Pupils' Perceptions of Their Experience of Schooling:

A Four Year Case Study at an Independent School

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Abstract

This research explored pupils' experiences of schooling through their perceptions of the enjoyment and importance of school and its subjects, together with influences and changes over time. It took the form of a case study, conducted over four years, with data collected at two points during the academic year, using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The research tracked a single year group, from the end of Year 7, to the start of Year 11, in two linked schools: a preparatory school and its senior school, both independent, selective, co-educational, day and boarding schools, situated in the north of England. The key findings indicated a degree of consistency in pupils' perceptions; in general terms, friendships, socialising and sports were the most enjoyed aspects of school, whilst trying hard, making friends and learning skills were the most important. The most enjoyed subjects were Games, Design Technology and Art, whilst the most important were Maths, English and Science. Subject enjoyment was attributed to the teacher (personality and delivery), the fun element, and pupil's talent; subject importance was predicated by usefulness for later life and for the world of work. Changes over time were apparent in some areas; the relative values of friendships increased and sports decreased; as career choices broadened, non-core subjects were elevated in status; the relationship between maturing pupils and more 'human' teachers became increasingly equitable. There were gender differences: boys preferred groups, teams and sports, whilst girls preferred socialising and friendships. Boys appeared to be more extrinsically motivated and girls were more intrinsically motivated toward subjects; boys' preferences were Maths, Science, and technology oriented, whilst girls' preferences were arts and humanities centred; boys tended toward practical, technical and scientific careers, whilst girls tended toward the arts, media and journalism. School was consistently regarded as part of a long educational process that included university. Pupils were motivated and a strong work ethic was evident. GCSE aspirations were high – A* or A grade; C was considered low. Teachers viewed positively were engaging, humorous experts and those viewed negatively were pedestrian and inept. Pupils' own families were supportive, aspirational, and influential on choice of 'proper' subjects and 'good' careers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study looked at the experiences of a group of pupils as they progressed through school in the independent sector of the English education system. The main thrust of the research looked at how they saw their journey through slightly more than four years of schooling, a journey where they moved from Year 7, near the top of a middle school environment, to Year 11, near the top of a senior school environment. The research looked at what they enjoyed about both school and the subjects they studied, and what they perceived as important about school and those subjects. Additionally, the research looked at what changed over time, and what influenced these pupils over the period of the research. The 'school' in question was really three schools under one umbrella, but only two concerned the study here; one (which shall be referred to as the *junior school*) catered for the middle years group from age eight to thirteen, and the other (which shall be referred to as the *senior school*, dealt with pupils from age thirteen to eighteen. Each of these two parts of the establishment was a co-educational day and boarding school, and transition at Year 8 generally saw pupils moving automatically from junior to senior school. Each school possessed its own characteristics and environment, and could be considered as fairly discrete. Competitive entry from pupils outside was accepted, principally at age eight, eleven and thirteen. As a selective school, academic standards were high, and the mix of students in both establishments represented a fairly stable and motivated group.

Background to the research.

My reason for wanting to pursue this avenue of research was rooted in an MA study (Cannons, 2001); this piece of research centred on pupils' perceptions of Design and Technology, but part of the work looked at attitudes toward all school subjects, particularly the hierarchy in terms of academic importance, enjoyment, pressure and creativity. The perceived importance or enjoyment of the subjects allowed them to be ranked against each other and the reasons for the ranking was explored. It became clear, for instance, that the most enjoyable subjects were often viewed as the least important, and vice versa. Enjoyable subjects were perceived as less stressful and pressured, whereas important

subjects were perceived as those where the work was hard but this was seen as acceptable, even expected, and furthermore the real value of the important subject was in its usefulness, both for future employment and for later life generally. The research was structured as a case study, which was, in essence, a snapshot across the whole age range of the middle and upper school; (eight to eighteen years), looking at the perceptions and feelings of the pupils themselves. The findings, particularly in terms of the relationship of one subject to another and how people felt about them prompted me to think that there was further scope for a more in-depth look at pupil's perceptions over time.

The focus of the research

In this current study I wanted to take this further and to find out more about how and why these perceptions developed and changed as the pupils passed through school; at what point and for what reason did the liking for a subject change? Why was it a given that some subjects would always be seen as more important to the pupils than others? What made pupils feel this way, and why?

Because the research was being conducted in an independent school, I wanted to find out what, if anything was different, when compared to pupils' experiences in maintained schools and whether or not these modern independent school pupils felt the same way about their schooling, as did their contemporaries in other schools. It is arguable that a stereotypical image of the English 'public school' pupil still pervades our collective consciousness today; this research might shed light on whether these images are merely caricatures, or if they still exist.

The areas I have looked at in this study have been researched fairly widely; some more than others, but because of its predominance in the education field, most –nearly all- the contemporary material deals with the state-run education sector. As far as independent schools are concerned, some studies have been done which examine their rather unique place in the educations system in this country, and because it has more of an obvious market orientation than the state apparatus, a good deal of the research concentrates on what makes people 'buy into' it in the first place. There has been independent school-oriented research on areas such as the perceived employment advantage gained from attending independent schools (Naylor et al., 2002; Wright, 1999; Power, 2000) or parental motivations for 'going private' and their expectations from the independent sector (Gorard, 1996; West et al., 1996; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003; Stafford,

1985; ISIS, 1998). There has been non-specific institutional research on the effect of socio-economic status (Flouri, 2006; Connolly, 2006; van der Werfhorst et al., 2003) and class capital (Sullivan, 2001; Chin, 2000), which, although not always aimed directly at independent schools, will have clear implications for independent education, as the higher socio-economic groups are seen as the natural catchment of this sector. Although research has looked carefully at pupils' experiences of English schools, in particular cases, from time to time (Lacey, 1970), including those in the independent sector (Lambert, 1968; Wakeford, 1969; Walford, 1986;), much of the recent research has looked further afield, to the USA (Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003), or has concentrated on a particular facet of independent school life (Tovey, 1992; Bourke, 2001).

The reason that I chose to follow a year group at this stage in their education was because of their unique position in the school hierarchy and because of the journey that they made; the situation presented a rather singular opportunity to study a cohort of pupils for an extended period of time. The number of pupils involved in the study remained fairly consistent, although, as it moved through the school, the size of the year group fluctuated from about eighty pupils to one hundred and fifteen. A large proportion of these children had been together, as a year group, since the age of eight (some for even longer), and some would probably continue their relationships beyond the age of eighteen.

Many facets of the pupils' journey provided a focus; as this rather large peer group traversed a number of important milestones in their school lives, these children and young people –young adults ultimately, will have developed and refined feelings and views about what it is that they were doing during their studies; they will have moved from an environment where they have had little or no input into what they do, to one where they have had large and important choices to make.

A significant factor for the research group was the process of moving through adolescence, with all that that entails. Research (Durkin, 1997; Connor, 1994; Padfield, 1997) has noted the difficulties faced by the developing young adult as he or she passes through what is accepted as a most difficult period, both in terms of home life and school life, and it is acknowledged that the place and omniscience of the peer group presents much in the way of influence and distraction; it is inevitably the outside observer who credits adolescents with a cohesive or group mentality that is not always acknowledged from within. Although

the perception is often that peers are copied mindlessly, it may be more the case that they are only compared, emulated or admired; deference is often paid to the strength and direction of family values rather than those of peers.

In addition to this, members of the group were shifting schools, moving from the top tier of a fairly large middle school environment, to the bottom tier of a large senior school. It might be argued that a 'normal' transition phase at the end of Year 6 allows for settlement at Year 7, the positive and negative feelings of Year 8 and the options at Year 9, followed by GCSE coursework in Year 10; all occurring over a respectable timescale. With our study institution this was, in a sense, a long-term movement compressed into a shorter timescale. The effect of school transition at Year 7 has been examined closely by many researchers (Morrison, 2000; Lucey and Reay, 2000; Harris and Rudduck, 1993; Galton et al., 2000) where the move from one primary institution (where the average age might be seven or eight years), to another secondary institution (where the average age might be fourteen or fifteen years); it may be significant that, in the case of the research schools, where transfer takes place at Year 8, the average age of pupils is ten years in junior school, and fifteen years in senior school.

Perhaps, for the pupils at least, the most significant stage of the journey occurred when they reached a point in school where the experience of educational compulsion gives way slightly and they are made to choose, from the subjects available, their options for GCSEs, as well as undertaking the GCSE courses proper. A good deal of research has been conducted into pupils' perceptions of subjects at school, before transition (Pollard and Triggs, 2000) and after GCSE (Elsworth, 1999; Whitehead, 1996) as well as the period during GCSEs; how pupils perceive subjects, and what makes then choose or not choose to study specific subjects (Adey and Biddulph, 2001; Colley and Comber, 2003; Miller et al., 1999), and in particular, the perceived differences in approach to subjects, and performance at subjects, of boys and girls (Lightbody et al., 1996; Hendley et al., 1995; Warrington and Younger, 1996a; Tinklin, 2000; van Houtte, 2004; Dryler, 1999; Francis, 2000). It has been shown that liking a subject does tend to follow traditional gender stereotypes; there is a tendency for boys to like 'hard' subjects and girls to like 'soft' subjects, and although the National Curriculum provides a compulsory core, which is followed by all children, evidence suggests that post-sixteen choices still follow the stereotypical routes. It is also the case that, as far

as outcomes are concerned, girls are outperforming boys, even in subjects seen as the preserve of males.

Apart from the perils of adolescence and the obstacle courses presented by the various phases of education through which the research group passed, and the concomitant changes that occurred, there was the impact of outside influences to be considered. Research has shown the considerable impact of the family environment (Flouri, 2006; McNeal, 2001) as well as the teaching environment (from the perspective of both pupils (McNess, 2006; McIntyre et al., 2005; Newman, 1997; Wallace, 1996a; Wallace, 1996b; Campbell et al., 2001; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1997; Duffield, 1998; Gipps and Tunstall, 1997; Lang, 1993; Keys and Fernandes, 1993) and teachers (Morgan and Morris, 1999; Atkinson, 2000;)) on pupils as they progress through school.

This piece of research mined the rich seam of material found in these studies and others, and compared it with data drawn (over a prolonged period of time) from the investigation of a discrete year group of students as they crossed the important thresholds in school life and moved towards public examination.

The structure of the study.

To begin with, a pilot study, using the questionnaire and interview instruments was carried out. This involved a group of twenty Year 8 pupils, who were tasked during the academic year 2001 – 2002. As with the main research group, all had the process explained to them, and none declined. The main research exercise involved a whole year group (approximately ninety pupils), all of who were asked to participate in the study. The research topic was explained, as was the length of time involved. None declined. The year group chosen were, at the start of the programme, in Year 7 during the academic year 2002-2003. The outline of the study is shown in Table 1.

The first year of the research focussed on pupils at the end of Year 7 and the beginning of Year 8. This was the age when most children would expect to be in the process of passing from a junior school to a senior school. Because, in the research schools, this change occurred at the end of Year 8, the research group were at a point where, although they were still experiencing the junior end of schooling, they had became the more senior members of their establishment. Questionnaires were administered to the whole year group at the end of Year 7, and interviews were conducted with a sample of pupils at the start of Year 8.

Table 1. The research programme for each academic year

September	**2001**	**2002**	**June** Piloting the questionnaire. 20 Year 8 pupils (10 boys, 10 girls)
September	**2002**	**2003**	**June** First year questionnaire data collection with 67 Year 7 pupils (41 boys, 26 girls)
September First year interview data collection with Year 8 sample (5 boys, 5 girls)	**2003**	**2004**	**June** Second year questionnaire data collection with 83 Year 8 pupils (49 boys, 34 girls)
September Second year interview data collection with Year 9 sample (5 boys, 5 girls)	**2004**	**2005**	**June** Third year questionnaire data collection with 82 Year 9 pupils (46 boys, 36 girls)
September Third year interview data collection with Year 10 sample (5 boys, 5 girls)	**2005**	**2006**	**June** Fourth year questionnaire data collection with 74 Year 10 pupils (41 boys, 33 girls)
September Fourth year interview data collection with Year 11 sample (5 boys, 5 girls)	**2006**	**2007**	**June**

The second year of the research looked at the pupils at the end of Year 8, and the beginning of Year 9, as they prepared for, and reflected on, the actual transition from one school to another, from one known environment to another less well-understood situation, with all that that entailed. These pupils were going to move schools, it was true, but they were going to a 'tied' school inasmuch as the senior establishment was in the same campus and they were all moving together, at the same time, to the same place. As happened in the first year, questionnaires were administered to the whole year group at the end of Year 8, and interviews were conducted with a sample of pupils at the start of Year 9.

The third year of the research looked at the pupils at the end of Year 9 and the beginning of Year 10. They had, by then, experienced a single year of senior school and of being the small fishes again, but were straight into the business of GCSE options and had to cope with, and make decisions about, the movement from wholly compulsory to partially elective education. Again, questionnaires were administered to the whole year group at the end of Year 9, and interviews were conducted with the sample group of pupils at the start of Year 10.

The fourth and final year of the research looked at the pupils at the end of Year 10, and the start of Year 11, when they were engaged in the 'serious'

business of GCSE courses themselves, and the reality of the choices that had been made. As well as being in the middle of the school, they were more used to the approaching GCSE examinations and even the prospect of further choices in the coming year. Questionnaires were administered to the whole year group at the end of Year 10, and interviews were conducted with the sample of pupils at the start of Year 11.

The research enriches our knowledge and understanding of pupils' perceptions of their experience of schooling, in that it provides evidence from a longitudinal study of a particular year group moving through four years of education in the independent sector. It provides detailed quantitative and qualitative data analysis of pupil perceptions over a prolonged period of time, which complements research studies carried out in the maintained sector.

The research thesis is broadly structured to follow the chronology of the data collection exercise. Chapter two provides a review of the literature, and looks at the areas relevant to the research questions, such as enjoyment, importance and influences on pupils' perceptions. Chapter three provides a context for the school, not only in terms of its place in the independent education arena, but also in terms of its organisation and structure. Chapter four lays out the methodology, in terms of the strategy and methods used during the research. Chapters five to eight deal with discrete sets of data from each of the four years of the research; chapter five contains analysis of the Year 7 questionnaire and the Year 8 interview data, chapter six contains analysis of the Year 8 questionnaire and the Year 9 interview data, chapter seven contains analysis of the Year 9 questionnaire and the Year 10 interview data, and chapter eight contains analysis of the Year 10 questionnaire and the Year 11 interview data. Chapter nine provides a longitudinal analysis of the data for the period as a whole: an overview of the data findings as well as specific significant details. Chapter ten provides a synthesis of the research and a discussion of it's finding. Chapter eleven concludes the thesis and suggests some ways in which the research might be developed. The appendices contain questionnaire and interview templates, and graphical quantitative data from the questionnaire responses, as well as comparative local and national data on GCSE results.

Chapter 2

Literature review

Introduction

Research into schools can be considered dry, often being done from the sidelines and only concerned with looking at the paper trail left by children wandering through the system. As noted by Smees and Thomas (1998):

> 'The majority of research into school improvement centres on academic achievement as an indicator of school effectiveness. Although this is a vital indicator, it alone can tell us little about the school environment or the pupils' attitudes within it –only whether or not the school is succeeding in terms of academic outcomes.' (p.7)

Although statistical analysis of academic outcomes provides evidence of the end result of pupils' efforts, research that purports to be school based, or about schools, or from schools should also be aimed at evaluating the experience of those at the sharp end. The status of those in the school environment often makes the research appear very one-sided; on the one hand adults run the schools, and it is they who do the research, by and large, and read the research. On the other hand, the subjects of the research, the pupils, are usually quite passive players in the affair. It would be a forgiving pupil who did not feel that there was an element of bias. It could be argued then that pupils' voices are not always heard, or heard in a way that is fair – anything that, from the pupils' viewpoint, smacks of criticism of an institution can often be dismissed as too challenging or simply wrong, especially if the critics are perceived as 'unqualified'. Added to this there are also the problems of confidentiality and ethics, which will always make the status of the pupils' voices difficult to equate with the adult world, but there is great merit in at least trying to put their views forward sensibly. As front line users of the system, their voices should count for something, if improvements are to be made. Fielding and Rudduck (2002) point out:

> '…there are many silent or silenced voices –students who would like to say things about teaching and learning but who don't feel able to without a framework that legitimises comment and provides reassurance that teachers will welcome their comments and not retaliate.' (p.2)

This piece of research then, was grounded in the belief that the perceptions and opinions of the practicing student certainly have a value and that, because of their unique position inside schools, pupils will always have something interesting

to say. In spite of the fact that they have no choice in whether they go to school or do not go to school (whereas teachers and managers have) it is surprising how very straightforward and simple pupils' expectations of schools are; there is, at the heart of it, the desire (Keys and Fernandes, 1993) that schools should at least be able to help children with exams, teach useful things and teach independence, and that (McNess, 2006) the content should be relevant, the process active and collaborative and the teachers fair and clear.

This research has been conducted with a group of pupils in an independent school, over a period of four years. During this time, from Year 7 to Year 10 they have grown and matured, they have moved from one school to another, and they have chosen and started their GCSE courses. The research has looked specifically at what they have thought of the process; what their perceptions of it have been. It has been concerned with the degree to which they have enjoyed the experience of school and the subjects learned there and what they have considered as important. Over the period of the research they have passed a number of significant milestones (i.e., moving schools and selecting and studying for GCSE) and the research has also looked into whether changes in perception have occurred, and what might have influenced these changes.

The shape of the literature review

Because the research was concerned with pupils' perceptions of their experience of school, the literature review is structured to reflect contemporary research on pupil perceptions but is divided into sections that are pertinent to the research questions. Also, because the research looked at the themes of enjoyment and importance, and how these might be interpreted in relation to the notion of school and taught subjects, there is, to begin with, some definition of the terms used.

To begin, and because the research took place in an independent school, there is some historical context, for the place of independent schools generally. Then, there is analysis of contemporary research that impinges upon pupils' perceptions of enjoyment, both in terms of school as a whole and school subjects, and the influences that bear upon them. There then follows analysis of contemporary research that impinges upon pupils' perceptions of importance, both of school as a whole and of school subjects, together with influences that bear upon them.

There is analysis too, of contemporary research that looks at pupils' perceptions of the changes that occur over time (with particular reference to the milestones such as school transition, options choice, and GCSE study) as well as the different influences that are brought to bear here too.

Definition of terms

As this research study was concerned with the perceptions of the pupils, particularly about the importance of, and their enjoyment of, the school institution and school subjects, it was felt it was necessary to define some of these terms used.

School

When pupils were asked for their feelings about school, it was intended that they saw school in as broad a context as possible; more generally, as a place that they were, rather than in the rather narrow terms associated with schooling and which only applied to lessons or subjects.

Subjects

The notion of subjects was clearly well understood, and was seen to apply to the academic and curricular subject as taught in lessons. The definition of what were considered to be subjects included such things as Physical Education and Games, which were timetabled (in the junior school) for seven periods a week as lessons, and were considered part of the curriculum rather than merely times for playing.

Enjoyment

Enjoyment was to be seen as the degree of pleasurable experience undergone by the individual and was something that each pupil would gauge individually. 'Most enjoyable' or 'least enjoyable' would be intended to define the extremes of (positive or negative) feeling about a situation.

Importance

Importance was to be the degree of personal consequence or moment attached to a situation or condition, and, again, pupils would perceive 'most important and least important' individually.

Independent schools in research

The independent school sector has not been studied and scrutinised as closely as the maintained sector, but research (Lambert, 1968; Wakeford, 1969; Walford, 1990; Sullivan and Heath, 2003; West and Noden, 2003; Walford, 1986, 2003; Foskett and Hemsley Brown, 2003) has examined the extent to which independent education providers are perceived, by both the adults and the children in the system and a fairly consistent picture has emerged. However, it could be argued that much of the research, at least that which is presented from the perspective of the school's pupils has promoted an image of the independent sector that might be considered rather dated; giving an overall impression that might now be perhaps somewhat flawed, from our twenty-first century perspective. Much research has drawn on data collected before the reforms of the seventies and eighties, and a more parochial image of the independent school system was probably easier to define in those times, because there was, arguably, a system in place that was more socially divisive and exclusive than it is today.
Contemporaneous research would have been very instructive in showing the differences that existed within the various strands of education that were perhaps considered to be towards the elitist end of the education pool, from the selective Grammar schools (Lacey, 1970) to the broad genre of independent schools (Wakeford, 1969; Walford, 1986a). However, it may be that research conducted in such schools (after the pupils had taken those pre-determined pathways at eleven, between the secondary modern schools and grammar schools) and the cultures and practices that were endemic therein, have perhaps something to tell us still. The case studies have provided some opportunities for comparison; not only with today's comprehensive schools, but also with contemporary modern independent education methods and practices.

Historically, independent schools as a group have been associated in the minds of many people, with the notion of wealth, privilege and power; an altogether elitist and exclusive set of organisations. It has long been assumed that an education obtained at such an institution provides a guaranteed place in one of the ancient universities followed by a high powered and influential career among the great and the good. The vigour with which this view is held depends often on the political stance of the exponent; independent schools have always been, if nothing else, most durable in their role as a political punch bag between the right

and the left wings of the governing classes. There are certain elements of these education institutions that are seen as archetypical; it is true that, even today, much of the cultural ethos of independent schools includes such facets as the Combined Cadet Force, the school chapel, and (more popularly) a high level of sporting participation and competition. These are often cited as those traditional elements, which are unchanging or developing, as Walford (1986a) notes:

> 'It is often a political choice as to whether the continuities or the changes are emphasised. In the same way, chapel, although still compulsory in most schools, is now an infrequent activity, and CCF is now often voluntary and far less militaristic. Those wishing to present a dynamic image of the public schools will point to the changes; while those who wish to present them as anachronistic will emphasise that chapel, CCF and sport are still there, and that the changes are in degree rather than in substance.' (p. 209)

The fact that, in the 1980s, 77% of cabinet members, 86% of the officer class (above the rank of major general) and 42% of the composition of the House of Commons (Walford, 1986a) could claim to be independent school alumni, whilst the same schools educated only 3% of the school-age population, would have done little to dispel the criticism.

