learn at school, and why do you think this is?
- What are your aspirations for the future and how well do you think you do at school?
- Do you get on well with your teachers? Do you think they have influenced your choices for the future, and if so, how?

CEG input

- What has CEG consisted of so far?
- Who delivers CEG in your school?
- Is CEG useful and do you think it has influenced the choices you have made?
- If yes, how? If not, how could it have been better?

Section 5: Friends and peers

- Do you discuss careers with friends?
- Do you know what choices friends have made/will make?
- Would you choose subjects/routes your friends have chosen – why?
- How important are the views and advice of your friends in making choices about the future?
- Can friends be role models? Examples.

Section 6: Role models

- What kind of people have an influence on your life?
- What kind of people would have an influence on career choices (ie. friends/family/famous people)
- What kind of people/careers do you admire, and why?

Section 7: Family

- Who in your family would you or do you discuss your career/education choices with?
- What role do you see different members of the family having in being involved in career/education choices? (ie. mother, father, siblings, grandparents, aunts/uncles/cousins)
- What level of importance do you put on the views & involvement of your families?
- What would happen or what would you do if what you had decided you really wanted to do was not accepted by other members of the family?

Section 8: Media

- Are you aware of advertising campaigns run by the government to promote specific careers?
- Do you feel you get a better idea of what careers are like from television and the media? Can you provide examples and do you feel these represent accurate images?
- Have you been influenced by how careers are portrayed in the media? Are there examples?

Section 9: Conclusion

- Following this discussion what would you highlight as the most influential or significant factors in making decisions about your future career/s?

Appendix 4 Example of Data Analysis

Data were collected using a tape recorder during each interview, and then written up using the following template. This example was taken from one of the interviews with the young people. Each section of the templates could then be grouped and collectively reviewed more easily. Relevant quotations were identified from the tape recordings or hand written notes and added here to ensure they were not lost.

<p>Profile Location – wants to live in a small village near the town he lives in now. Wouldn't move away from his family for a job/to study.</p> <p>Most significant influences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dad and his friends, grass track 	<p>Current plans Wants to be a mechanic. Doesn't know what he needs to do to train to be a mechanic. Wants to go to college in York to stay close to his family. Did want to be a wagon driver but wants to be a mechanic now and doesn't think he will change his mind about that now.</p>
<p>Role models Aunty's boyfriend is a mechanic and a friend of the family is a mechanic and sometimes he spends time with them in their workshops</p>	<p>Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brother = 9 • Sister = 6 months old • Father does autograss racing with his friends and he teaches him basic mechanics on those cars. • Does talk to mum and dad about the future – “they help me think through it and work out what I have to do to become a mechanic” “my Dad shows me mechanics through grasstrack” • It would worry him if his parents didn't think he should be a mechanic. Wouldn't want to do it as much as if they supported him. • Sometimes talks to uncle but nobody else
<p>Quotations How will you find out what qualifications you need to be an mechanic – “research in the internet and do work</p>	<p>Friends and peers Does discuss career plans with his friends and likes discussing it. Encourages him and motivates him to</p>

<p>experience in a garage in year 10" "At first I thought I wanted to be a wagon driver because I like bikes and cars and because of hanging around with my Dad and his friends (who are wagon drivers) but then I thought I'd be better off as a mechanic rather than a lorry driver"</p>	<p>work towards being a mechanic. Wouldn't be influenced by friends thoughts "well at the end of the day its my decision"</p>
<p>Experiences of school "Tough" and "boring" Likes some lessons and some teachers. Made lots of new friends. Enjoys school most of the time but doesn't think he will do well at school.</p>	<p>Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reads a lot of car magazines which has influenced him. • Watches American Hot Rods which he thinks is realistic and finds informative. • Not aware of being influenced by the media in any other way.
<p>Other</p>	<p>Careers advice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "When I was at primary school we had this enterprise club and we went over to this garage and they showed us how to do MOTs" • "Someone did come in and talk to us about what we wanted to do for our careers"

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