From the viewpoint of the twenty-first century, where a more egalitarian and meritocratic education system is desirable, much of the criticism levelled at independent schools will define their structure and ethos as being very Victorian; indeed, it was the case that the nineteenth century aim of public schools was to encourage anti-practical and anti-industrial attitudes (Walford, 1986a), with the ultimate aim of:

> '…civilising children from the new commercial and industrial middle class away from 'vulgar' values about science, technology, business and commerce'…(p.185)

A populist view of independent education that holds good, perhaps, even today. The scholar presently found in the majority of independent schools is, it could be argued, far removed from this traditional image of the public school (boy) with a predestined course ahead of him. The reasons for this change may lie in the fairly recent past. The advent of compulsory education post-1944 and the comprehensivisation of the 1970s will not have perhaps levelled the playing field but will have ensured that all the pupils were at least playing on the pitch. The call, in the 1970s and beyond, from the (once despised) world of Commerce and Industry for well-qualified school leavers, together with the shift from the divisive

CSE (certificate of Secondary Education) and GCE (General certificate of Education) 'O' level examinations toward a universal equivalence of school leaving qualifications based on a National Curriculum, will have done much more; pupils were now, at least on the face of it, competing for the same goals. It is arguable that, as a consequence of such changes, the majority of independent schools today are not, largely, offering the same education, to the same type of children as they have traditionally done. This is not only because of external political and educational changes either; whilst pupils in most independent schools may feel that they benefit from better facilities and smaller classes, they do not consider that they are part of a separate social group, set on a privileged path. The view might perhaps still hold true for the child at one of the elite independent schools, but these pupils under observation are certainly more egalitarian in outlook and consider the task of acquiring and using qualifications as being much more of a struggle requiring greater effort and with a less certain outcome. In a sense there is a feeling that the children in this study school are more representative of those who might have once been found in the old Grammar school system.

Much of the research (Walford, 1986a; Lambert, 1968; Wakeford, 1969) concerned with independent schools has looked at what would have been seen as the 'traditional' type of establishment, that is, a boarding school, where pupils (and staff) are confined together round the clock for long periods of time (compared, perhaps unfairly, to the institutionalisation that can occur inside prisons). An archetypal image conjured up would have been that of a spacious, expensive (probably rural) single-sex school. It would be fair to say that the perceptions of school put forward by pupils in these environments would (even today) be different to those expressed by our research school for the very simple reason that the incumbents were unable to 'escape'; their whole life was bound up within the confines of the school, for better or worse. Furthermore, if they were inside a boy-only (or girl-only) community (perhaps more of a rarity these days) there was little chance of ameliorating their discomfort by mixing socially with the opposite sex at the end of a school day.

As far as the research giving an accurate picture of independent schools generally, it is entirely plausible that the institutional nature of a full-time boarding school has such an impact on pupils that it will heavily colour perceptions of the school and what it does. Children who feel that they do badly, or are badly done by (both by their peers and the staff in whose care they are placed) are more likely to

feel the pressure more intensely than children who can remove themselves to a different environment with different people for at least part of the day.

Why the image of the independent school as being institutional rather persists, may be more easily understood if one looks at the structure of the society that provided the manpower for such places. Up until fairly recently it could be claimed that the typical teacher will have been a male (probably single, in the early part of his career, at least) who had served time as a pupil in a similar institution (sometimes the very same institution at which he now worked) before attending an Oxbridge college, and perhaps serving in the forces, in wartime or national service. Teaching in a public school was often viewed as a natural extension of the cloistered, single-sex, rather clubby way of life that these characters had enjoyed since early childhood. It might then take a generational shift for the perceptions and feelings of these masters to develop and change and this in turn would take more time for that effect to be reflected in the perceptions of their pupils, who would in turn, become adults and perhaps parents (providing customers) or staff themselves. These changes may also be effected slowly because the independent sector has always used its sense of 'tradition' to sell itself to its customers, many of whom have been keen to invest in something with which they have been familiar (and may have experienced) during their own childhood. These very reasons can cause independent school governors to be fiercely protective of their charges and resistant to change; it has been said that tampering with their school is like tampering with their childhood. Add to this the loyalty and longevity of the independent school teacher; although it is not uncommon for teachers from the maintained sector to move into the private sector these days, those holding tenure in the independent sector do not move outside of it, generally, and in some cases, a school may retain staff that it does not necessarily require, as Walford (1986a) notes:

> '…if a school, for example, has five classics masters who are largely unable to teach other subjects, classics must remain on the timetable until they retire or move.' (p.215)

So it is clear that, independent schools are often thought to be radically different from maintained schools for a whole variety of reasons, some of them cultural and structural as well as the obvious economic ones. There is a view that those pupils in the independent sector are perhaps more advantaged in terms of their prospects when at school and, once they leave and go to work. Power (2000)

has suggested that the divide between the maintained and independent sectors in education is as clear and unambiguous as it ever was, and that there still exists a strong link between independent education and elitism, through placement at university (Oxbridge) and subsequently during career prospects in the professions. Naylor et al. (2002) go further; their research suggests that independent school pupils enjoy a salary premium by virtue of having attended an independent school; it is assumed that an employer uses prior schooling as a determinant in the assessment of graduate potential. In this way, one could see that, from the parents' perspective at least, the capital investment in an independent education is an attractive one, where pupils will benefit from better resources whilst at school, as well as the subsequent social networking service which is thought to exist in the upper echelons of those professions patronised by independent schools.

Tovey (1993) suggests that participation in the independent sector is promulgated by a desire, on the one hand, for academic emphasis (which is most probably still the case), and 'character development' on the other. The notion of character development that once comprised:

> '…obedience, hierarchy, respect, team games, adventure, loyalty and leadership…' (p.179)

should, perhaps, nowadays be regarded as rather arcane, having, by modern standards, something of a sense of subservience about it. Today the emphasis, or ethos of an independent school might be more centred on what would be termed 'individual development', where the personal characteristics of the person are brought out rather than he (or she) being moulded to the requirements of the institution. It could be argued that the once widespread traditional school loyalty, or group affinity, has given way to individualism, and has done so by virtue of the need to address the stark reality of academic competition and the success that this brings. Tovey gives us a picture of the independent school as a place where the institutional collective identity is stronger; within it he offers us two types of individualism; one where the subject has a clear sense of their identity as a:

> '…singular being concerned with personal achievement…' (p.179)

and another where individualism co-exists with group loyalty, where:

> '…personal achievement, rather than depending purely upon a personal focus is bound up with group membership…' (p.180)

It is arguable that, in the research school at least, there was no subordination; the individuals' doctrine was more durable, despite evidence of the existence of various social groups and so-called cliques. The unofficial status once widely granted in independent schools to what Tovey calls the 'elite sub-cultures' may have once seen powers ceded to pupils as part of the school hierarchy. The research school might have had a strong sporting sub-culture, but it remained that, and had no dominance or power structure of itself. Tovey suggests that the effect of academic competition may have forced changes, and membership of such an elitist sub-culture on its own was not enough to sustain a pupil during (and after) school. Tovey shows us that the typical independent school works hierarchically, both officially, and unofficially, where pupils adopt a socially structured approach to relationships in order to reproduce and reinforce the accepted social norms. In the research school this was not the case; officially a hierarchy existed and the school was managed 'top-down', through the House system. For the pupils though, there was very much more interaction and movement between and among layers (years) and groups (Houses). Social exclusivity and elitism, as exemplified by 'established families' (p.183), may have served to illustrate the differentiation in Tovey's example, but in the research school it could be argued that there was too much 'new blood' diluting the pool. Granted, some families were generation-deep in pupils, but not to the extent of influencing peers exponentially. Within the independent school world, the entrenchment of this social structure is perceived by many to be so pervasive that schools that do not fit the model are regarded as odd. Tovey cites an ex-direct grant school, in its first decade of HMC membership, thus:

> 'being of grammar school origin, it had never developed a dominant cultural perspective which could be described as 'public school-like' ' (p.185)

This sort of 'cultural perspective' may point towards the more egalitarian and modernist view of independent schools, reflected in the research school where:

> '…despite a concerted hierarchical basis to life and the presence of individual students of extreme wealth, differentiation remained at the level of the individual, not as part of any unified social or cultural formation…' (P.185)

According to Kuriloff and Reichart (2003), this form of elitism has flourished in the USA with regard to independent education, providing access to the top jobs; the country's top businesses, finance houses and government service jobs have

predominantly been serviced by the elite private schools, and parents increasingly send children to these schools in order to improve the chances of gaining places at elite private universities. There is an assumption that it is predominantly children of the ruling class that attend independent schools, and the social characteristics of this class imbue the ethos of the school and dominate it. Like Tovey (1993), Kuriloff and Reichart demonstrate an acceptance of, and adherence to a doctrine where a small but powerful minority hold sway over a majority by virtue of observance of desirable social norms associated with elite schools. The:

> 'enduring inter-generational stability of wealth and privilege' (p.753)

may be thus passed from generation to generation.

Independent schools as a whole do not have to adhere to this model, and evidence from the research school showed that not all private schools are the same. It could be that the advantages offered by independent schools are more readily grasped and used by their students because of their more extrovert and self-confident personalities. Bourke (2001) suggests that the personality traits of children at independent schools (whilst being fairly similar to the national norm in most respects) are notably different in some areas; independent school children are considered to be more outgoing, cheerful and adventurous, all of which are significant components in extraversion. More outgoing children are likely to come from home environments where reason replaces discipline in behaviour control, and adventurous children are likely to come from homes that induce self-confidence. Interestingly, girls score higher and boys score lower than the national norm on conscientiousness about work, reflecting perhaps the general perception of girls' concerns with getting work done, and boys' concerns with not being seen to work hard. In terms of anxiety, Bourke suggests that independent school children are bolder and more emotionally stable than the norm, and are less tense and apprehensive than the norm. Independent school boys are thought to be more group dependent and are keen joiners, who value social approval, whilst independent school girls are thought to be more individualistic.

Given that the spirit and ethos of any school is heavily influenced by its constituent parts, it could be argued that a typical independent school culture would be informed by the personality traits of these pupils, with, as Bourke suggests, their more outgoing and extrovert characters, as:

> '…friendly extraverted pupils are more likely to be imitated than unsocial introverts…' (p.6)

Pupils' perceptions of their enjoyment of school and its subjects, and some influencing factors.

General enjoyment of school

The enjoyment of something, whether it is important or frivolous, has a great bearing on what we get out of it. We are sensibly predisposed, as Jeremy Bentham might have said, to the principle of utility; we naturally tend towards happiness, both as individuals and as communities. School is no exception; happy children will enjoy school, and will get more out of it.

But what do children really enjoy about school as a place to go? It can be readily agreed by most observers of children, both as youngsters and as adolescents, that friendship figures largely in their minds and is a particularly significant factor in their enjoyment of school; they would acknowledge that, on balance, a friendly school leads to higher motivation and greater success (Newman, 1997). In general, both boys and girls do have similar views about the enjoyment they derive from school; Keys and Fernandes (1993) suggest that the great majority of pupils agree that school is 'worth doing', although it has been shown in some research (Beresford, 2000; Lightbody et al., 1996) that, in the general run of things, girls seem to experience a greater overall level of enjoyment at school than do boys; Beresford suggests that discontent for the boys seems to be most apparent in Year 8, a point in their school careers where they seem to suffer both a poor relationship with their teachers, and a poor view of their own behaviour. Girls, though, are not totally immune; they seem to be at their most discontented in Year 10, when they seem to have both the poorest relationship with the teachers, and to least enjoy their lessons. In terms of enjoyment of school generally, the perceptions of children in independent schools are similar to those of their colleagues in the maintained sector; Walford (1986a) suggests that even in the more cloistered environment of a full-time boarding community, 76% of pupils claim to enjoy going to school, and Lambert (1968) observes that pupils place friendships top of their list for enjoyment of school.

As regards their more particular favourite things about school, children place at the top of the list qualities such as friendships with other children followed by such things as break time and going out on trips. Lightbody et al. (1996) suggest that a gender split does occur when looking in more detail, where girls

show a greater enjoyment of such things as friends, outings, teachers and lessons, whilst boys show greater enjoyment of sports and clubs. A similar characteristic is present in the independent sector, as Bourke (2001) notes; boys prefer the collective association of groups and teams, whilst girls tend to be more social and individualistic.

Enjoyment of subjects

Although there is some variation in pupils' likes and dislikes, there are certainly some subjects that seem to take up strongly felt positions in the minds of a good many pupils. It does follow that a subject will be better liked if the experience is enjoyable, but it helps the subjects' credibility in the mind of the pupil if it is also perceived as useful, i.e. for work later on (Hendley et al., 1996). In their general appreciation of subjects, there appears to be a link between the liking for a subject and the perceived ability in a subject (Adey and Biddulph, 2001); as well as this perceived personal ability which they themselves bring to the subject, pupils also take into consideration a subject's own 'activity' quotient when judging whether it is liked or disliked (Colley and Comber, 2003). There is a general consensus that the more active and practical subjects are more enjoyable; Design and Technology, Art, Games and Physical Education, for instance, are generally more enjoyed than Maths, English and Science. Keys and Fernandes (1993) suggest that pupils prefer most those lessons where they can 'make something' or where they are engaged in discussions. Practical work during lessons is a very positive element in the minds of pupils, and work is considered to have more ownership if pupils do it <u>but</u> things can go wrong along the way; the difficulty, as always, may be persuading pupils that learning should be about the wrong as well as the right (Wallace, 1996b).

The differences between active, participatory education and passive education are seen early on. Pollard and Triggs (2000) suggest that there is a clear perception, even in the minds of small children, of the difference between being active in learning (through making and doing) and simply recording (writing). Alerby (2003) suggests that children's enjoyment of school as a whole is marked by their liking for practical lessons rather than theoretical lessons, and Nishimura et al. (2003) suggest that there is general support in pupils' minds for the popularity of practical and creative subjects over the more traditional academic ones. In pupils' minds, most anxiety is expressed over the core subjects of

English, Maths and Science. Less anxiety is prevalent in other subject areas; Pollard and Triggs (2000) suggest that, in what is often perceived as being a far less pressured area of formal education, the non-core subjects are taught in a more relaxed way, which is thought to lead to less stress among pupils, and consequently higher positive motivation and a greater sense of achievement as a result.

For most pupils, their perception of what makes a subject enjoyable varies with how they see their attainment levels and some pupils will perceive their 'hard work' bearing very little fruit whatever they do; for many, the notion of hard work is very unappealing unless something in it exists which will motivate and stimulate interest. Often, work is only considered exciting if it is fruitful and interesting; it certainly has the capacity to become rather tiring if it is felt to be routine (Kernshaw, 1996). In the minds of children, it is often the case that high skill, high challenge activities provide the optimum experience (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1997). It might be considered unfortunate that the notion of enjoyment is inextricably linked with the idea of hard work and the two are often, in the minds of children, mutually exclusive. Enjoyable subjects (in their experience, those that are intrinsically more appealing) are perceived as less important, are more relaxed and are the sort of lessons where the pupil exercises more autonomy. Children have a good memory of, and a liking for the more active elements of a subject. Adey and Biddulph (2001) suggest that, in subjects such as History and Geography for instance, there is a great enthusiasm for role-play and activities, for outings and interaction with other people, be it outside school or in group work within the institution; conversely, there appears to be great antipathy toward the idea of worksheets, essays and copying copious amounts of written work from the board.

Boredom as a construct can be regarded as both negative and positive; in education certainly, bored pupils blame the teacher or the system, whilst teachers see it as a criticism of their delivery. Belton and Priyadharshini (2007) suggest that, although boredom can result from both under and over stimulation, it can be ameliorated when pupils have both autonomy and control, as well as challenge. Resulting enjoyment should not:

> '…be mistaken for 'fun', just as it should not be confused with 'pleasure'…(p.592)

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-a tension should exist. It is the case that pupils who feel autonomous, or who are more intrinsically motivated will be less likely to feel 'bored', but rather will regard a situation more as an opportunity to explore and create.

Pollard and Triggs (2000) suggest that children like subjects because they are interesting or easy, and dislike subjects that they find hard or boring; Nishimura et al. (2003) suggest that, looking at the general run of school subjects, the great majority of children cite 'interest' as a main reason for liking a subject, and pupils approve of elements like practical work, lab work and group work. In their minds, the creative subjects, despite being the least emphasised in school and least measured and tested, are the most favoured.

Their experiences, whilst participating in their school subjects do tend to make pupils express their sense of enjoyment, or lack of it, in extremes; Physical Education, for instance, is very much liked; Religious Education is not (Galton et al., 2000). Children who have reached the end of Key Stage 3 describe their best-liked subjects to be English, Games and Maths (Hendley et al., 1996), although Maths and Science appear to be perceived in a polarised way; loved and hated in equal measure. Within school itself, there are many reasons given for subjects being the most enjoyed; the degree of intrinsic enjoyment or interest that they have in the subject itself, the part played in the experience by the teachers of those subjects, and the pupil's own ability in the subject are significant in the minds of pupils. Outside of school, the value of the subject in employment is a significant factor. At the opposite end of the enjoyment scale, the least liked subjects are often cited as Science, Maths and Modern Foreign Languages. Pupils' reasons for this are school oriented; a lack of enjoyment is often put down to the teacher, or the pupil's own ability in the subject, or the lack of interest in, or enjoyment of, the subject. Pollard and Triggs (2000) suggest that the perception of (Year 6) Science has become more negative because there is a shift from process skills (more akin to 'doing' and participating) and understanding towards recollection and regurgitation of curriculum content and knowledge. This perhaps results in a corresponding pressure on time given over to transmission of information rather than time spent on learning through doing, with a resultant high boredom quotient. In a world where the curriculum is centralised, balancing the weight of material which has to be delivered, with the mechanics of the delivery can be problematic: Pollard and Triggs (2000) similarly suggest that there is a case where History and Geography delivery (in Years 5 and 6) suffers because

the weight of the curriculum content does not allow space for engagement with the subject in a meaningful or relevant way.

As far as school subjects generally are concerned, Lightbody et al. (1996) suggest that girls tend to enjoy English, French, Drama, German, History, Music and Home Economics, whereas boys tend to enjoy Science, Physical Education, Technology and Information Technology, and Nishimura et al. (2003) suggest that girls tend to favour a foreign language and their native language (as we would recognise a preference for English and French), and boys tend to favour Maths and Science.

The modern day English/Maths/Science trivium seems to occupy polarised positions for likes (low) and importance (high) as it always seems to have done (Colley and Comber, 2003). In considering specifically their enjoyment of these core subjects (English, Maths and Science), Miller et al. (1999) suggest that (through Years 7 to 11) girls enjoy English most, followed by Science, followed by Maths, whereas boys most enjoy Science, followed by English, then Maths.

Science is seen by pupils as a 'difficult' subject, only undertaken by 'able' pupils (Bennett, 2001), indeed, up to transfer (at 11) Science has generally got a positive image, but from then on the perception of it as difficult is reinforced by the cyclical argument that it is difficult to do, so only clever pupils do it, therefore it must be difficult (Osborne et al., 1998). Not only do boys rather than girls seem to prefer Science, but girls themselves express a feeling that boys are naturally better at Science (and Maths), and do not need to work as hard at it (Warrington et al., 2000).

Within the hierarchy of subjects that pupils enjoy, there is a clear dislike of those subjects that are seen to be on the periphery, and that use little curriculum time as these are considered to be of low status (Hendley and Stables, 1996) and therefore of little merit.

Pupils have strong views about not only the work that they do in school subjects, but also the practice of homework associated with those school subjects; a low status subject will engender feelings of antipathy towards the subject itself, and the homework task, especially where it is considered disorganised and inconsistent, in quantity, priority and pressure (Warrington and Younger, 1996b):

> 'The nature of the homework task, the status of the subject, the resources available to support the homework task and the perceived value of the task by the teacher, all profoundly influenced the pupils reaction to the homework.' (p. 94).

Pupil motivation

The delivery of a modern, information-rich curriculum can be, for some students, a rather suffocating experience. The provision of the relevant educational material, on its own, is not quite enough to stir most pupils into life, From their perspective, the dead weight of the curriculum can be felt clearly; Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1997) provide a stark example of how easy it is to fail to inspire:

> 'The problem with our technologically inspired views of education is that we have come to expect learning to be a function of the rationality of the information provided. In other words, we assume that if the material is well organised and logically presented, students will learn it. Nothing is further from the fact. Students will learn only if they are motivated. The motivation could be extrinsic –the desire to get a well-paying job after graduation –but learning essential to a persons' self must be intrinsically rewarding,' (p.195).

Motivation and enjoyment are closely linked in the minds of pupils. Year 9 pupils (talking about History and Geography) say that it is a liking for the subject that gives them the main motivation for studying it (Adey and Biddulph, 2001) Those factors which motivate pupils to enjoy a subject, and then to engage with it and (hopefully) succeed in it, to a greater or lesser degree, are important considerations all through their school careers. Norwich (1999) suggests that (in Maths and English) Year 7 pupils are more motivated to behave and learn than their colleagues in Year 9, and this motivation is driven more by reasons concerned with parents than it is by reasons concerned with teachers. It is known that the intrinsically self-driven and motivated student is certainly to be found in primary school and during the early part of secondary school; Norwich (1999) gives the example of girls and boys (in Years 7 to 9) where girls show a high intrinsic motivation in English, but a low intrinsic motivation in Maths, and boys show intermediate motivation in both subjects. The more extrinsically driven student is perhaps a personality that exists more during the latter part of the secondary cycle, when the outside influences of grades in public examinations and the world of work come into play. Here, the less enjoyable notion of 'hard work' is perceived as belonging to more subjects, where extrinsic (and often very subtle) pressure is applied in various areas; that is, to get through work, to understand quickly and to achieve good grades. In the minds of the maturing pupil, the intrinsic motivation, once widely experienced and enjoyed, and derived from an

inherent interest in the subject in all its forms, now competes with an extrinsic motivation, derived from the need to gain results. Given the impetus that intrinsic motivation provides for the individual, it may be inevitable, perhaps, that a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is what gets most pupils through (Kernshaw, 1996) in the end.

How a pupil approaches the job of learning will inevitably impact on how much he or she enjoys the process. For those who possess a 'deep' approach to learning, as exemplified by Campbell et al. (2001), there will exist a more sophisticated understanding of, and engagement with, both the teaching process and the learning experience; those with deep approaches generally take a more active role in the exercise, using a variety of techniques. The opposite can be said of those pupils who have a 'surface' approach; here, they concentrate on repetition and reproduction strategies in their learning. Of course, a pupils' perception of how enjoyable the education experience is will depend on both the curriculum material delivered and the teacher's method of delivering that material. It is evident that children who are high achievers are most satisfied, motivated and esteemed in their work; those children for whom school is problematic, who find the subjects hard or who feel teachers do not help them with problems are least satisfied with their lot (Beresford, 2000).

Influences on enjoyment

Transfer between schools

The normal transfer between primary and secondary school in the UK takes place at 11; pupils complete their junior school education at the end of Year 6, and shift into the senior school environment at the beginning of Year 7. Miller et al. (1999) suggest that, after transition, pupils' interest in subjects undergoes something of a change; for both boys and girls, subject preference during the four years from Year 7 to Year 11 fluctuates, which results in a 'W' profile (see fig. 1). In the research school, as in common with many independent schools, school transfer occurred at 13 (at the end of Year 8), and this will have made some difference in pupils' perceptions and attitudes towards subjects, as well as their relationships with teachers. Under normal circumstances the transfer to secondary school (at 11) finds children still disposed to a higher level of enjoyment of school. Keys and Fernandes (1993) suggest that Year 7 pupils tend to have a less jaded

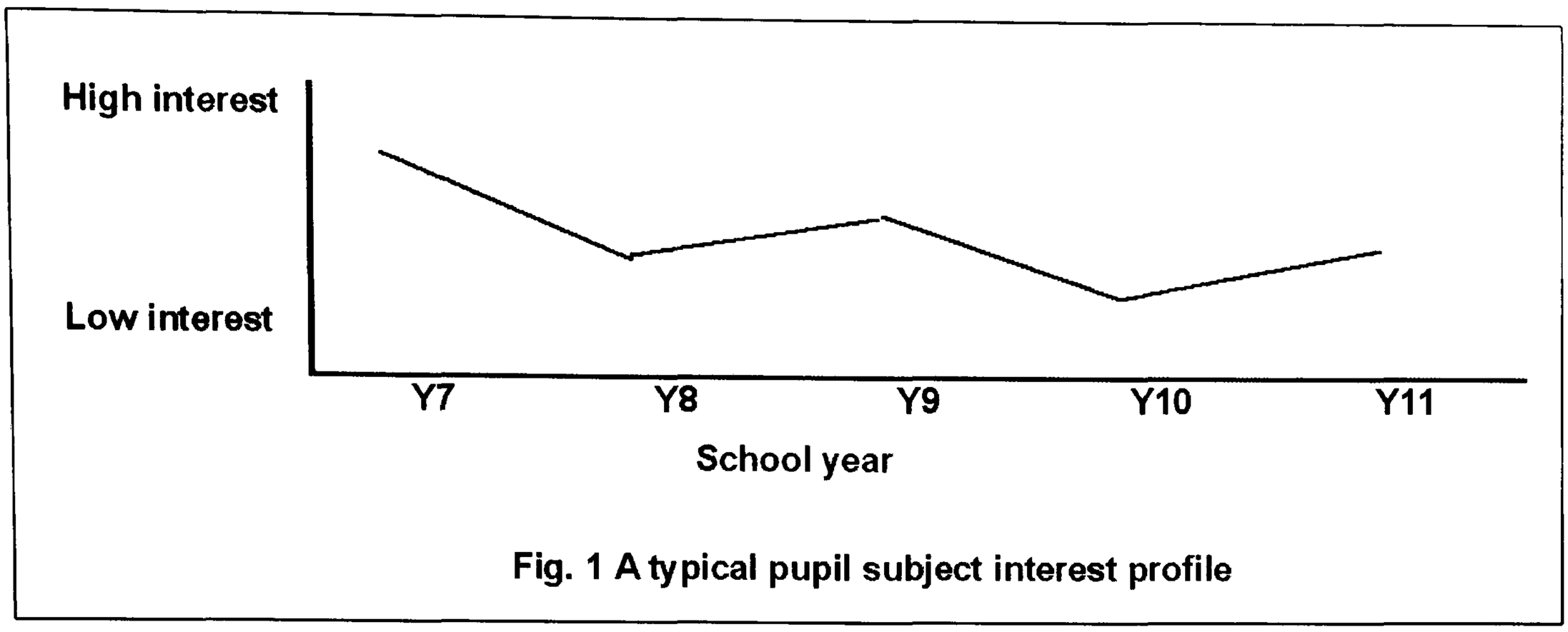

Fig. 1 A typical pupil subject interest profile

view of the experience than do their colleagues in Year 9; they are less bored than their senior peers, and they like their teachers more.

Relationships with teachers

To enjoy something, and to be motivated to participate, you have to like what you are doing and when the 'doing' involves relationships and social interaction then it follows that you have to like the people around you for the experience to be a success. It is already clear that a range of issues will influence pupil motivation; in particular there appears to be a close link between attitudes of pupils and the actions of their teachers. Beresford (2000) notes:

> ' ...hand in hand with the understanding of how they are learning comes enjoyment of a particular teaching approach, and the motivation to do well.' (p.4).

Beresford has pointed out that pupils do put a lot of store in their relationship with the teacher, and that pupils will often assess how well they are doing by gauging the teacher's reaction, although it can be hard to distinguish between a reaction brought about by behaviour issues or one brought about by work (performance) issues. In the maintained sector, with a transition at 11, pupils in the early years (Year 7) predominantly gauge the relationship by the teachers' personality rather than their pedagogical ability, although this changes in the later (GCSE) years, but the teacher's personality is still seen as influential, for instance, in preserving good order. The relationship with the teacher is not always positive and successful; Beresford observes, even as early as the start of senior school in Year 7, a hardening of attitudes to subjects where the teacher is disliked, indeed, one of the main reasons cited by pupils as for not liking school is the poor relationship that

pupils have with specific teachers or subjects. Having said that, there is much to recommend good relationships with teachers; students do report liking teachers who are accessible and supportive, and who possess good personality and teaching skills (Lang, 1993), and teachers who are approachable. In their minds there is a balance to be struck; pupils do not like petty rules, total silence or wholesale disorder (Wallace, 1996a). In general, enjoyment of subjects is driven by the relationship with the subject, or more usually with the subject teacher (Galton et al., 2000). Miller et al. (1999) suggest that pupils across the years (Year 7 to Year 11) feel consistently more positive about their subject teacher than they do about the subject itself. There are differences between the attitudes of boys and girls; girls seem most positive in their relationship with English teachers, particularly in Year 9, where boys seem more positive about the relationship with Maths teachers. For girls, the relationship with Science teachers makes a steady decline after Year 7, until Year 10, picking up slightly in Year 11. The relationship with Maths teachers drops significantly in Year 10 and recovers slightly in Year 11. For boys, the relationship with English teachers makes a slow, steady decline after Year 7, as does the relationship with Science teachers. Only with Maths teachers does the relationship show an improvement (in Year 9). In general, pupils are thought to respond to teachers more positively when there is encouragement (Duffield,1998):

> 'If they have a bit of fun then you want to do well for that teacher…if you don't like a teacher you blank out.' (p.8),

and interest shown. According to Beresford (2000), it is clear that the pupil/teacher relationship is enhanced when pupils see teachers as being more 'normal':

> "…students respond best to teachers who show an active interest in them as people as well as learners…" (p.8)

Children feel that teachers do respond somewhat differently to boys and to girls, however. Boys feel that they are less well treated and that girls are able to 'get away with it' more easily (Warrington and Younger, 1996a). Pupils are much more likely to enjoy subjects where the teacher explains things, who praises them, who is calm, who challenges them, and who provides opportunities for creativity (Newman, 1997). The best educational experience is found through encouragement and interest. Children learn best when teachers use a variety of styles of teaching, or when they find the lessons interesting or when they are

taught new ways of learning. Methods that are repetitive or simplistic can draw similar reactions from pupils at either end of the learning spectrum; Campbell et al. (2001) suggest that both 'surface' learners and 'deep' learners find that the didactic and repetitive nature of some lessons engenders clear negative feelings about the process; teachers are able to deliver the curriculum to suit either the aptitudes of 'surface' or 'deep' learners, and the practice of what might be described as 'surface teaching' where delivery could be termed as:

> '…the presentation of information and the mechanical practice and implementation of acquired knowledge…' (p.180)

has the effect of limiting the educational impact of what is taught. If it is accepted that 'deep' learning is far more effective for the pupil's educational achievement in the long run, then 'deep' teaching styles, where the teacher implements a range of strategies to engage the pupil are, arguably, more effective tools for achieving this. Campbell cites an example where:

> '…learning was made 'fun' and interesting through a great deal of student activity and practical exercises…' (p.182)

The importance of engagement is summed up perhaps by Morgan and Morris (1999) who see good teaching as pre-eminently to do with:

> ' …the quality of the teacher's methods of presentation, feedback, classroom control and order, and interpersonal relationships. Quality teaching for pupils is about activity, not passivity; about negotiation and close relationships, not distance and deference.' (p.54)

and Wallace (1996b) notes:

> '…pupils work on personalised views of their interaction with teachers to the extent that liking or disliking teachers is of primary significance to 'getting on well' in a subject.' (p. 35).

Relationship with families

A great deal of influence will inevitably pass down through families and the strength of the relationship between parents and children must reflect this. There is, inevitably, perceived to be more of an overt influence in the independent school sector, as here, there is a direct cost associated with the experience. Historically, pupils have always been aware, to some degree, of the financial implications of their particular form of education, and there is always the strong possibility that a pupil's enjoyment of their schooling experience may be overshadowed to some

degree by the knowledge of the family's commitment. Historically, this may always have been the case; one of Lambert's (1968) interviewees rather earnestly noted:

> '...I worry about what will happen if I fail my exams, am I doing justice to my parents sending me here, after all, they have forked out £2,000 on my education...' (p.276)

In general, the positive feelings apparent in the perceptions of independent school pupils about their experiences at school could be, perhaps, a reflection of the attitude of the parents; this positive parental perception of independent education could be present, if for no other reason, than by virtue of the fact that a conscious decision has been made to invest large amounts of money in the enterprise. Bourke (2001) sees independent school parents, rather than being uncaring, child-haters, as generally well-meaning people who are only seeking the best for their children, and are anxious for them to benefit from a good education. Although it is an adult decision to spend the money, the role of the child in the process is by no means a diminished one; ISIS (1997) suggest that, in choosing an independent school, the views and opinions of the children influence a majority of the parents who make the choice; Jackson and Bisset (2005) suggest that, for parents who opt into private co-educational schooling the child's happiness is a significantly important factor in their decision-making about school choice. It is not inconceivable then, that children will be fully aware of the discussions that take place about, for instance, a particular school's good reputation, or its perceived better standard of education, and there is bound to be some positive link in the child's mind between the family's good reasons for choosing private education, in a particular school, and the pupil's own feelings toward the experience.

Although adolescents are often caricatured for their reactionary attitudes towards all things parental, Durkin (1997) makes the point that, although peer group conformity is acknowledged to be a powerful entity at school, parental and familial ties are, usually, stronger; a degree of peer-parent conflict does often occur, but rarely enough to destroy a relationship. He suggests too, that the oft quoted 'generation gap' is also largely mythical; the vast majority of adolescents are happy in the relationship they have with their parents, indeed there is thought to be a general congruence between the two groups in attitudes on things moral, political and social.

Relationship with peers

The concept of enjoyment, in the pupil mind, can be tempered by how you see yourself and how others see you. Self-esteem is known to drop during adolescence, especially in the case of girls who are experiencing the transition through schools, although it is thought that only about 10% suffer any real storm or stress at this age (Durkin, 1997). There are perhaps only two strands of school life that matter to the pupils: the formal system that imposes or expects conformity, and the informal system where peers play a more dominant role. According to Tovey (1993), the independent sector has long nurtured, and indeed relied on, a system that is a conjunction of the informal and the formal, to create hierarchies that lean toward greater pupil control of the school environment than might have been possible or desirable outside the independent system. In the general scheme of things, adolescents are known to look to their peer group for friendship and influence. In this, boys attach more importance to how they are seen by the group than do girls, who consider interpersonal, intimate relationships more important (Bourke, 2001; van Houtte, 2004). In their life at school, working as they do with a foot in both these informal and informal systems, all children have to develop reputations of some sort. On a formal level, Padfield (1997) suggests that those who have bad reputations usually fulfil an expectation of bad behaviour and non-conformism, whilst those with a good reputation are often forgiven when they *are* bad –it is seen as an 'off' day. On an informal level, the reputations granted by peers often cause more suffering than those formal reputations foisted on children by the system; there may be far more extreme measures taken in order to toe the line with informal groupings than are permissible or possible in the formal society of school. These informal reputations, gained during the normal social interactions (alongside the formal activities of the school day) can be very powerful; a reputation as, for instance a 'swot' or a 'skivver' may be so often thrown at an individual that he is then expected to adopt the persona, and *become* the identity foisted on him by his peers. Boys, particularly find reputations important. They speak, (Warrington et al, 2000) of:

> '….how important their reputation was, and a good reputation, as far as they were concerned, was gained by standing up for oneself, being assertive and noticed by teachers and peers.' (p. 403).

Durkin (1997) cites these various types of peer groups, which include dyads (pairs) such as friends, cliques or groups of several who interact frequently,

crowds or large collections with similar images or affinities ('brains', 'jocks', etc.). Such peer groups have been, historically, cited as a dominant feature of independent school life (Tovey,1993) where they are considered elitist and hierarchical:

> 'One of the key features of the form of these has been seen to relate closely to the dominant organisational form of school life as a whole –namely, hierarchy and clear distinctions based on that hierarchy. Rather than the co-existence of separate, relatively equal interest groups, we find sub-cultures with very definite status expectations.' (p. 188).

Peer influence may be such that, the opportunity to belong to a group will provide a positive peer relationship at some level, even if the aims or behaviour of the group is not wholly desirable (Connor, 1994). During adolescence the emotional dependence and pressure felt from, and attributed to, parents, is, to a degree, transferred to the peer group (Durkin, 1997). Samdal et al. (1999) suggest that more inclusiveness with a peer group results in better performance at school because less time and energy is being spent on 'joining' and more on 'work'. Not everything is rosy though; for boys particularly, the effect of peers on academic achievement can be negative; there is greater pressure to 'under-achieve' – to some boys, the image of 'boffs' is wholly unattractive (Warrington and Younger, 1996) and in cases where boys worked hard, they often pretended not to (Warrington et al., 2000). In the general population of children at any given school a sense of contentment with school will have a positive effect on those children. Samdal et al. (1999) suggest that, where pupils have a positive sense of satisfaction with their school, and a good relationship with their peers and their teachers, then this will of itself impact positively on their academic achievement, although it could be significant that although these factors are a strong influence, they do not take account of such things as family and socio-economic status. It could be argued then, that the positive environment in school provides a ready opportunity for those pupils who are motivated enough to take full advantage of the conditions; positive attitude promotes good achievement, which in turn promotes positive feelings towards the school (see fig. 2). For those children who have the advantage of positive external factors such as a supportive family and advantageous socio-economic standing, this positive reinforcement can only be more beneficial.

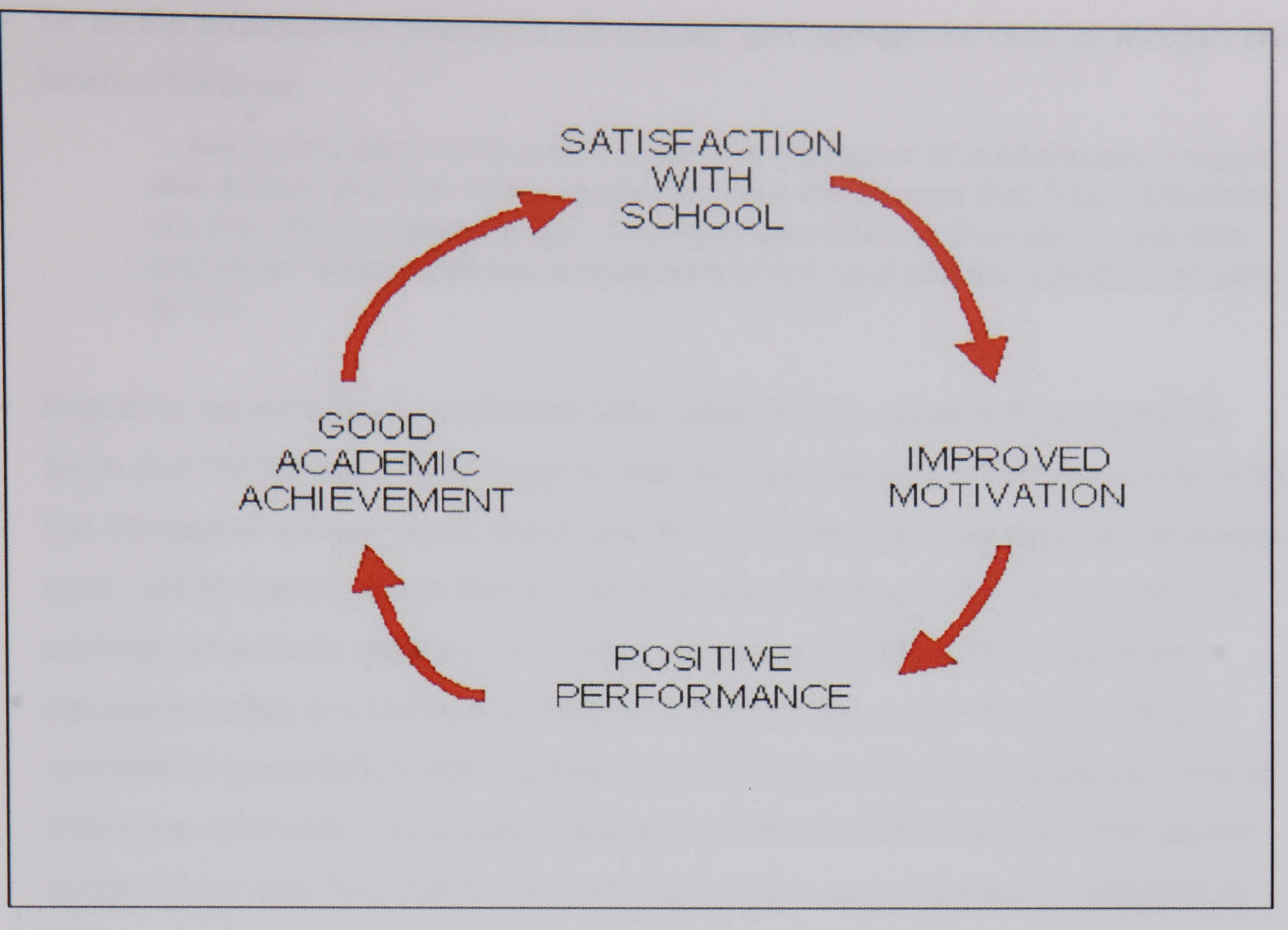

Fig. 2 Positive reinforcement

Enjoying school fully is an experience that is open to all and it is generally accepted that the majority of students enjoy going to school. It may be the case that children who are acknowledged as 'advantaged', and who are financially more secure, with parents who are perhaps more motivated to engage with the experience, will inevitably bring more to the experience and take more away from it. As Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1997) suggest:

> 'Perhaps only talented students appreciate being challenged to their limits, but other evidence suggests that in fact everyone tends to describe the most enjoyable experiences of his life as having tension between opportunities for action and capacity to act. A person does not get really involved in a tennis game unless skills are stretched. A book that makes no demands on the imagination is likely to be boring. Thus, what talented students want from their teacher is likely to be a more urgent and closely stated version of what every student would want to experience in school.' (p.188).

Importance

General importance of school

The importance of school, or going to school (perhaps two entirely different constructs) depends on the participant's point of view. The purpose of school, as

far as the professional delivery is concerned, can perhaps be cited by Morgan and Morris (1999) as:

> '…equipping each of its citizens with the character of autonomous thought and action, with the *moral* sense and civic confidence that they collectively are the ultimate government. *Quality* in education is then about character and skills, about both the architecture of the soul and the standard of living.' (p.16).

Arguably, an intrinsically motivated view, albeit from a rather lofty perspective.

Keys and Fernandes (1993) suggest that the vast majority of children certainly find the concept of school 'worth doing' and there is definitely a perspective (Nishimura et al., 2003) that suggests that school is all about getting good grades, which is perhaps an entirely extrinsic motivation. Anderson (1996) reflects students' perceptions that are perhaps a mixture of the two; the notion that the school rationale is grounded in learning facts and understanding relationships as well as making a contribution to society. Morgan and Morris (1999) suggest that school pupils do not see their part in the learning process as being overly important or influential; they see themselves as being recipients rather than partners in the process. Beresford (2000) suggests that, although children may not have an overly philosophical view of education, they do give much thought to the specifics that they consider important in the structure of the places where they learn; most children understand the importance of school and know that at school they do try hard, and do work hard, and generally it is girls who feel this to be the case more than boys. Pupils want to do well in the work that they do; Miller et al. (1999) suggest that three quarters of pupils think that they make a good effort in their subjects. Pupils also acknowledge the importance of preparing for the world of work, because their rationale for being at school states that they are wholly engaged in preparing for it; Rudduck et al. (1996) suggest that pupils see that one of the main purposes of working hard at school is in order to obtain qualifications in order to ensure a good start in life and a good job. It may seem curious to an outsider that so much of the preparation for the wider world of work is dependant on people who have, in some cases, so little experience or knowledge of it; in reality, it could be argued (Little and Threat, 1994) that these preparations are grounded in a world that is, not only marshalled by individuals who have, in a good number of instances, hardly ever been away from school, but whose views are largely hypothetical:

> 'The adult work place remains largely invisible to most adolescents…students are left to acquire their understanding of work through their own out of school employment, the stories told by friends and family and their contact with the broader social environment.' (p. 289)

Outside of school, beyond the perceptions of the pupils and the parents, there are the views of those who will engage with the pupils at a later date; the employers. Tufnell et al. (2002) suggest that those skills which school-leavers most need in order to make them employable are not so much to do with specific subject knowledge, (although a good level of numeracy and computer literacy are definite prerequisites) but are centred on the less tested qualities such as communication skills, the ability to work in a team, personal and social skills, and the ability to solve problems. These are characteristics that might be considered by some to be rather fuzzy, or intrinsically driven. Certainly some of these are what Walford (1986b) might see as those skills that would be generated in a more loosely classified and framed environment.

How the importance of school is determined will perhaps have a different meaning for those engaged in the independent sector. Today, independent schools may have become caught up in a challenge or competition which is not of their choosing, but which has nevertheless caused them to become much more overtly academically oriented, as they face stiff competition from state schools for provision of highly qualified school leaver entering the professions (Walford, 1986a). As well as perceptions of what it is about and how successful it is overall, the importance of school extends to *how* it achieves its aims as well. In particular the emphasis on the work ethos is well known to children at independent schools, who are aware of the pressure of work and the importance attached to academic work (Walford, 1986a; Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003). The divide between the maintained and independent schools is wider perhaps when the 'how' is looked at closely, but it could be argued that it is the 'how' element that persuades parents to choose independent schools, for their high academic standards, good discipline and character development (Walford, 1986; Tovey, 1993; Kuriloff and Reichart, 2003). Independent schools traditionally are thought to adopt (Walford, 1986b) a tightly framed (the degree of control that teachers and pupils have over delivery of the curriculum content) and classified (how much subjects 'speak' to each other) education structure with little cross-fertilisation between subjects; teaching is conducted by specialists for each subject area and there is little adaptation from a

curriculum. This is thought to fly in the face of the traditional avenues of career for the independent school pupil - the professions, where career structure is very loosely framed and structured. The modernisation of the curriculum noticeably since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 has perhaps led to schools generally having very discrete subjects with marginal input from the staff and pupils, (what Walford (1986b) might have termed 'boundary maintenance'); a major shift in emphasis for some schools which, as a result, may not be now developing the 'rounded 'person; something that has certainly long been an espoused virtue of the independent sector. To some parents, the importance of school is perceived as fundamental; a situation where, for some, only the independent education sector is perceived as 'safe', and the maintained sector is perceived as 'risky' (West et al., 1996). The thorny issue of separately (and additionally, for a contribution is made to local taxation for this very purpose,) funding education lends some credence to the notion of heavy family commitment (Stafford,1985):

> '...fee-paying parents will have made a very conscious and deliberate choice of a school and must demonstrate their commitment to education with a willingness to part with quite substantial sums of money..' (p.140)

In the independent sector, education provision is often part of a very long-term strategy, (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003):

> 'The process of planning appears to be set in the context of distinctive priorities among the factors influencing choice and a clear vision of the ultimate goal of schooling. Choice of independent school seems, for most parents, to reflect their belief in the value of high academic achievement as a requirement for entry into the more prestigious universities and into careers in business or the professions. The payoff is clear. ' (p.197)

Historically, the payoff has indeed been clear; independent education has long been seen as the way into establishment careers, as Walford (1990) notes:

> '...in 1988 only just above 7% of the school population were in private schools, these schools provided about 25% of graduates in British universities. For Oxford and Cambridge universities the figure was just under a half. Pupils from private schools obtained about 25% of all A level passes, and 50% of all 'A' grades at A level. In 1984 at least 83% of high court judges and appeal judges, 69% of ambassadors, 50% of high-ranking civil servants and 89% of law lords had been to private schools. In 1981, 92% of directors of major life insurance companies, 70% of directors or clearing banks, 83% of chairmen of clearing banks and 88% of chairmen of merchant banks had also spent their early years in these schools. Just

> under half of the members of parliament in 1987 had been privately educated.' (p.39)

Chin (2000) suggests that, in the United States at least, what is being played out is probably a far more concentrated engagement by families with the refined world of the super-elite preparatory school system and consequent access to American private schools which offer similar perceptions of real and tangible reward to their charges; Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) suggest that, unconsciously, or consciously, some families are buying into a belief-system, and:

> '…are often hoping for training in the habits of success they believe such schools uniquely offer….elite independent schools embody such (cultural) capital in their impressive faculty and facilities, their demanding curricula, and their capacity to first attract and then to develop students with privileged habits of mind and heart.' (p.753)

Naylor et al. (2002) have suggested that attendance at an independent school has some measure of pecuniary benefit for the individual, even, sometimes, in spite of the pupil's educational attainment because:

> '…Independent school pupils will have better subsequent labour market prospects to the extent that the school they attended is well connected in employment networks…' (p.318)

Arguably, an independent school child's destiny is heavily influenced by schooling and family background (the 'capital' investment). In the minds of many observers of the independent sector a characteristic and historic link still exists with the world of big business, the City and the professions. It has been suggested perhaps unsurprisingly then, (Power, 2000) that 63% of independent school pupils end up working in the private sector and 45% in the public sector (whilst 36% of state school pupils work in the private sector and 54% in the public sector).

Importance of subjects

In considering the importance of their schoolwork, children have cited hard work, good teaching, family influence and liking for the subject as factors in their academic success.

What one sees as being important is also linked to what is ultimately thought of as 'doable' or useful to the individual. Indeed, the perceived usefulness of a subject in life generally, as well as its usefulness in acquiring a job has figured largely in pupils views of its importance (Colley and Comber, 2003), although

research by Adey and Biddulph (2001) suggests that, in the minds of pupils, the majority of school subjects are not perceived as having a wider usefulness in life, that is, subjects perceived as being outside those core subjects that relate directly to the process of getting a job; it would seem that the concept of studying 'in the round' to improve a general outlook on life and to gain a broadly balanced education is a rather misunderstood concept in many minds; children cannot honestly answer the question' why are we doing this?'. Humanities subjects such as History and Geography, for instance, are thought by some pupils (Adey and Biddulph, 2001) to be useful in some connection with work and getting a job, although the specific link between these subjects and the world of work is rather more nebulous.

Although children tend to lean towards the practical subjects early on in their school careers (around Year 7) rather than the academic subjects, there is, in Year 11, a leaning towards the academic; perhaps due to the extrinsic pressures from exams, the future, job prospects and so on (Coley and Comber, 2003). With the move from intrinsic motivation in younger pupils through to extrinsic motivation in older pupils it has been accepted that interest declines in subjects generally after Year 7 (Beresford, 2000). The fracturing of perceptions about school subjects occurs latterly in secondary school but evidence (Pollard and Triggs, 2000) has suggested that perceptions do alter further down, in primary education:

> 'Despite the National Curriculum commitment to breadth and balance, for our group the 'basic' subjects of Mathematics and English were dominant in their perception of the curriculum they experienced across all six years of the study… outside the core subjects our target pupils experienced a squeezing of the creative curriculum. Breadth and balance, it appears, were compromised by the powerful and increasing emphasis on core subjects and national testing, and also by the weight of content to be covered.'(p.83)

Getting pupils to engage with subjects is something that will go a long way towards improving the subject image in their minds; it has been argued that improving pupils' understanding of what is going on is enhanced by devolving ownership; pupils who have a stake in the work (Games, Art and Design and Technology are good examples) or who see a clear link to the real world outside of school (i.e. mapping, in Geography) are more likely to appreciate the rationale behind the curriculum (Rudduck, 1996).

It may be that boys and girls perceive subjects very differently, simply because of their gender, but it is not something that is cut and dried from the start

of the schooling experience; in terms of a subject's perceived masculinity or femininity, Lightbody et al. (1996) suggest that younger children are less inclined to give a subject a particular gender leaning than their older colleagues; for those pupils in secondary school, however, there is evidence of masculine and feminine leanings towards different groups of subjects. Dryler (1999) suggests that girls dominate nursing, social care and humanities subjects, and boys dominate the technical/engineering programmes. Tinklin et al. (2000) suggest that there is a female bias towards Home Economics, Office and Information Studies and Religious Studies, whilst there is a male bias towards Technological Studies, Craft and design, Graphical Communication and Physical Education. Elsworth (1999) suggests that there is a predisposition towards particular school subjects if one has a generic interest in that area of human endeavour. He suggests that boys show a predisposition towards Maths, Information Technology, Agriculture, Physical Education, Technology and Physical Sciences, and girls show a predisposition towards Biology, Science, Art, Health, Home Economics and Modern Foreign Languages.

For the majority of pupils at school, the core subjects of English, Maths and Science are thought to be most important in the greater scheme of things; Pollard and Triggs (2000) suggest that Maths is seen as a weighty subject, but one that is enjoyed by both ends of the pupil spectrum, as it provides both a challenge for high achievers and the security of completion for low achievers.

Miller et al. (1999) suggest that pupils can indeed see the importance of these subjects, and particularly their having a value for work and employment chances later on, although their perceived value is accepted only in a certain order: girls rank English as most important, followed by Maths, then Science; for boys, the rank order puts Maths first, then English, then Science. Both boys and girls maintain (in Years 7 and 11) a positive expectation of the need for both English and Maths. The value of Science, as far as girls is concerned, is appreciated as being less important in Year 11 than in Year 7, showing a decline in their belief that it is a necessity for work. Boys go from being fairly neutral about its importance (in Year 7), to being more positive (in Year 11); showing that, over time, for them at least, Science had improved its stock as a subject. Osborne and Collins (2001) suggest that school science (principally secondary school science) can be seen as suffering from alienation, as pupils have a problem relating it to everyday life. If the curriculum is content dominated and suffers from 'repetition,

copying and the rushed experience' (p.461) then it may not be hard to reconcile this with the pupils' view of repetition and copying as being tedious. Bennett (2001) suggests that the science taught at school suffers because it is both considered 'difficult' and the preserve of 'clever' people, and it lacks a recognisable content for many children. There is, arguably, a negative view outside school, in society at large, where science is not accorded the same laurels as other areas of work (Osborne et al., 1998). Haste (2004) suggests that there is a fairly marked difference between the approach of boys and girls to the idea of science; boys view science in terms of investment, science research, Space and the wholesale benefits that science can provide. Girls, on the other hand, feel strongly about the ethics associated with science; its green issues, social issues, and environmental issues. Given the structural differences in the syllabuses of each of the strands of science, it is perhaps not surprising then, as suggested by Tinklin et al. (2000), that girls show a preference for Biology and boys show a preference for Physics.

For most children at school, the importance of what they are doing can be distilled into a single entity: GCSE. The GCSE is a significant milestone in the career of any pupil at school, and it is certainly perceived as challenging by all but the most able students but the notion of what constitutes this 'challenge' is often perceived to mean volume of work rather than 'academic' challenge. It may be this less academic perception of the exam which has led to a general perception that anything below a 'C' grade is seen as a failure (Bishop et al., 1999). From the pupils' perspective the shift in perception about the examination may be perhaps due to one of two things; some evidence from Miller et al. (1999) shows that half of girls and slightly more boys feel that subjects get easier as they get older, and Colley and Comber (2003) suggest that practical subjects have become more popular; perhaps it is the ease with which practical subjects exams are perceived that has meant that they are less feared. The dread of exams might be due more to perceptions about the volume of work required, rather than the anticipated intellectual challenge; a clue to the root of this may be evidenced (Adey and Biddulph, 2001) from the perspective of Year 9 pupils, who perceive GCSE subjects to be concerned with lots of reading and writing and tests, although research by Bishop et al. (1999) suggests that GCSE work should be accessed at Key Stage 3 rather than later on.

The value of the effort required to jump through this particular set of hoops is often realised too late; by Year 11 many pupils acknowledge the role they have

played in the previous two years, particularly in their lack of understanding by virtue of *not* having paid attention (Rudduck, 1996). There is, certainly by the latter stages of schooling, a convergence of pupil understanding (in both the independent and the maintained sector) that the object of attendance at school is to gain qualifications (Walford, 1986a). Qualification has now long been recognised as a vital part of being at school –parents and some children plainly see it as not only the main reason for attending school but also part of the deal between the parents and the school; evidence of a return on the investment made. Even in the 1960s the influence felt by the need for results had been felt at independent schools, where the provision of a 'broad classical education' that had hitherto been the watchword at many establishments, was seen to give way to the 'modern' trend for high examination grades (Walford, 1986a). Even for the independent schools then, which purported to provide education for the 'whole person', the place of exams and qualifications, and the corresponding dedication of time to curriculum and examinations, perhaps caused most development and movement towards a more comprehensive approach to education in the sector. The dangers, however, of a need to fulfil the requirements of an examination dominated curriculum ('teaching to the exam' as it is often labelled) may, arguably, be seen as counter-productive as Osborne and Collins (2000) note:

> '…it is highly anomalous, that in an age when society increasingly places a premium on the higher order cognitive abilities to retrieve, sort and sift information, that such curricula continue to place an emphasis on lower order abilities of recall and comprehension of basic concepts. The contrast between the political rhetoric, which places a high premium on the values of education for the skills that contemporary society prizes, and its 19th century emphasis on an ability to recall the 'facts' of science is very stark.' (p.461)

In the minds of pupils at school there is a hierarchy of importance attached to subjects. As we have seen, the core subjects are dominant in the minds of pupils, because they are seen as important, and have a value that is plainly seen. There are subliminal messages about the difficulties or otherwise of certain subjects and consequently their rank, or importance. Connected with this in the minds of pupils are definite links between types of pupils and types of subjects where, for instance 'boffs' are more suited to Physics (Adey and Biddulph, 2001). Bishop et al. (1999) suggest that there is a clear perception of the perceived 'hardness' of different school subjects, which has meant that 93% of children see it

as more difficult to gain good grades in some GCSE subjects than in others; this perception has a corresponding downside for some of these other subjects:

> 'Those subjects perceived as 'easy' were more likely to fit the vocational domain and were often regarded as 'soft options' and unreliable indicators of high academic standards.'(p.46)

From both the schools' and the pupils' point of view, the weakness of the subjects perceived as non-academic or vocational in a school that is overly academic can be problematic in providing a balance of educational activities to satisfy the needs of the majority of pupils; not only those who seem to express a preference for activity-based education (Little and Threat, 1994). Independent schools would, arguably, fit the definition of 'overly academic' in the minds of some observers, particularly as they are selective of their intake and are accessed specifically for their delivery of good results in academic subjects.

Pupil motivation

Pupils are motivated by a number of factors. According to Lightbody et al. (1996), girls rank highest factors such as hard work and teachers liking you, whilst boys rank highest factors such as cleverness and talent for subject. Hard work is acceptable -even fruitful- if it is seen as interesting and exciting, as Newman (1997) notes:

> '....work provided by the teacher that was too hard created unhappiness and insecurity. Activities that provided excitement and choice were motivating.' (p.5)

The picture is not so cut and dried in all cases though. Durkin (1997) suggests that perceptions of success or failure, in the mind of the pupil at least, are also likely to be explained away as being due to one of four causes: their ability in the subject, the amount of effort that they have put into it, the perceived task difficulty and simple luck. Smees and Thomas (1998) suggest that, at the modest level from which they view the world, children are more concerned with personal issues (peer groups, teachers, environment and transport) than they are with the nitty-gritty of the curriculum and subjects, and Wallace (1996b) suggests that pupils are motivated more by interest in Years 7, 8 and, to a degree, Year 9, whereas in Years 10 and 11 all is driven by grades and outcomes. Rudduck et al. (1996) suggest that pupils in Year 8 and 9 have something of a feeling of abandonment because they sense that their teachers are, certainly in the summer months,

concentration all their time and effort on their Year 10 and 11 charges, who are about to face public exams, and so they can perhaps only conclude that their work is not as important as their older colleagues.

By the onset of GCSEs, pupils are motivated (or demotivated) by a number of different factors. In terms of the influences that drive pupils forward, the GCSE exam itself is seen as a motivating factor for 86% of those students doing the work (Bishop et al., 1999). The like or dislike of specific subjects is linked to, for instance, perceived usefulness later in life (Durkin, 1998), and the shift in motivations are what Wallace (1996b) calls 'from interest to expediency' :

> '…when pupils' commitment to learning moves away from its dependence on the gratification provided in Years 7 and 8 by interesting work, it becomes ever more dependent on strategies which serve their self-interest.' (p.67)

The differences in maturity and outlook of boys and girls at the GCSE stage of schooling can have a marked effect on perception and performance. By now, girls' goals, expectations and motivation are generally considered to be the more positive; boys are more ambivalent about their goals and are generally negative about both their expectations in the examinations, and in their own motivation for working (Warrington and Younger, 1996). Coupled with this rather bleak outlook, boys tend to work less hard at those subjects that they consider less important (Warrington et al., 2000). The way pupils approach the various subjects will be determined to some degree by the way the subject appeals to them, although broadly, subjects can be split into different groups; Hendley et al. (1996) suggest that subjects such as Design and Technology and English are more intrinsically (process) motivated whereas Maths is extrinsically (qualifications) motivated, and Science is perceived as being a mixture of the two. For most pupils there is some conflict in their motivation; Kernshaw (1996) suggests that the intrinsic (interest driven) motivation competes with the extrinsic (grades and jobs driven) motivation in pupils' minds. This may lead to some decisions being made about GCSE subject choices, for instance, based on expediency rather than on merit.

Influences on importance

Transfer between schools

The research period provided a good opportunity to look at the myriad of changes that were experienced (and instigated) by the group under discussion. This particular period of school life provided a rich vein for exploration because of the many facets presented by those who experienced it. Some of the less obvious, but perhaps more profound changes were those not under the direct control of the education institution itself; adolescence being a principle example. Durkin (1997) notes that adolescence brings about changes, which have a major impact on youngsters' lives, in terms of their biology, their social status, and the organisational context (moving schools).

Our group of pupils were under the microscope from Year 7, a time when their peers in the maintained sector would have already moved on. In the 'normal' transition to senior school, the positive ethos that is encouraged by 'big school' is set early on. The transfer from one regime to another brings with it many expectations and fears as well as excitement and possibilities. Pupils often take with them the 'baggage' of the previous school and expectations for some may be very high because the promise of advancement brought about through existing experience is there, although enthusiasm can be tempered by practice, if the experience is seen to be retrogressive (Galton et al., 2000). Norwich (1999) suggests that, compared to their older peers, Year 7 pupils believe that they have a higher reason for learning and behaving at school than do their colleagues in Year 9; younger pupils feel that learning and behaving is the proper thing to do; older children have more reasons for not learning and behaving by the time they reach Years 9 and 10. Perhaps familiarity with the system and a growing awareness of the frailty of the human condition leads pupils to begin to question what they are being asked to do. Students' feelings about teachers as people begin to dominate and mould more acutely attitudes to teaching and learning. There may be, as children grow, a more critical edge to their relationship with their adult mentors; Beresford (2000) suggests that, even from Year 7, pupils' attitudes to particular subjects and teachers begin to harden, so it can be seen that the teacher relationship is crucial. Moving from one school to another creates huge anxieties for children as they move from the 'senior position' in a 'manageable environment' to 'naïve newcomer' in an 'anonymous bureaucracy' (Duffield, 1998). Despite many attempts to address the thorny issue of moving schools, adults can never entirely assuage the discomfort felt by children, as Morrison (2000) notes:

> 'They were apprehensive about the unknown in a way that no amount of liaison would have overcome.' (p.48)

Something of the difficulty of school transition and the turmoil that is experienced thereafter is summed up by Rudduck et al. (1996):

> ' An experience of wholeness is fractured and the move is an introduction to the principles of fragmentation and division which intensify as pupils move through secondary schooling.' (p. 3).

The severity of this fracture is not confined to the initial move:

> '...Year 8 is problematic, it has neither the compelling novelty of Year 7, nor the promise of ownership through option choices of Year 9. Nor does it have the 'real world' urgency of Years 10 and 11 with their opportunities for exploring the worlds of employment and their preparation for the serious work of the examinations.' (p.6)

there is some trade-off to be had in this anxious state, however, as Lucey and Reay (2000) note:

> '...the prospect of going to 'big school' presents children with a dilemma central to the experience of growing up; that in order to gain freedom and autonomy from adult regulation one must be willing to relinquish some measure of the protection which that regulation affords.' (p.203)

It is obviously something more than just a move from the top of one organisation to the bottom of another, and those pupils who move into this new environment alongside a group of people that they know are more likely to benefit from the positive effects of this peer group support (Lucey and Reay, 2000) than those that do not. The younger, less mature, less confident pupils are more at risk during this time. It perhaps follows then that the most successful movers are the academically able, self-confident and socially mature pupils (Galton et al., 2000). Chaplain (1996) suggests that, although it is useful for the initial settling in during Years 7 and 8, this delicate social support mechanism provided by friends and close peers may give way once options are made at Year 9, and the social support is removed. The rather singular notion of a problematic relationship shift at school transfer may be perhaps seen then as part of an on-going year-on-year progression, brought about by different pressures and demands faced each September (Galton et al., 2000); perhaps the self-confidence of the young begins to give way with the onset of adolescence.

Relationships with teachers

Pupils will have a sense of what makes a school work well for them, and what it is that they see as helpful and useful. Teachers are seen by the outside world as a fundamental part of the make-up of a school, and are also viewed by the pupils as an important part of their school experience. Lucey and Reay (2000) suggest that pupils generally consider that the elements that make up a good school are based upon these important people within it; decent teachers, who help you, who teach properly and who run a school with good discipline and no bullying. Given that teachers have considerable influence over pupils' enjoyment of lessons, it must be the case that teachers will also have a degree of influence over pupils perceptions about the importance of their subjects. Morgan and Morris (1999) suggest that much of the rationale for a given perception about a subject is to do with the way the subject is taught rather than how much the subject itself is perceived. Inside school, the teacher can have an extraordinary influence on the pupil's perception of his or her world, and the developing pupil, as he or she grows and matures, will experience a developing relationship with the teacher. Gipps and Tunstall (1997) suggest that, whilst younger pupils will often simply equate the results of their efforts with the amount of effort that they themselves have put into it, older children do begin to see a link between the positive teacher and the positive pupil (Alerby, 2003). Pupils certainly put a good deal of store by successful teaching. Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1997) suggest that teachers are more

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS CLASSROOM ROLE	RELATED VIEW OF PUPIL IDENTITY	PUPIL RESPONSE PERSPECTIVE
Reliance on survival and control (shouts at pupils)	Adversary	Oppositional behaviour and reluctant learner
High reliance on transmission of knowledge	Receiver of truth and wisdom	Passive learner sometimes bored
Reliant on transaction	Co-partner in learning activity	Co-partner and active learner, takes ownership for own learning achievement

Fig. 3 Teacher classroom perspectives

effective when they transcend the archetypal institutional information dissemination role to become more personal and personable in their dealings with pupils; Morgan and Morris (1999) suggest (fig. 3) several ways in which a typical

teacher-pupil relationship might be structured. It might be suggested by some that the 'traditional' educational values that are thought to be inherent in the independent sector might perhaps lead to teachers there adopting a more formal and didactic style, based on information dissemination, rather than engaging easily in what might be seen as a more liberal style of teaching; traditional values, after all, are often equated with old-fashioned values.

Beresford (2000) suggests that it is generally the case that most children get on well with teachers, most of the time (there are dips and troughs at different times, for both boys and girls, but the essential trend is upward); and that by the end of Year 7, pupils are already assessing the value of their subjects in terms of future employment, rather than as a contribution to their broad education. By the end of Year 9, Wallace (1996b) suggests that this delicate, trusting relationship which exists between pupil and teacher certainly needs reciprocal understanding, and the looming external demands of public examinations, together with concerns about access to the wider world of work, require implicit support from teachers from this point onwards:

> 'Pupils emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships with understanding teachers who were prepared to listen.'(p.39).

For teachers, both in the core subjects, and in what pupils see as the more peripheral subjects, this is important; it means that the significance of the relationship established between the pupils and the teacher at this stage could have a real and tangible effect on a pupil's perception of a subject from that point forward. A pupil may see a subject as more or less important or valuable, simply because of the teacher, rather than because of any judgement made about the subject itself. A strong influence on the schooling experience of those going through the system is clearly felt in the way the curriculum is delivered, or is perceived. Where pupils perceive that there are shortcomings during lessons they are happy to apportion responsibility (Morgan and Morris, 1999); unfortunately, so are the opposition:

> '.... teachers believe that this is overwhelmingly to do with the pupils themselves, substantially with their endowed ability and home background. Pupils in directly opposite response believe..(it)..is overwhelmingly to do with the behaviour of teachers, principally with their teaching methods and social relationships in the classroom.' (p.113)

Relationships with families

Although the role of the teacher is influential in shaping attitudes to school subjects, there is evidence that the family has a stronger role; in terms of the influence over subjects, both Norwich (1999) and Adey and Biddulph (2001) suggest that, in this respect, parental influence is stronger than that of the school. It is known that there are gender differences in attitudes to, and preferences for, subjects taken at GCSE (Tinklin, 2000) and this is, in turn, perhaps influenced by the different familial approach to the work ethic of boys and girls; Warrington and Younger (1996a) suggest that parental expectations of children as they approach GCSE are higher for girls (perhaps because they are thought to mature earlier) than they are for boys.

The common denominator in the relationship between the school and the family is the pupil; he or she is fundamental to both, and is influenced by both. It follows that the family that has a working relationship with the school will provide a more positive influence on the pupil and his or her approach to the school. Hofman et al. (1996) suggest that, in order to promote the well-being of the pupil and to develop him or her fully:

> '…an ideal setting would exist where there is no conflict between the school as an extension of the family and the school as emancipator of the child from the family.'(p. 369).

The role played by the school is certainly multi-faceted and parents and pupils need to draw what they can from the experience. Heyward (1995) notes:

> 'Schools are among the most fundamental socialising agents in society. One of the consequences of changing family structures, with more single-parent families and families in which both parents work outside the home seems to have been a greater responsibility placed on the school for the transmission of social and cultural values to the younger generation.' (p.190)

If this is the case, then the more the family are attuned to the ethos and values of their children's school, then the greater is the chance of ensuring a positive benefit for the pupil. Hofman et al. (1996) suggest that families and communities that share similar norms between adults and children are more likely to support the education of that community's children, and so, by virtue of their shared interest in the venture, the sorts of pupils and families that make up independent school communities are thought to be more likely to demonstrate such behaviour because they are the sort of communities where a value consistency exists between adults

and children; the networking and knowledge (social capital, perhaps) about the school community which is enjoyed and shared by the community and the families within it is an important factor in the close knit success of those communities.

This would imply that the benefits of parental involvement are seen to pay off in the long run; McNeal (2001) suggests that this involvement (seen as a 'lay' term for social and/or cultural capital) has the effect of reducing occurrences of juvenile problematic behaviour as well as enhancing achievement, and is a device that is used predominantly by families in the upper socio-economic strata; the supposed natural catchment of the independent school.

Whilst well-meaning and hard-pressed parents of pupils in independent education, perhaps not unreasonably, want a return on their 'investment', in the shape of a university place and a well paid career, this may, for some children at least, be an unrealistic goal, and may come at a cost to the development of the 'rounded' person (Walford, 1986a), and despite the wider social admonition of those who send their children to independent schools, these families are, in essence, only trying to help their children succeed; children who are seen by Chin (2000) as:

> '…the sometimes rebellious, sometimes compliant objects of genuine parental concern.' (p. 136)

The commitment to independent education is usually a heavy one, and may be driven by many factors, as parents seek perhaps improved safety and welfare for their children, improved pastoral care, tradition, higher academic standards, sports or extra-curricular activities (Gorard, 1996). It may be argued that the better off are merely utilising their 'class capital' by using and manipulating what the independent sector has to offer, and thereby perpetuating and continuing the practice through the next generation. Indeed, the notion of 'capital' appears to be very relevant to the private education arena. Schuller (1996) suggests that the concept of capital is defined as both human capital (in terms of the individual –his or her education and income or productivity), and social capital (in terms of social networks and values and the level of social obligation and quality of life). Chin (2000) argues that capital comprises:

financial capital –in the form of wealth

human capital – in the form of educational level

cultural capital – in the form of aesthetics, manners and taste

social capital – in the form of networks and social support.

Research (van der Werfhorst et al., 2003; Chin, 2000) suggests that there is a practice of accumulating and using the cultural, social and economic capital of the parental generation (which the better off family possesses) to perpetuate and improve the capital of the coming generation by virtue of school choice and career path. Indeed, van der Werfhorst (2002) suggests that the type of educational resource we invest in is a significant determinant in our choice of job or career path:

> ' Investments in education are made in order to reproduce the type of resource that is dominant in the family. So children whose aim is to reproduce economic resources are likely to invest in the fields of study where financial and legal competences are generated. People who possess these competences are likely to acquire jobs that score high on the economic hierarchy.' (p.288)

Sullivan (2001) suggests that the cultural capital is:

> '...inculcated into the higher class home, and enables the higher class students to gain higher educational credentials than the lower class students. This enables higher class individuals to maintain their class position, and legitimates the dominant positions that they typically go on to hold.' (p.894)

West et al. (1996) also suggest that, if wealthy parents fall into the definition of the 'professional classes' then it might follow that they desire to see a professional career path for their children from an early age; much more so than their state school counterparts. Van der Werfhorst et al. (2003) suggest that higher social class children additionally benefit from higher academic attainment, and thus they:

> '...were more likely to enter the prestigious fields of medicine and law than the children of unskilled manual labourers. (p. 59)

Sullivan and Cheung (2003) note:

> 'To realise class maintenance, or upward mobility on the economic dimension, the economic elite's children are likely to enter fields that develop commercial and financial skills, or other fields that yield high financial returns on the labour market. Children of working class origin possess relatively little of either type of capital, and therefore cannot be seen as choosing either culturally or economically oriented fields in order to reproduce this family's type of capital.' (p.45)

So the influence that the family has over the pupil might be very subtle indeed; for the independent school pupil, the expectation of high achievement and attainment

might be perceived as an ingrained part of the normal family culture. Social and cultural capital is not exclusively the preserve of the independent sector, and its effects are not only felt by those families who elect to 'go private'; Sullivan (2001) suggests that its value is also seen as bearing fruit in state schools where the parents' social class is thought to have a significant effect on their children's GCSE attainment; additionally, research (McNiece, et al., 2004; Flouri, 2006) suggests that those children from more advantageous socio-economic backgrounds achieve better results all the way through the compulsory school years than their counterparts from poorer backgrounds, and that children from professional households perform significantly better than children from other social groups.

Relationships with peers

Samdal et al. (1999) suggest that contemporary comparisons of schools often look very closely at the academic areas without taking account of the psychosocial environment, or the way in which pupils engage with each other and their surroundings- something which, in modern education parlance might fall under the title of 'added value'. Adolescence impacts quite significantly on the pupils as they pass through school, and might be considered as one of the larger milestones in any school career. Durkin (1997) suggests that adolescence brings about changes that have a major impact on youngsters' lives, and this is not only something which they see as impinging on their biology, but also on their social status within the school and among the peer group, and on their organisational environment, particularly when moving between schools. There is also, later on, the impending public examinations and the prospect of a career choice to be made. Being an adolescent, in school, is problematic because:

> "…deciding who one is to become tends to attract a lot of advice, possibly from conflicting sources, and substantial impact from reality, in the form of school grades, peer feedback and career prospects." (p.514).

The adolescent view of school life is constantly changing, and it is clear that how pupils see themselves at school has a significant influence on their perceptions of school. Beresford (2000) suggests that, in terms of how good they feel they actually are at what they do, students' perceptions of their own ability in particular subjects are found to be quite consistent up till the end of Year 7, but after that there is a decline. Further, Galton et al. (2000) suggest that, after

transfer (at the end of Year 6) there follows a fallow period, in Years 7 and 8, where there is a dip in achievement.

As well as the more apparent signs of development and change being experienced, these poor individuals are also subject to something of 'egocentricism' where they are self-aware, perhaps even feeling as if they are under the magnifying glass rather too much, which can, arguably, be a state of mind that is inclined to have a disproportionate effect on some decisions. Peer pressure can work as a force for good, as well as being perceived as a poor influence on pupils' behaviour; if the social norm is one in which there is a positive work ethic and a strong school ethos then it is conceivable that the pressure to conform positively will be strong indeed. Independent schools, it could be argued, contain more motivated pupils, from parentally engaged backgrounds, and are thus a group who might be more positively influenced in the main; Connor (1994) suggests that children with high self-esteem and who have a positive self-image will more easily resist poor influences on their behaviour.

Bourke (2001) suggests that the characteristics of children at independent schools show them to be more outgoing and competitive; it might be then that these children would be more concerned with their relative positions in the peer hierarchy, and would have more regard for their relative performance and achievement in school tests and exams. In a selective school environment, where the standard of achievement could be expected to be higher than the norm, it might be easy for these children to lose sight of their real ability, simply because the reference points are slightly artificial, being always above the national norms. Dryler (1999) refers to the 'frog and pond' effect (after Davis, 1996) where:

> '…an individual evaluates his/her achievements relative to other individuals with whom a comparison in natural…(thus)…while high individual marks positively affect educational attainment, high average marks in school reduce the likelihood of choosing the academic track in upper secondary school. Thus in a school of high achievers (those with high marks), pupils lower their aspirations when comparing themselves with their classmates because they view themselves as more mediocre than if they had attended a school of low achievers…being a big frog in a small pond increases educational aspirations.' (p.301)

Chapter 3

The Research Context – The School

Introduction

This chapter provides some brief historical background to independent schools generally, and a context for the place of the research school in particular. It also gives some general background on the location and structure of the elements of the school used in the research. There are data on both the contemporary and historical pupil demographic, and also a contemporary staff profile. There is a summary of the entry requirements, the subject curriculum, how the academic year is divided, as well as the structure of a typical school day. Contemporary pupil workload has been summarised, including the proportion of time spent on academic and sports, games and extra-curricular activities. Finally there are data on the research group pupils' family backgrounds, i.e. parental occupations and residential and travel arrangements.

Historical context

The research school in question, as an independent school, would at one time have been referred to as a 'public school'. The term is little used today, except perhaps as a 'media' term in relation to the 'premier-league' players in the independent sector; those schools referred to as the 'Rugby and Eton group' of schools. Among the plethora of independent schools that existed in the nineteenth century, the term 'public school' was once applied only to those establishments that were members of the Headmasters Conference (HMC). Independent schools as a genre did, (and do), boast a diverse range of educational institutions (outside the orbit of the government's education framework for maintained schools), and which included the large, the small, the good the bad and the ugly. The HMC grouping was a nineteenth century innovation, formed to draw together the best of the sector, to include only schools where standards were considered high.

The study school was a member of the HMC and had been for some time; it considered itself to be one of the oldest schools in the country, being in existence for over 1300 years, and was, (like most of its contemporaries) originally established as a boys school.

A note on the school data

In general, the data used in this chapter did not include material pertaining to the smallest of the contributors to the school as a whole, which was the pre-preparatory school, educating the youngest members of the community, aged from three to eight years. The exclusion was decided upon, not because the data was considered unimportant *per se*, but because the research was concerned only with the junior and senior schools, and the relationship between the two.

Location

The school was located near the centre of a northern English city that boasted a population of about 80,000. The immediate area was predominantly rural and quite wealthy, indeed, the local economy supported a number of other independent schools within the city itself, as well as in the surrounding countryside, and so competition for pupils (especially day pupils) was keen.

Pupil numbers

Although originally founded as a boy's school, the institution was, at the time of the research, coeducational, and educated just over one thousand pupils in total. Although (see Table 2) this number included the pre-preparatory school, the research was concerned only with the junior and senior schools. The gender split across the institution was about 60% boys and 40% girls. The intake was predominantly composed of day pupils (about 80%), with the remainder forming the boarding community. Both boys and girls could board; in the junior school, from the age of eight, as well as in the senior school, from the age of thirteen. The junior school had one, mixed boarding House, and the senior school had four, single-sex Houses; two for the girls, and two for the boys.

Table 2. Pupil numbers in the research school

School	Boys	Girls	Total
Pre-preparatory	94	72	166
Junior	205	142	347
senior	322	214	536

The main school campus housed the senior school, which educated older pupils, between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. The junior school occupied a lower campus, and contained younger pupils, between the ages of eight and thirteen.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the school boasted sixty-five boys in the senior school. By 1950, this had risen to four hundred and seventy one: comprising two hundred and eighty in the senior school and one hundred and ninety one in the junior school. As the school grew, and the campus increased in size, so the number of children educated in all areas of the school increased.

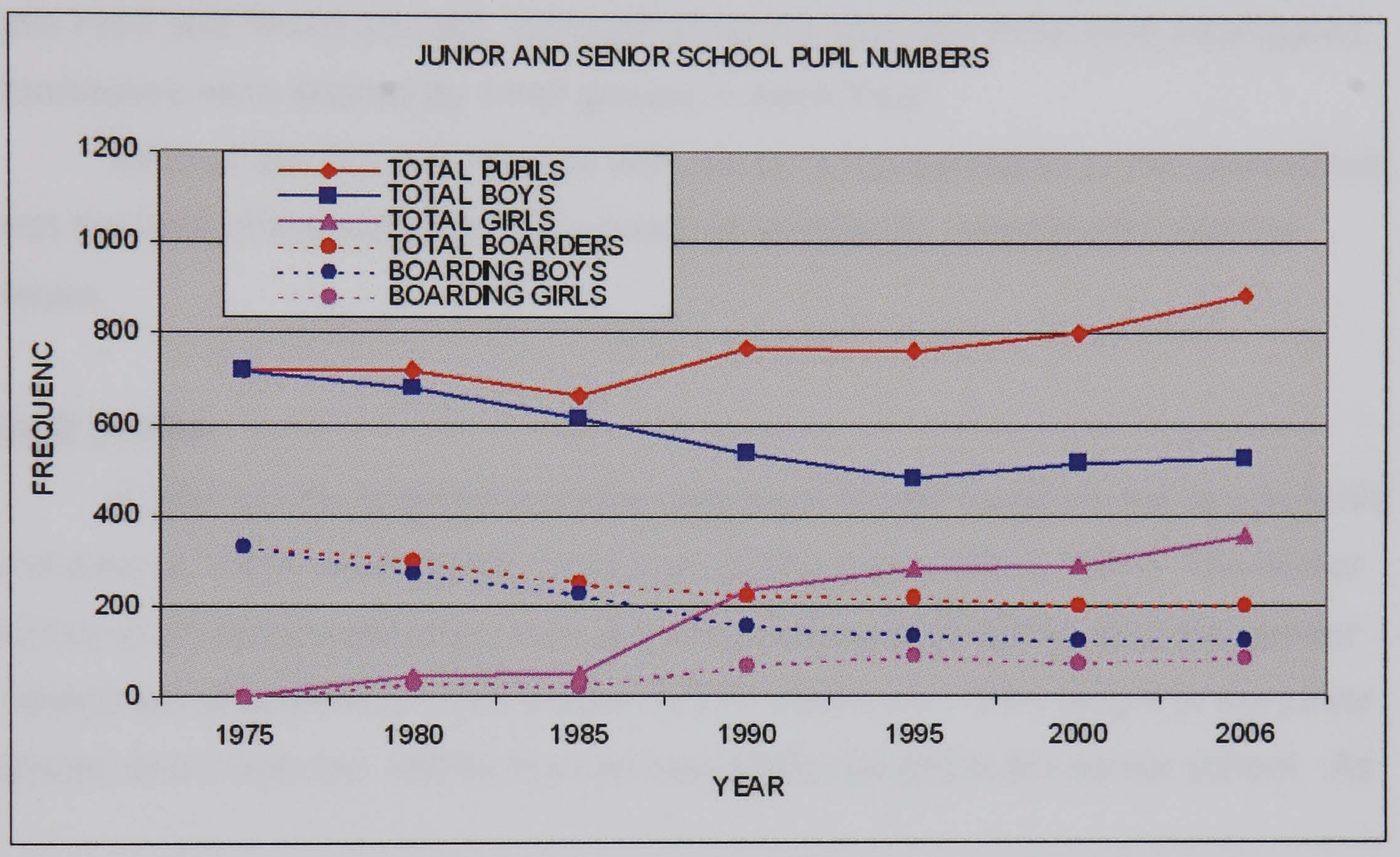

Fig. 4 The junior and senior school roll and boarding numbers

Recent history is represented by fig. 4, which illustrates the growth of the establishment, over a period of twenty years, from 1975 to 2006. As can be seen from the graph, the pupil total for the two schools rose between 1975 and 1996, only suffering a slight dip in the mid 1980s. Girls were first introduced to the school roll in the 1980s; first at senior school then, a few years later, at junior school. Whilst total school numbers have risen, the proportion of the community that boards has fallen steadily, even despite an increasing number of girl boarders.

The structure and hierarchy of the school

The senior school had nine Houses altogether. There were four boarding Houses with resident housemasters and families; two for boys and two for girls. Younger pupils shared rooms, but there was more privacy for the more senior

pupils. For the day pupils, there were five day Houses, each with a range of common rooms, studies and changing facilities. The Housemasters and Housemistresses had studies in their Houses and, with the help of tutors, offered pastoral care similar to that given by their boarding colleagues. Day pupils could, for a small extra charge, have the status of 'day boarder', which provided membership of a boarding House and the boarders' evening meal. Such pupils left for home at 2000 hours, after evening prep.

The junior school had six Houses altogether. There was one boarding House, with resident Housemistress and family, and within which the boys and girls lived and mixed socially, although sleeping arrangements were segregated; dormitories were shared by small groups in each Year.

Each of the five day Houses was run by a Housemaster or Housemistress, with the help of teaching staff who acted as assistants, dealing with pastoral issues.

Staff profile

A total of one hundred and four members of staff taught in the two schools, and overall, there were slightly more men (52%) than women (48%). The senior school staff (66%) was larger than the junior school staff (34%), and the gender breakdown showed that more women (22%) than men (12%) taught in the junior school, and more men (40%) than women (26%) taught in the senior school. As

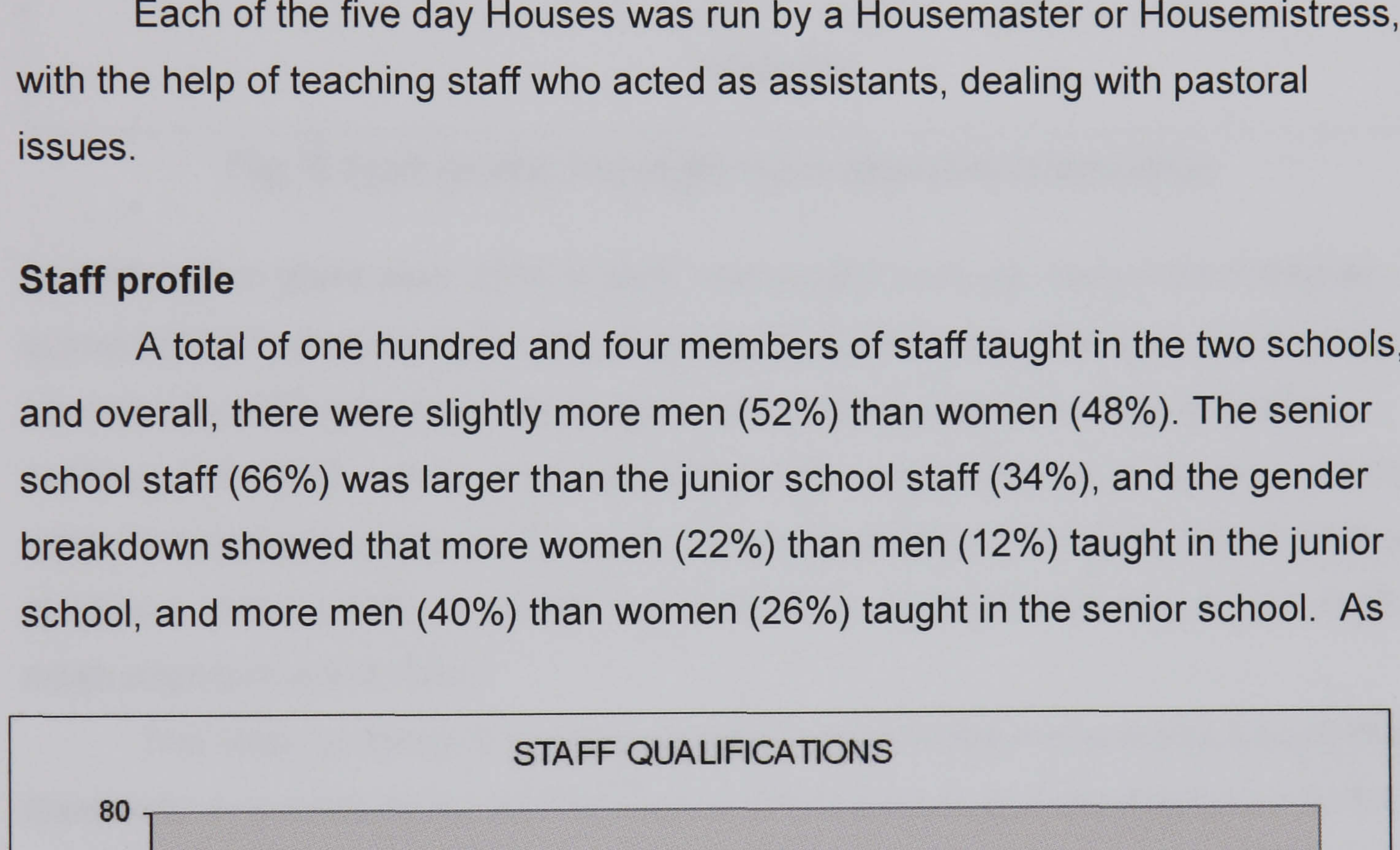

Fig. 5 Teaching staff degree types

can be seen from fig. 5, the staff comprised more arts graduates than scientists

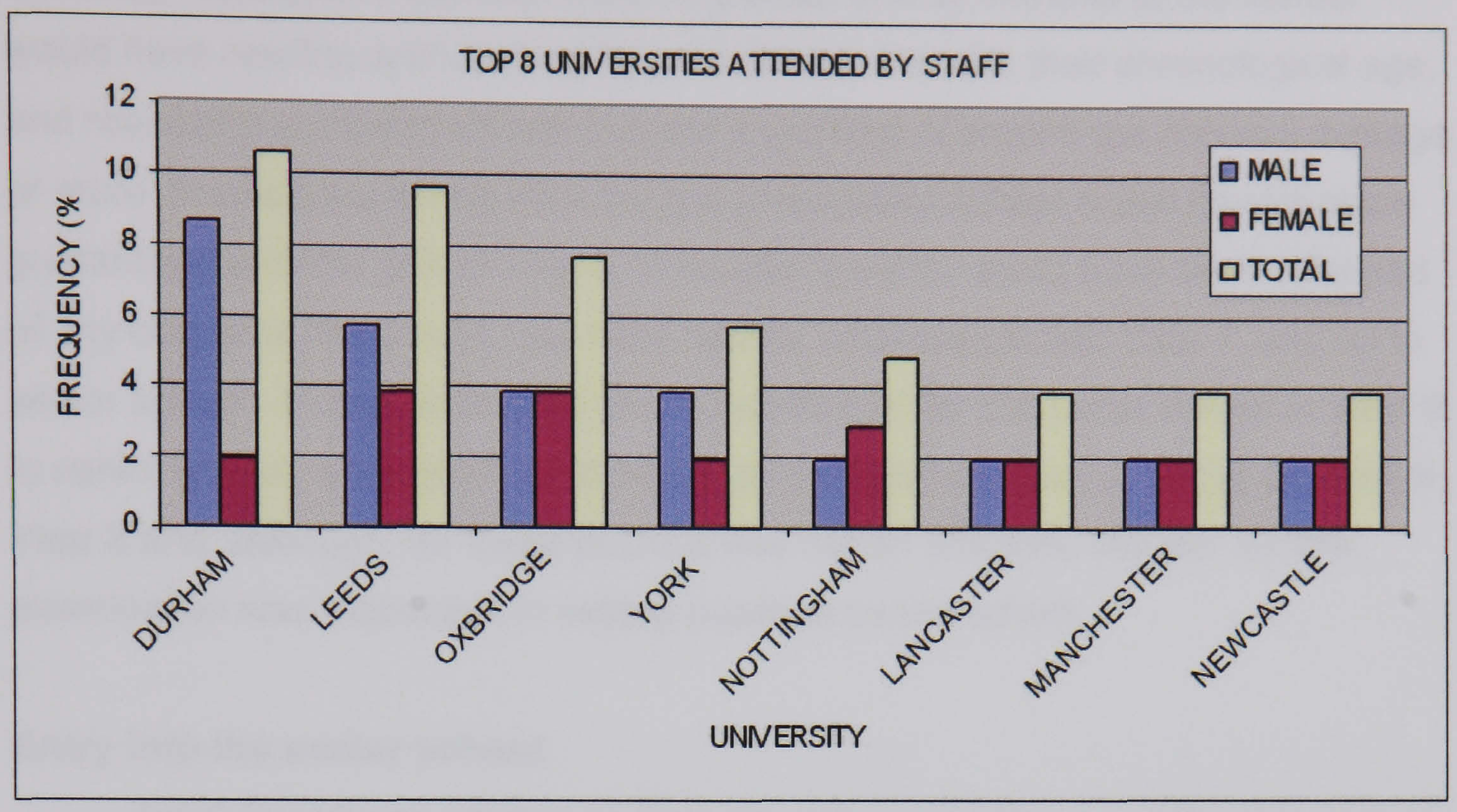

Fig. 6 Staff profile: the eight most-attended universities

and education graduates. 22% of staff, and nearly twice as many men (14%) as women (8%) had some form of post-graduate qualification. The type of university attended by staff was quite varied, and, taking into account the longevity of a number of the staff, some of the establishments were no longer in existence in the same form (polytechnics, for instance, having become universities). For illustrative purposes, and because the range was quite wide, fig. 6 reflects data for the eight most-attended universities.

The total numbers of pupils and staff in each of the two schools means that there was a nominal pupil-teacher ratio of 8:1 in the senior school and 10:1 in the junior school. This did not mean, however, that class sizes were universally small; although some GCSE and A level groups could contain four or five pupils, the nominal teaching group sizes, between Years 7 and 9, could comprise between fifteen and twenty-four pupils.

Entry to the junior school

Pupils were selected for entry at the ages of eight, ten and eleven, and, occasionally, at nine and twelve, if spaces were available in the school. Entry was by way of selective tests, aimed to measure both current academic performance and an indication of potential, and a confidential report from a pupil's present school was also taken into account. Common to all age groups were tests for

basic English and Mathematics, as well as a standardised test of basic ability, including reading and spelling. It was expected that all entrants to the school would have reading and spelling ages at least in line with their chronological age, and reasoning quotients should indicate a quotient of around the national average or more. Pupils transferring from the pre-preparatory school would have a place guaranteed until the end of Year 6; thereafter parents would have been informed of any concerns the school may have had for continuance into Year 7, and on to senior school. Pupils, who were moving on from Year 8 in junior school to Year 9 in senior school, were required to sit the senior school entrance test at the end of Year 8 and, although, for these pupils it was not an entrance test *per se*, the examination was instructive in setting pupils at senior school.

Entry into the senior school

Apart from those coming up from its own junior school, pupils were able to enter senior school via the school's own Entrance Examination or by a combination of the Entrance Examination and the Common Entrance Examination. The vagueness (as it was seen by its critics) of the Common Entrance Examination was that it allowed each participating school not only to set its own pass mark, but also to mark its own papers. This has always been regarded as a way for the school to gain considerable leeway in deciding who may or may not pass through its portals (Wakeford, 1969). These institutions were, after all, a business as well as a school; significant weight may have been placed on the acceptance of certain family members, particularly if there were siblings in the school or a parent was an old boy/girl (or, indeed, was willing to endow the school with some facility.)

The senior school's own entrance Examination required that applicants were tested in Mathematics, English and French as well as general intelligence. A confidential report from a pupil's present school was also taken into account. Pupils generally entered senior school, into Year 9, at the age of thirteen, but possibilities existed for entry at all ages, as well as at sixteen or seventeen, into the Sixth Form.

Entry into sixth form

Pupils in Year 11 at senior school were expected to achieve a minimum of six GCSE passes at grade B or above, in order to successfully pass into the sixth form.

Pupils wishing to enter the sixth form from other schools sat the Sixth Form Entrance and Scholarship Examination. An academic reference, which included predicted GCSE grades, was obtained from their current school. For those performing well in the examination and with satisfactory predicted grades an unconditional offer of a place was made; for those for whom there was uncertainty regarding their academic potential, a conditional offer (a minimum of six GCSE passes at grade B or above) was made.

The curriculum –junior school

The curriculum was developed through the five junior school years with subjects being added and new methods introduced, to prepare pupils for the more formalised study routines of the Senior School. All pupils in Year 4 were largely taught by the general class teacher and for both Years 4 and 5, the children were largely based in their own form rooms. Because specialist teaching was gradually introduced, by Year 7 pupils were moving from subject to subject in the various departments.

The core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science were supplemented with History, Geography, Art, Physical Education and Games, Music, Design and Technology, Information Technology and Religious Education. An introduction to Modern Foreign Languages through a language awareness programme began in Year 4. Formal French teaching and Latin were introduced in Year 6 and German in Year 7. An option to take Spanish instead of German was offered in Year 8. Personal, Social and Health Education was taught at all ages.

The curriculum –senior school

During their first year (Year 9) at senior school, pupils followed a broad curriculum with a range of subjects similar to those studied at junior school (core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science, supplemented with History, Geography, Art, Physical Education and Games, Music, Design and Technology, and Information Technology). A Modern Foreign Language –French- was compulsory, and those who studied German or Spanish in Year 8 (at junior school), studied the subject until the end of Year 9, when it became optional. All

pupils in Year 9 studied Classics in one form or another: either Latin, or, for those with no experience of the language, Classical Civilisation. Religious Education was a compulsory subject, and the GCSE course proper began in Year 9.

In Year 10 pupils began GCSE courses in the Core Subjects (English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, the sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Physics) and French, as well as Religious Education. Optional subject choices included Art and Design, Classical Civilisation, Design and Technology, Drama, Geography, German, Spanish, History, Latin, and Music. As well as these subjects, pupils undertook courses in Information and Communications Technology, Physical Education and Personal, Social and Health Education. All subjects available from GCSE were available for 'A' Level and additional courses leading to A and AS level qualifications included Business Studies, Economics, Government and Politics, Further Mathematics, Physical Education and Theatre Studies.

The structure of the school year

For both the junior and senior schools the year was divided into three terms: the autumn term (from September to December), the spring term (from January to March) and the summer term (from April to July). The autumn term was the longest, having about thirteen working weeks, and was split by a two-week half term holiday in October. The three-week Christmas holidays separated this term from the spring term, which lasted ten weeks, and was split by a one-week half term holiday in February. The Easter holiday separated this term from the summer term, which lasted eleven weeks, and was split by a long weekend in May. The nine-week summer holiday brought the academic year round to September again.

The amount of time that a pupil spent at school differed between the junior and senior schools, because of the different length of each respective school's working day, (including Saturday). As a proportion of their year, each pupil in senior school would probably spend one hundred and ninety seven working days at school (54% of the year); having, during term time, Sundays off. A junior school pupil (who had Saturday afternoons and Sundays free) would probably spend one hundred and seventy nine working days each year in school (49% of the year).

The structure of the school day

Although the institution was not a boarding-only school, having only 20% of its pupils as boarders, much of the structure was modelled on the lines of a traditional boarding school, so the commitment of the pupils, in terms of time, was quite heavy. In the case of the senior school, the format of the day, and the week, was perhaps one of the most traditional aspects of the school structure, borrowed almost exactly from a regimen, recorded twenty years previously by Walford (1986a), devised, because it was felt that:

> '...pupils need both routine and to be kept busy for as much of their time as possible, and that Sunday's break in routine is sufficient rest...most lessons occur in the morning, when on weekdays there are usually five forty-minute periods, and on Saturdays four. In addition, on three afternoons each week a further two lessons are held in the afternoon. The timing of these afternoon lessons depends on the season. During summer they occur directly after lunch, and the pupils are then involved in sports or other activities for the rest of the afternoon. In winter, however, the lack of light in the early evening means that football or rugby is played directly after lunch and pupils return, somewhat exhausted, to lessons at about 4.30 until 6.00pm' (p. 32)

The senior school working week was structured along very similar lines to these; the bulk of the academic work was concentrated largely in the morning and early afternoon with sports and team games taking place on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday afternoon. During the second half of the autumn term (from Late October to early December),'winter timetable' came into effect on Monday and Friday, where the sports and games options took place in the early part of the afternoon, followed by academic lessons in the latter (dark) part of the day. The working day, six days out of seven, for most pupils, began from about 0825 and finished at 1700 hours, or later, if there were concerts or matches. Once a pupil gained entry to the senior school in the third form (Year 9), he (or she) could expect to work a pretty solid thirty-six hour week; spending twenty-six hours on academic lessons, and a further ten hours on sports or team games (see fig. 7). Although the majority of this non-academic time was vested in sports and team games, pupils could opt for 'non-active' pastimes for a proportion of the time. A wide range of activities were available, and these included rugby football, hockey, netball, tennis, cricket, rowing, athletics, basketball, badminton, cross-country, climbing, fencing, shooting, squash, swimming, weight training, trampolining and

aerobics. The facilities available to support thee activities included two sports centres, a gymnasium, an indoor swimming pool, extensive playing fields, a boathouse and tennis courts.

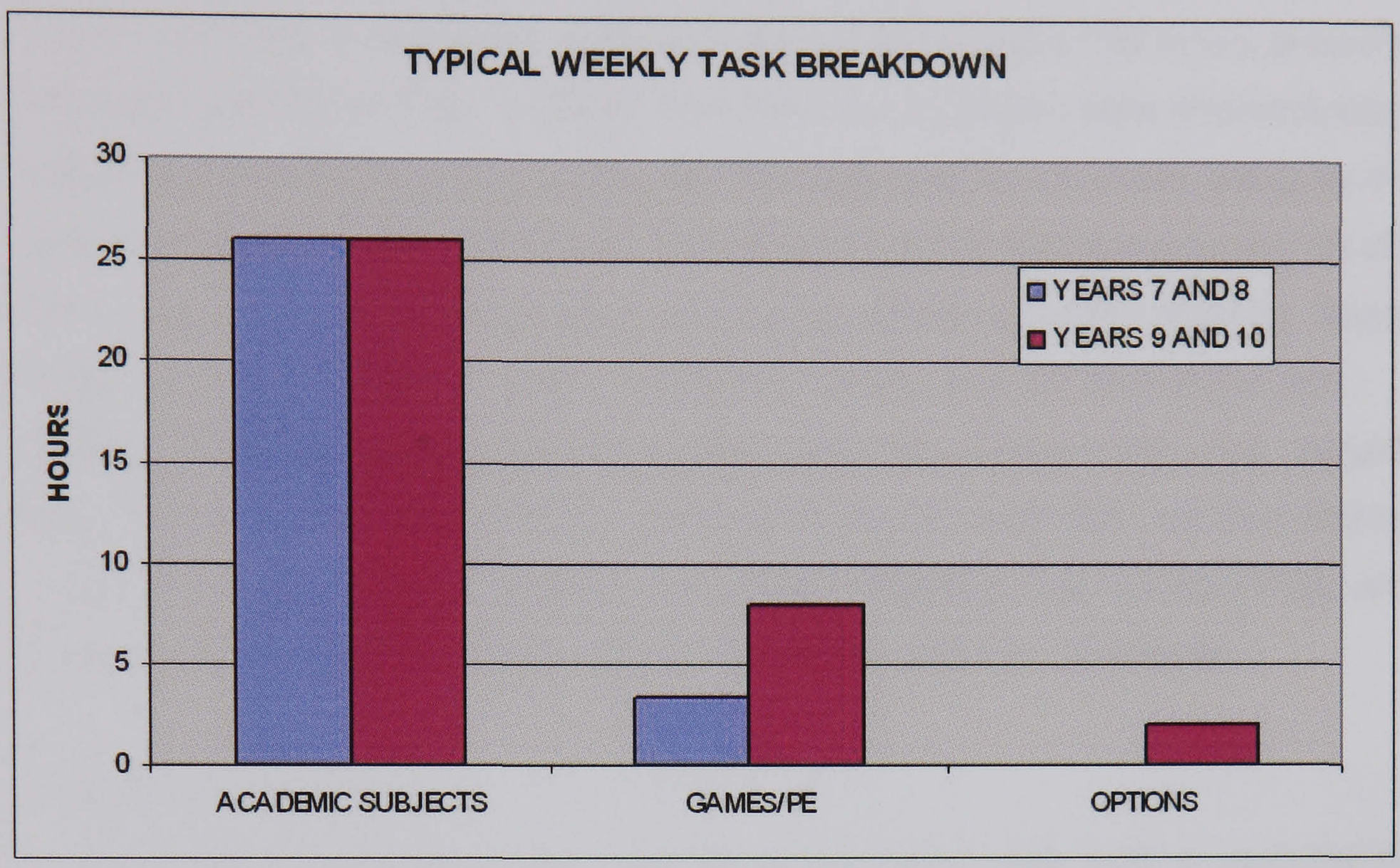

Fig. 7. A comparison of the weekly task breakdown of late junior and early senior school pupils

The 'non-active' pursuits, which could be chosen on two afternoons a week, included Amnesty International, community service, chess, backgammon, computing, electronics, science society, satellite recording service, photography, art, design, reading, poetry, literary society, politics, debating society, climbing wall, Combined Cadet Force, Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, and a myriad of musical groups, including barbershop quartet, chamber choir, chapel choir, choral society, close harmony group, pop music, school choir, string orchestras, symphony orchestra, string quartet, woodwind, quartet/quintet, swing band, traditional jazz group, wind band, brass group and chamber group. Although a 'non-active' regime was available, many pupils chose further sporting and team activities through choice.

In the junior school, the pupils also experienced a very intensive five and a half day week. From Monday to Friday, the day started at 0820 in the morning and ran until the end of school at 1600. Pupils would go home then, unless they were engaged in optional after-school clubs and activities, which ran each day until

1700. Additionally a 'prep club' operated each day from 1600 until 1720 to cater for children who could not be collected at 1600. Saturday school took place from 0820 until1200 hours.

A pupil in the junior school could expect to work almost a thirty hour week; twenty-six hours of academic study and at least three and a half hours of sports and team games (see fig. 7). More often than not, a greater level of participation would be the norm for many pupils, with matches and tournaments being held on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. The range of sports and team games on offer to the junior school pupils included: swimming, athletics, netball, squash, fencing, rugby, soccer, badminton, tennis, rounders, hockey and, for part of the year, rowing. The range of optional after-school clubs and activities included: computer club, French club, model making, chess, animal club, craft club, creative writing, street dance, disco dance, speech and drama, debating club, cookery club, art group, choir, cello group, brass group, wind band and two orchestras.

Pupil workload

The academic demands, in terms of time, were quite high for both the junior and the senior schools. Fig. 8 represents the relative study load of a similar group of pupils across the two schools. Data used was taken from the timetable of Year

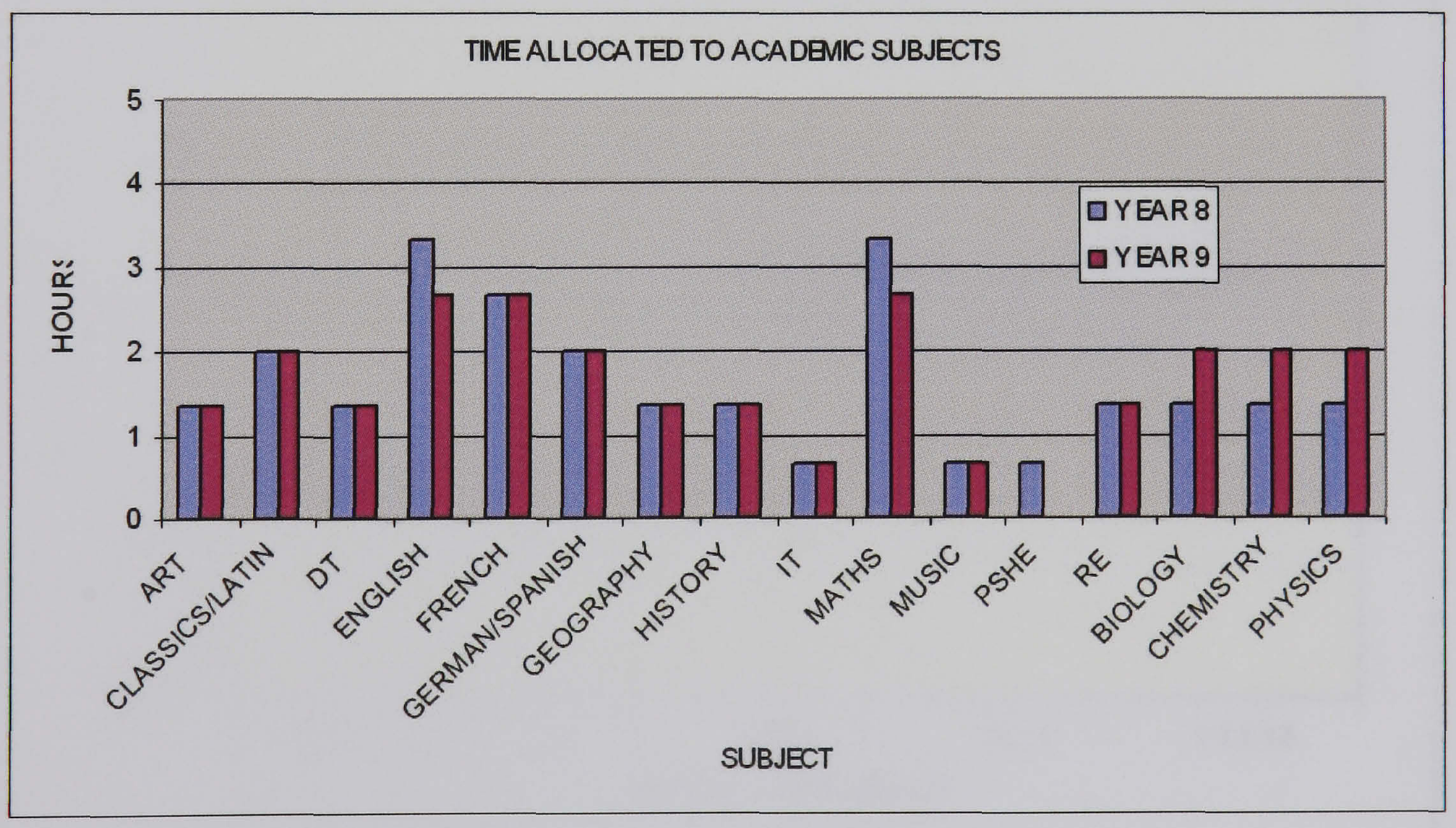

Fig. 8 A comparison of the weekly academic subject time allocation of late junior and early senior school pupils

8 pupils in the junior school, and Year 9 pupils in the senior school; this was done because Years 7 and 8 (considered the 'senior' years in junior school) had a broadly similar workload, and Year 9 followed a comparable working practice prior to GCSE options at the end of the year. The allocation of academic study time was in addition to the heavy extra-curricular timetable described previously. Pupils in both schools spent a total of twenty-six hours a week on academic subjects. As can be seen from the graph, the balance between the two schools was fairly equitable, except that, in the junior school, 25% more study time was dedicated to English and Maths than was the case in the senior school. Conversely, the senior school pupils enjoyed a third more time on the sciences than did their peers in the junior school. Personal, Social and Health Education was not taught as a discrete subject in senior school, as it was in junior school, but was offered during tutor sessions.

School Fees

The research school's fee structure (for junior and senior schools) is shown in fig. 9. The fee levels were taken from the published data available in the

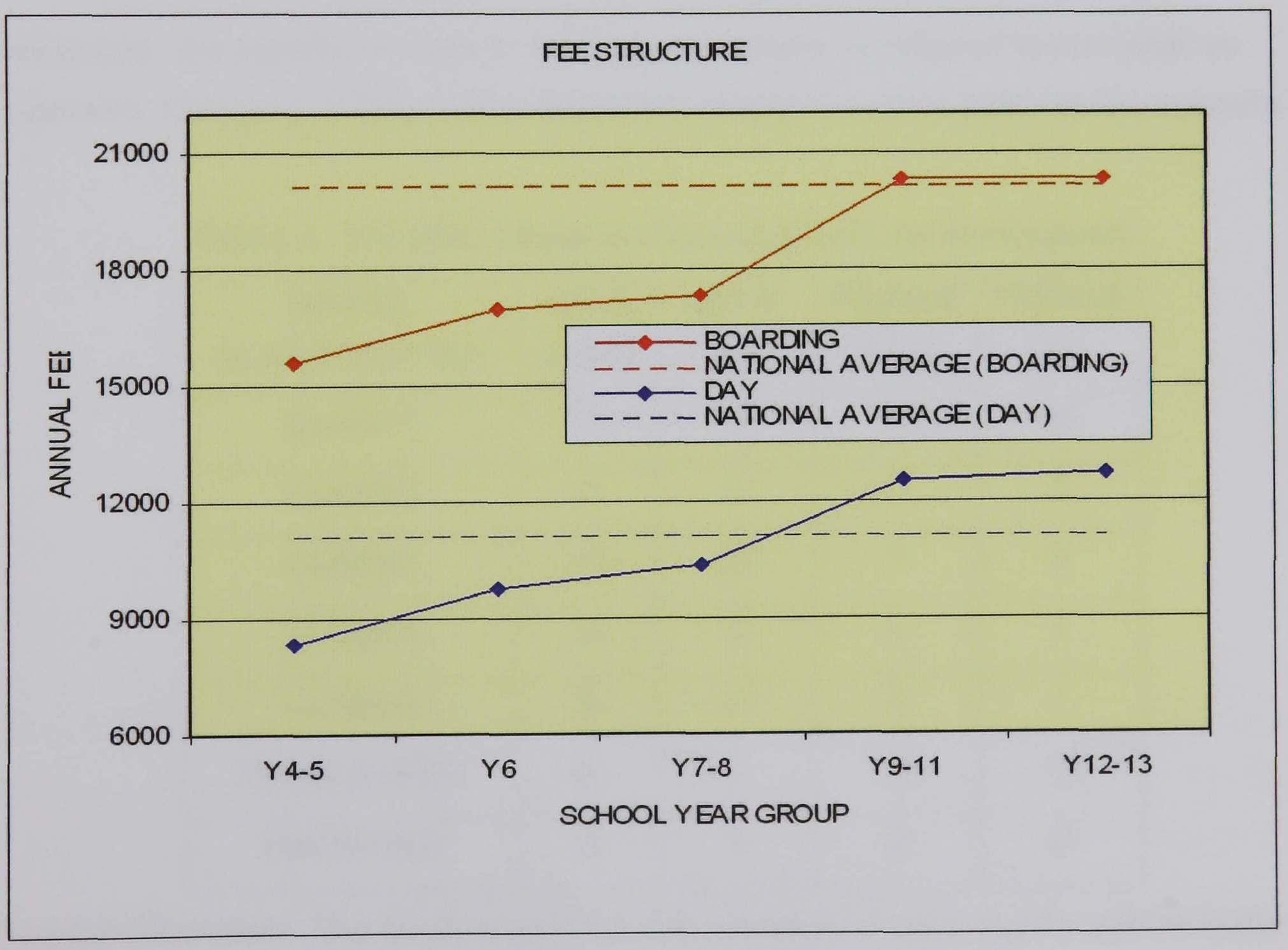

Fig. 9 School Fee Structure

school's prospectus, for the academic year 2007-2008. The quoted national average fee was the latest data supplied by the Independent Schools Council (2007) and reflected average annual fees for boarding children at boarding schools, and for day children attending boarding schools.

Pupil profile –family background

The research questionnaire provided an opportunity to determine, for the research year group at least, the family's socio-economic status, via the pupils' indication of their significant male and female parent or carer's occupations (for

Table 3. National Statistics socio-economic classification

Class	Label
1	Managerial and professional occupations
2	Intermediate occupations
3	Small employers and own account workers
4	Lower supervisory and technical occupations
5	Semi-routine and routine occupations

simplicity, the significant male or female parent/carer is referred to hereafter as 'parent'). This gave a reasonable indication of what could be seen as the school's

Table 4. NS-SEC classification of pupils' parents/carers

NS-SEC CLASSIFICATION	MALE (RAW)	MALE (%)	FEMALE (RAW)	FEMALE (%)
CLASS 1	63	74	56	66
CLASS 2	0	0	4	5
CLASS 3	19	22	7	8
CLASS 4	0	0	1	1
CLASS 5	0	0	1	1
HOME-MAKER	0	0	16	19
DECEASED	3	4	0	0

typical subscriber. The Socio-economic classification of each pupil's parent in the

research group were assessed according to the criteria laid down in the Office for National Statistics (2007) five- class National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (see table 3). From the eighty-five pupils in the research group, employment data was returned for all the parents. As can be seen from table 4, the majority of parents were in Class 1. The preponderance of males in Class 3 may be explained by the high proportion of male parents reported as being engaged in a small business or entrepreneurial occupation. A high number of females were in Class 1; it could be argued that the number, proportionally, was markedly higher than for males, and the high number of females who were not included in any classification (who were reported as being a 'housewife' (At Home)), will perhaps have skewed the data. The professions engaged in by pupils'

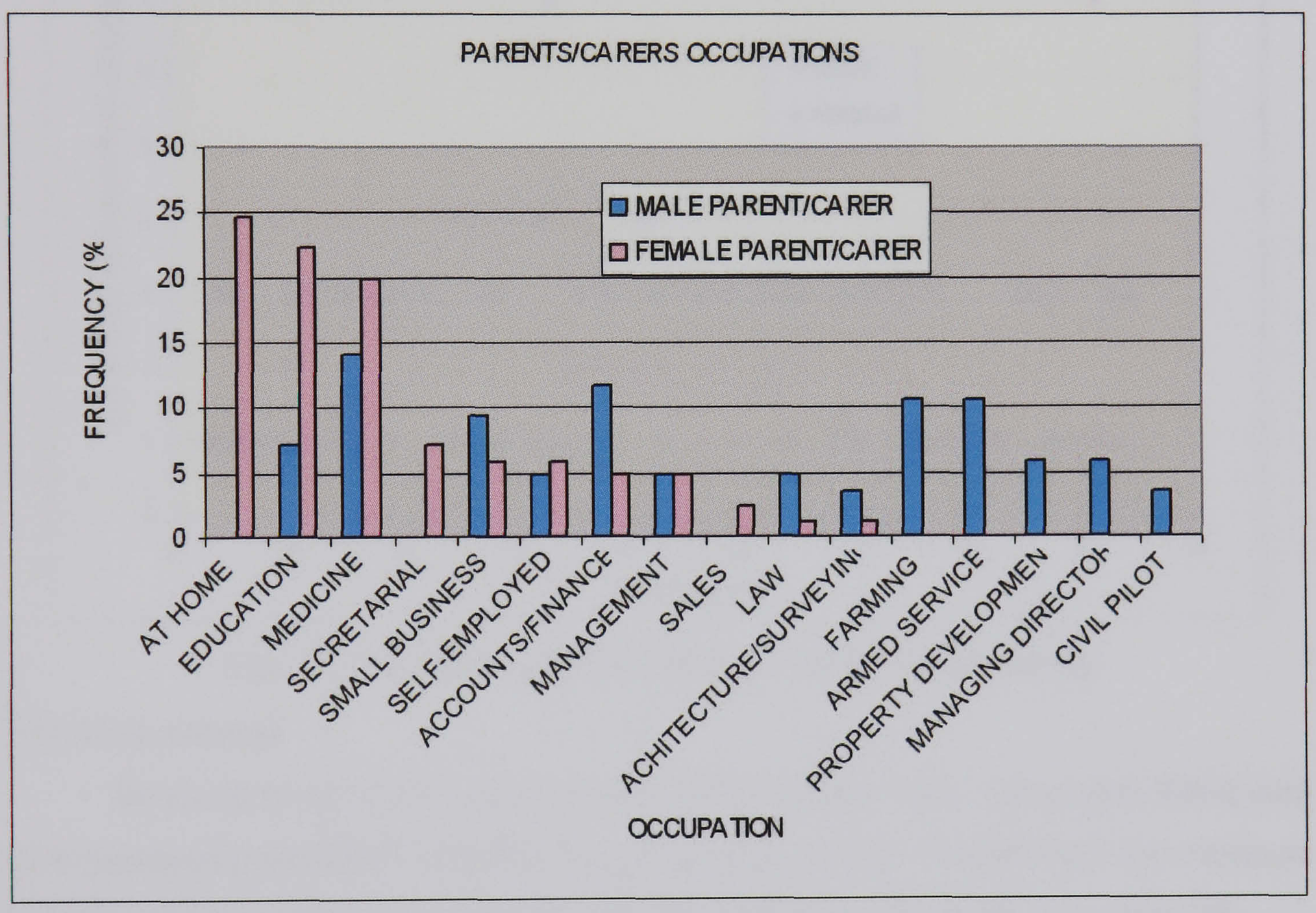

Fig. 10 Parents/carers occupations by type

parents were perhaps quite typical of independent school subscribers. Fig. 10 illustrates the occupations of both males and females. For males, medicine was the largest professional group, and accountancy was second largest. The armed services and farming were well represented, more so than law (often thought to be a birthright of independent school pupils). Property development was noteworthy, in that it warranted a definitive category. For females, being at home was the most

significant grouping, and education was a far better represented occupation than it was for males, and more females were engaged in medicine than were males. In addition to the descriptive classification given above, the significance of the occupational groupings (according to the eight value NS-SEC categorisation) can be seen in fig. 11. Both classification 1 (modern professional) and classification 8 (traditional professional occupations) reflected the highest proportion of both male and female parent occupations. Category 3 (senior managers or administrators) had the next greatest population (of males, predominantly).

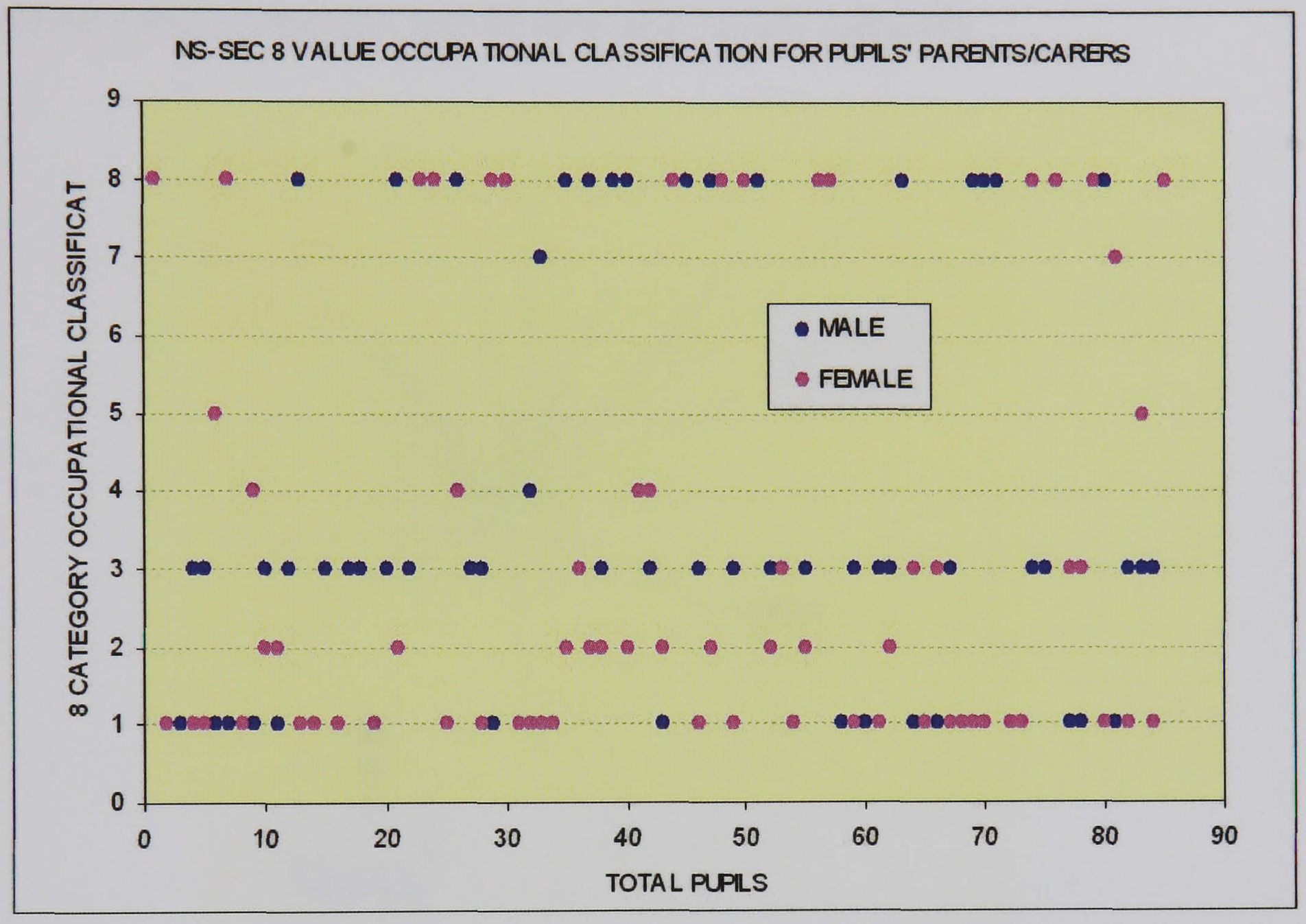

Fig. 11 The eight value NS-SEC occupational groupings

Travel to school

Because most of the pupils attending the school were day pupils, there was a tremendous movement of traffic at each end of the day, to and from the campus. In terms of where they lived and how far they travelled to school, the research cohort was likely to be fairly representative of the school as a whole. Fig. 12 shows the individual travel vectors for day pupils in the research year group; this data was from seventy-eight of the pupils taking part in the study, and of these, sixty-three were day pupils, which meant that they travelled in to school and home again each day. The remaining fifteen of the year group were boarders, which meant that they did not travel at all, but lived on the premises. Table 5 gives the breakdown of distances travelled, by day pupils, into and out of school each day.

Just over a third (35%) lived within 5 km of the school, so were very local indeed; most within the city ring road and could be classed as urban. Just under a third (30%) lived between 5 km and 10 km from school. The remaining third lived between 10 km and 40 km from school. Both these latter groups could be classed as rural travellers, coming into the city from the surrounding countryside, and its towns and villages. The school was located on the northwest side of a busy city; and the travel vectors show a bias towards the north and west, which had the easiest travel corridors, avoiding more congested urban travel, which would have involved crossing the city, and its river and railway networks.

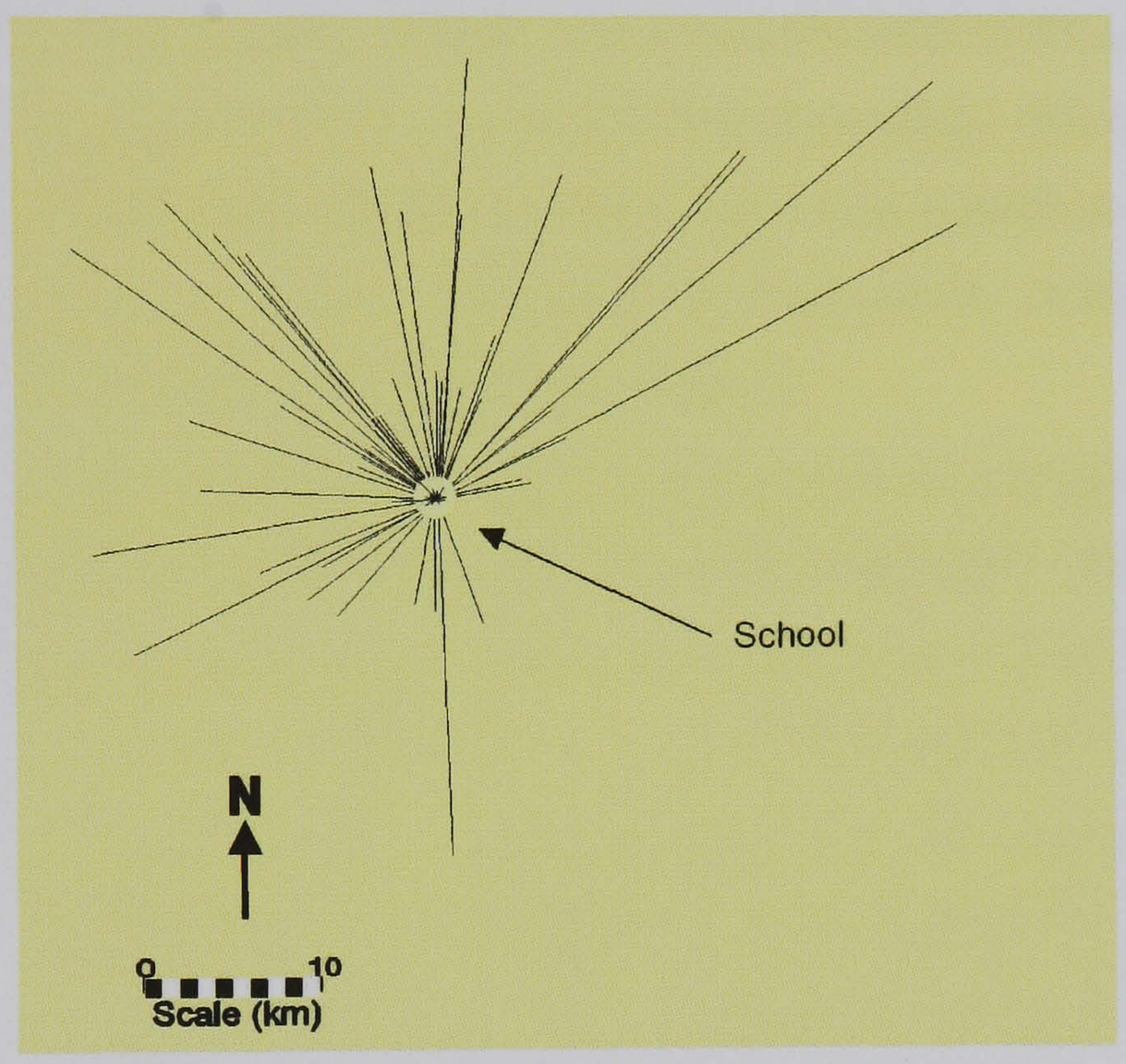

Fig. 12 Distance and direction travelled to school by research (day) pupils.

Table 5: Relative distances travelled to school

Distance (km)	Frequency	%
0- 5	22	35
5-10	19	30
10-15	4	6
15-20	9	14
20-25	3	5
25-30	4	6
30-35	1	2
35-40	1	2
Total	63	100.00

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

This piece of research was a study of a journey through a significant part of one education institution, over a period of four years. The research was designed to follow a specific year group of pupils as a cohort, as it passed through and between two of the schools under scrutiny. The main research questions were concerned with the views, perceptions and opinions of the pupils in the group as they passed through some important and decisive stages in their school lives. As mentioned previously, the rationale for looking at the school from the viewpoint of the pupils was based on previous work done in the same institution, (Cannons, 2001) but which, in those particular circumstances focused on a single subject.

The research (as a longitudinal case study) involved a single year group of pupils passing through a four-year period of education, beginning at the end of Year 7, (whilst they were located in the upper tier of the middle school) and concluding at the start of Year 11, (in the GCSE year of the senior school). The main aim of the research was to explore pupils' perceptions of their experiences of schooling in the independent education sector. The research began as the pupils were in Year 7, a stage of school life where they might normally expect to face school transition, but where, in this particular institution, they were experiencing the senior years at a middle school, (Years 7 and 8). They then moved (at the conclusion of Year 8) from one school to another, and undertook GCSE option choices (Year 9) and finally, for this research, they commenced GCSE curriculum study (Years 10 and 11).

The principal focus of the research was on the pupils' perceptions of their time in school and of what happened to them as they passed through these years. It looked at these in a number of ways. The main research questions were:

Enjoyment –what did pupils find enjoyable, and why?

Importance –what did pupils find important, and why?

Perceptual change over time- how did pupils perceive changes in enjoyment and importance over the period covered in the study, i.e. school transition, GCSE options, GCSE study?

Influences -what influences did they perceive as having a bearing on perceptions during the period covered in the study?

In particular the study looked at what were pupils' perceptions of their enjoyment of school generally and subjects in particular and the reasons why that might be so, what were pupils' perceptions of the importance of school in general and subjects in particular, and the reasons why that might be so. Additionally, the research questions were concerned with the pupils' observations of factors that might impinge on these perceptions, including:

their perceived career options,

their pastimes away from school,

their parents' or carers' occupations,

their perceived talent and ability in subjects,

their perceptions of the causes of anxiety and stress,

and,

their perceptions of GCSE choices as these drew closer.

The rationale, briefly, was intended to observe and reflect, via questionnaire and interview, what the perceptions of pupils were at specific points during the research period, their altered perspectives of school over time and what influences were brought to bear and how and why they changed as the pupils passed through the study period.

Educational research as a genre has great credibility, particularly when it is looking at the activities and outcomes of the teaching profession from the statistical vantage point of the academic results. In addition, studies that provide a pupil voice by exploring their perceptions of the activities and outcomes of the teaching profession have also contributed important insights, although there is still, in some circles, a reluctance to give data on the pupil voice as much weight as evidence compared with data based on academic results. Smees and Thomas (1998) comment:

> 'What students have to say about teaching and learning may be feared as personally challenging or as threatening to the institution. A strategy of the fearful is to limit student comment to aspects of school life which are seen as relatively safe, or which do not have significant impact on

> the work of adults within the school such as uniform, school meals or the colour of classroom walls.' (p.3)

This research then, was looking at the pupil and listening to his or her voice. Via the questionnaire and interview methods outlined below, it was anticipated that the research would show how these pupils' views, perceptions and opinions developed and changed over the four years of the study, and what influences were brought to bear on these views.

Why a case study?

As an overall research strategy this particular piece of research has been structured as a case study for a number of reasons. Denscombe (2003) suggests that, one's aim, in electing to conduct a case study:

> '…is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular' (p. 30)

In this case the particular is one independent education institution; it occurs in a natural setting, is self-contained and has obvious boundaries. These, and other criteria generally thought to be conditional for case studies, make a good case for it being so. As a research strategy, case study invites multiple methods (in this case, questionnaire and interview) and its aim is not only to look at the outcomes of the research, but also to explain *how* the outcomes are arrived at; in this way a case study bestows some validity on, not only the outcomes, but also the process of achieving those outcomes.

A criticism of case studies (Denscombe, 2003) is often that they can be too reliant on qualitative data and interpretative methods, rather than using quantitative data and statistical methods. In this research, the intention was to cover the research topics in depth, and with a suitable degree of rigour, by using a methodological approach that combined qualitative data (provided via interview and the open questions used in the questionnaire) and descriptive statistical data (provided by the rating scale items in the questionnaire).

To be of value, it can be argued that a case study needs to be exhaustive and subsequently time-consuming, but it can be shown that, even on a more limited scale, a case study can yield an accurate and representative picture of the object of study (Hopkins, 1994): in this case the

views, opinions and perceptions of pupils in the institution. As Bell (1993) points out, a case study:

> ' ...allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific incident or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work." (p.8).

This research looked at particular and specific parts of the larger educational institution rather than taking a broad view of the whole enterprise. Such a study could be criticized for being rather too narrow to be truly defined as a case study, but there is value in such a piece of work, because it will, as Bell (1993) argues:

> ' ...provide the reader with a three-dimensional picture, and will illustrate relationships, micropolitical issues and patterns of influence in a particular context.' (P.9).

The research sought the opinions, views and perceptions of the young people who were moving through the different stages of the institution, and who were, at the same time, passing through some important milestones in their educational lives. The change from the middle school to the senior school has been, for these pupils, as much as for any others, a very important and pivotal moment in their time at school. This, despite their knowing more about the senior school to which they are moving, and probably in more detail than many other pupils facing the same move will have done. They have felt the shift in emphasis as the centre of gravity of the peer group has shifted from around ten years old to sixteen years old. They will have encountered the effect of GCSE curricula teaching as it affected them, at the same time as some subjects were discarded. Teaching styles, both in terms of personal relationships and delivery of content will have shifted and changed.

A case study was considered a very appropriate description because of the multi-faceted evolution that was taking place, both to the individuals in the group, and to the group as a whole. Within the case study it was possible that these perceptions and views could be recorded as qualitative data in responses to interviews and as (by using a mix of open and closed questions) qualitative and quantitative data in response to questionnaires. Both data collection methods were used in this study. However, the relationship between the questionnaire and the interview should be made clear from the

outset. Although the questionnaire was the principal data collection instrument used at the end of the academic year, the interview did not serve simply as a follow-up to the questionnaire, but was rather initiated as a separate data collection exercise in its own right.

Because the study intended that the research cover the main milestones during the education process, as far as was practicable with a piece of research such as this, the actual data collection exercise was designed to cover Years 8, 9 and 10, because these included the final year of a junior (middle) school, a transition to senior school, a first year at senior school, including GCSE choices, and finally a first GCSE curriculum year. It was, in the event, possible to add an additional academic year -Year 7, to the study, (extending the data collection to four years rather than three) because of the early success with piloting and development of the research instruments.

The nature of quantitative and qualitative research

A fundamental difference is often alluded to between qualitative and quantitative research methods, and the two are often argued as being mutually exclusive; quantitative research is naturally deductive and tests theory by confirming or rejecting a hypothesis. Its roots, in the natural science model, give it, according to its adherents, more gravitas than qualitative research, which, being regarded as inductive and subjective, is often seen as rather 'woolly', requiring interpretation of social phenomena and their meanings. Bryman (2007) suggests that it is entirely laudable to adopt a research strategy that takes the best of both worlds. A multi-strategy model goes against the argument that a particular research method carries deeply rooted epistemological commitments, and that each research method is rooted in different and incommensurable paradigms. It could be argued that there is little logic in, on the one hand, regarding quantitative and qualitative strategies as somehow fixed and irreconcilable, yet at the same time, allowing that the devotees of one use the other as a strategic derivative. Perhaps, if a paradigm provides parameters within which scientists operate within a discipline, then a multi-strategy research model can be posited as a new paradigm? Using both methods then, can be a deliberate strategy, and

particularly where it provides alternative viewpoints of the same investigation, something that is considered particularly useful (Lacey, 1970) in education research. Here, then, the dovetailing of research strategies can provide a model that is complementary rather than hierarchical. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods can illuminate the data more effectively: quantitative data providing a more static representation and qualitative data providing a processual picture. A combined approach to research is posited by Clough and Nutbrowne (2007), where appropriate elements are taken from each methodology. Such an approach requires 'radical looking' (p.24), which acknowledges that, in our research for instance, these pupils, in this place, at this time, provide a perspective that is different from that which is already known; it fills a gap in knowledge.

Looking at an education institution as we have done, regarding it as a unique and valid case study, might also lead one to argue that the research strategy follows what Denscombe (2003) describes as a phenomenological approach, trying as it does to deal with pupils' perceptions and meanings, attitudes and beliefs (p.96)

Questionnaires

The value of questionnaires as data collection instruments has been amply demonstrated in a number of areas of educational research. Of particular interest to me in conducting this research were those that sought to reflect the views of pupils in school, from the straightforward use of the tactic in developing a methodology for eliciting their thinking on a positive school ethos (Smith, 1998) to pupils' views of the concept of self (Jurisevic, 1998) or, of the broader aspects of school life such as the relationship between their perception of their psychological environment and how satisfied they are with school and how well they do (Samdal et al.,1999). There is the difference between boys' and girls' academic cultures and their approaches to learning, (van Houtte, 2004) as well as the traditional dichotomy of the respective male and female 'leanings' towards rationality and emotion, objectivity and subjectivity and science and nature (Francis, 2000). Within the relationship between the sexes at school there are the additional tensions caused by the effects of different motivations of boys and girls in terms of how they approach

work, what their expectations are and what they like and dislike (Lightbody et al, 1996; Warrington and Younger, 1996a). Where subjects are concerned, there is further evidence of the value of such data collection methodology examining the differences in boys' and girls' attitudes to core subjects in the National Curriculum (Hendley et al, 1995; Miller et al., 1999), pupils' subject preferences generally at Key Stage 3 (Hendley et al., 1996), particularly in Geography and History (Adey and Biddulph, 2001), and science and technology (Haste, 2004). Within this structure that is subject teaching and learning there is further material that reflects on pupils' experiences of setting and its effects on motivation and achievement (Boaler, 1996; Boaler et al., 1998).

Interviewing

Similarly, interviewing as a data gathering exercise involving pupils has been demonstrated, from very young pupils (Alerby, 2003; Gipps and Tunstall, 1997) onward. As with other research methodologies, interviews have proved effective in exploring issues around pupil motivation (Atkinson, 2000), approaches to learning at school (Campbell et al., 2001), views on achievement at school, including relationships with teachers (Duffield, 1998), and the view of school and teaching in the pre-transition phase (Newman, 1997) and in the early stages after transition to secondary school (Harris and Rudduck, 1993). The further effects of the differences between boys and girls and their approaches to, and views of, school (Warrington et al., 2000), and their goals, expectations and motivation (Warrington and Younger, 1996a) are tackled through interviews, as are broader attitudes to, and views of, GCSE (Bishop et al., 1999), specific subject issues, for instance pupils' views of the role and value of school science (Osborne and Collins, 2001). The subject-specific picture of the effects of setting, from the pupils' point of view, are explored (Boaler, 1996; Boaler et al., 1998), as are the broader views of their progress, difficulties, friendships, interests and futures (Rudduck et al., 1996).

There is something of a methodological Chinese wall that persists between qualitative research data and quantitative research data, but both have a place in this study. Qualitative data is often seen as overly subjective, concentrating as it does on the word rather than straightforward statistics

(Vulliamy and Webb, 1992) associated with quantitative research data. This study aims to use both methodologies. Qualitative data from the interviews can complement the quantitative data produced by questionnaire. Additionally, the questionnaire allowed qualitative data in the form of responses to open questions, to complement the quantitative data collected using rating scales.

Research structure

In determining the structure of the research programme, a number of data collection methods were considered. Data collection was concentrated, in some detail, on the pupils themselves, rather than the adults (teachers and parents) who inhabited the world under scrutiny, and whilst it was accepted that both teachers and parents would have added another dimension to the story, it was decided not to elicit views from the adult group. A mixture of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used in this study (see Appendices A and B). Questionnaire and interview were selected as research methods principally because of two factors: control and timing. Interviewing, as a data collection method, had been used successfully in previous research in the institution (Cannons, 2001) and it was felt that the experience had been an indicator what was and what was not achievable, given the time available. Other methods of data collection were considered at the start of the research but it was felt that both questionnaire and interview lent themselves to better management by and on behalf of both the researcher and the subjects. Observation was discarded as a research method because it was felt that it only provided evidence of behaviours rather than thoughts and opinions about an event; the research thesis was grounded in pupil perception, so a more significant input was required from the pupils themselves. A diary or 'blog' might have been a useful method of researching alternate truths, and may have even been preferred by some participants, but the need to control the collection of data as closely as possible in order to collect as much as possible within a small time frame was a huge consideration. There was also the issue of confidentiality and disclosure to be considered, particularly with methods that were more portable or accessible. Diaries, as a device might be more susceptible to abuse, particularly if mislaid or lost, a risk that might

persuade pupils to edit or slant their records accordingly. Similarly, a blog, which is considered by many to be a very public document, might have yielded material that was perhaps less honest than was the case using the more secure methods ultimately chosen. Additionally, the remoteness of the diarist or blogger would perhaps also call into question the veracity of the evidence provided, as there could be no guarantee that the compiler was actually the diarist or blogger, or that the views expressed were not influenced wittingly or unwittingly, by another party. Control and timing were a consideration, not least because the researcher was conducting the research as well as holding down a full-time job. Time, for both the researcher and the pupils, was sometimes at a premium, and, especially later in the programme, the pupils' lives became busier still as they approached their GCSE exams and schedules became even more crowded; chapter three (the school context) provides some evidence of this. The large number of pupils involved in the study meant that conducting interviews with all the respondents was going to be unrealistic. Finding time within the school day for conducting even short interviews was just not practicable. Neither the pupils nor the researcher could have been guaranteed enough free space for the successful completion of the work using this method. Interviewing would prove, nevertheless to be useful for sampling and testing the questionnaire in the piloting stage of the work, as well as forming a significant part of the data collection alongside the questionnaires. Questionnaires were chosen as a vehicle for data collection involving all the pupils in the year group because such an instrument could be distributed and collected easily, and collation of data could be organised and analysed more quickly. Planning and preparing the questionnaire required careful selection of both the questions, and in the case of Likert type questions, the responses to those questions. The research followed a year group over a prolonged period of time and Table 6 shows the number of pupils participating each year in the questionnaire data collection exercise. The proportion taking part remained high over the period; the increase in group size to one hundred and fifteen in Year 9 (after transfer) reflected the influx of pupils into the school from outside. These pupils were not used in the study, as it was felt that their prior experiences might skew the data; only the original junior school cohort, comprising around eighty-five pupils was used,

and formed the research population throughout the study.

Table 6. Pupils taking part in the research

	Total pupils available	
Year	Total pupils in year	Total pupils participating
7	82	67
8	85	83
9	84*	82
10	84*	74
* Junior school cohort in year group (115)		

Additionally, from this population, ten pupils were selected at the start of the research, from Year 7 (five boys and five girls) to take part in the interviews; the same ten pupils did so throughout the programme of research.

When the different data collection points occurred

The full-scale study commenced in the academic year beginning September 2002, with the year group under scrutiny at the penultimate year of their time in the middle school environment (Year 7). The first questionnaire data collection occurred at the end of the academic year, in June and July. Interview data collection occurred in the November and December of the following autumn term (i.e., at the early part of the next academic year). This was planned so that questionnaire data collection would take place at the close of the year, giving the pupils ample time to reflect on the things that had happened during the year that had passed. Additionally the timing was such that it occurred after the stresses and strains of the summer term end of year exams. It was thought that pupils would be able then to give total concentration to the research rather than perhaps being more preoccupied with more pressing academic questions. Interview data collection was planned to take place at the beginning of the following year for much the same reasons, in the sense that the timing being at the end of the autumn term would have given a two fold benefit; firstly, the initial excitement of the start of a new academic year would have dissipated to a degree and the pupils would have become more familiar with the routine and their place within

it. Secondly, there would be sufficient distance between one data collection point and another. Although only a few weeks might have elapsed since the start of the school term, a few months would have passed since the completion of the questionnaire.

Access and recruitment

Because the research took place in an educational institution, where the researcher was on the teaching staff, potentially, at any rate, all the respondents were available at any given time, so access did not present any real problems. Once the area of research had been decided upon, the educational institution itself was approached and formal permission sought to conduct the study. Because this researcher had conducted some investigations previous to this in the institution in question (Cannons, 2001) there was an existing relationship already established, together with some research results. This acknowledged track record helped to make a persuasive case, and wholehearted support was given from the outset. In preparing for the research, letters were sent out to the parents or carers of all the pupils who would be involved. There were two groups engaged in the research: a pilot group and the main research group. The pilot group was made up from pupils in the senior year (Year 8) of the middle school (one year older than the research group), and these would be required to help in determining the structure of the questionnaire. A letter explaining the nature of the research and the pupils' role in that research was distributed to all involved. The letter explained, carefully, what the pupils' would be expected to do, when they would be expected to do it, and the probable outcome of their involvement. Reassurances were given about confidentiality and anonymity during their part in the research. They were given every opportunity to choose to decline. None did. At the same time, a similar letter was sent to the second group; this was the cohort that would participate in the main research. These pupils were a year younger than the pilot group, but would shortly be in the senior year of their middle school. The same level of explanation about the research, the pupils' role in that research, and the likely outcome of that research was given. Again, confidentiality and anonymity

was assured, and all were given the opportunity to decline to take part. Again, none did.

The whole school community comprising some one thousand pupils (ranging in age from three to eighteen) meant that there was a large population from which to choose a research group. Previous research (Cannons, 2001) had sampled the school population within the age range eight to sixteen, from the middle school up to GCSEs, and with particular regard to a single subject. The research here was intending to look at the wider experience of pupils, beginning with the pre-transitional period in school and concluding with GCSE curriculum. This particular institution did not generally provide junior pupils for other senior schools at transition, nor did it receive many of its pupils from elsewhere at transition; it was almost wholly self-contained, in that the majority of its pupils went through the same system from the age of three to eighteen. These three separate institutions (junior, middle and senior schools) that constituted the larger establishment may have been seen as separate schools in the sense that they had different names, but the general consensus was that the educational path was set for most of the pupils from an early age. Because one element of the focus in the research was transition, the group chosen was near the end of its time in middle school. Throughout the school, each year group consisted of between fifty and eighty pupils; fluctuations occurred as pupils were taken in from the outside; usually at Year 7, and after transition, Year 9. The original intention was to take a group from Year 8 (the same year as the pilot group), as these were in the last year of the middle school; they were at the top of the tree in one place and were ready for the change to senior school. The plan was to follow them from Year 8 to Year 10, a period of three years, which would have been the most practicable given the limitations of the research timetable. Ultimately, because of the early success of the piloting, the research started at the end of Year 7, a year earlier than planned. The group was already primed and ready, the permissions having been sought and obtained from both the school and the parents at the same time as the pilot group. It was a benefit to have the study begin a year early, not least because Year 7 was the stage at which pupils in most schools face transition to secondary school in this country, and it seemed an ideal opportunity to get some data from pupils

in that age group, but from pupils who were not facing the exact same challenges at the same time as their peers who experienced transition at age eleven might be. The research group under scrutiny consisted of about eighty pupils. These were a mixed gender group, where about 60% were boys. The whole year group participated in the questionnaire, and a gender-balanced sample of ten pupils took part in the interviews.

Location of the data collection

All the data collection took place at the school. The make-up of the education institution (which was a selective co-educational establishment) having nearly one thousand pupils in all, constituted three separate but linked schools comprising about one hundred and fifty pupils (aged three to eight) in the most junior school, three hundred and sixty pupils (aged eight to thirteen) in the middle school and five hundred pupils (aged thirteen to eighteen) in the senior school. Because of the ages of those involved in the research the focus of the study was on the middle and senior school, therefore the data collection took place in both of these establishments. Because of the logistical problems associated with marshalling a whole year group at one time, the end-of-year questionnaires were conducted in the school appropriate for the stage of education that the pupils faced at the time. All the interviews were conducted in the middle school, in the Art and Design building.

Ethical issues

Because of where the research was conducted and the relationship existing between the pupils, the teaching staff and the researcher, there was a need for clear, defined, ethical parameters. This type of research, where the researcher was part of the regime being studied, meant that particular care was required in this respect. In cases such as this, as Hopkins (1994) says, the researcher (and his work) is:

> ' ...deeply embedded in an existing social organization, and the failure to work within the general procedures of that organization may not only jeopardize the process of improvement, but existing valuable work. Principles of procedure for action research accordingly, go beyond the usual concerns for confidentiality and respect for the persons who are the subject of inquiry and defined in addition, appropriate ways of working with other participants in the social organization.' (p. 221).

At the commencement of the study care was taken to communicate the aims and objectives of the research to all participants. Letters of permission were sent to families and carers of all parties involved, both in the pilot stages of the work, and the main research itself. These letters not only gave details of the research aims and expectations, but also made clear the ethical guidelines that would be followed during the study. All parties were informed of the absolute importance in the research of both confidentiality and anonymity. Particularly where the relationships between pupils and teachers at school was concerned, it was felt that there was a perceived power imbalance and it was considered necessary to address this imbalance as far a possible by repeatedly stressing the importance of confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents, and their contributions to both questionnaire and interview material.

In addition to the confidentiality and anonymity afforded to the pupils involved in the study, there was the position of teaching staff to be considered. Within such a small and close-knit community there was the possibility that individuals might be recognised, simply by virtue of the fact that a subject area might be taught, in some instances, by only one or two individuals. Because the report of the research data was intended to reflect the perceptions and views of pupils, about their school experience, there was always the possibility that observations, comments or opinions might be expressed about individuals, and there was the possibility that such remarks would be perhaps construed as inflammatory or personally damaging. A policy was adopted from the outset that, as far as possible, no such material was to be included in the final data presentation. With quantitative data collection this presented no problem, but qualitative data (both from the interviews and from open questions or commentaries in the questionnaire) could have presented areas for concern.

Researcher effect

One aspect of practitioner research that needed to be taken into consideration was the effect that the researcher might have on the research that was being conducted. In this case, the researcher was a member of the

institution that was being studied, and, for better or worse, operated as a part of the system of hierarchy in the institution. In eliciting the views of pupils, and particularly where the views were about the researcher's peers and colleagues, care had to be taken to ensure that pupils' views were honestly and fairly expressed. Reassurances over anonymity and confidentiality were considered sufficiently secure such that no-one declined to take part in the programme of research. In circumstances where the researcher is a part of the institution, a good deal depends on mutual trust, although of a slightly different order to the everyday pupil-teacher relationship. Within a piece of research, the practitioner is trying to operate more objectively, and this means, in addition to being able to draw information fairly from the subjects, the researcher needs to be aware of, and guard against his or her own prejudices regarding the topics under discussion. The situation in the questionnaire data collection exercise was perhaps more straightforward to manage and to police; pupils operated with a good deal of autonomy during the data collection, and seemed to be happy with the level of instruction provided in the questionnaire itself. Very little interchange occurred directly between the pupils and the researcher. Naturally, questions in the instrument had to be framed in a neutral way and could not allude to a particular person or subject. With open questions, particular care had to be taken to phrase the enquiry such that pupils both understood what was required, and also felt that they had ample opportunity to respond as openly and fully as possible. Similarly, closed questions, where the pupils selected from a list of given responses, had to be crafted so that there was no bias or loading apparent. The process during the interviews could be regarded as slightly more problematic. For the exchange to be fruitful during a one-to-one dialogue a positive rapport was required; the dynamic depended on a high degree of mutual trust. One reason for choosing interview as a means of data collection was due to the good relationship that existed already with pupils, and the sense that a high degree of trust was already in place. An additional influencing factor may have been that the researcher taught Design Technology, considered by pupils to be a low-stress, high-enjoyment, non-core subject. As far as pupils were concerned there was no agenda; in terms of its impact with other teachers and with families, they perceived the subject

as neutral. Having said that, the researcher had to be aware that his position as a teacher could lead to the possibility that pupils might avoid discussion of particular topics or teachers, or tell the researcher what they think he wants to hear. In order to minimise this possibility, the researcher took as much care as possible not to react to what pupils said in the interviews in a manner that might undermine the validity of the views pupils expressed. In the event, all subjects and personalities were included in the dialogue (even Design Technology); there was never any indication that subjects, or teachers, were excluded from the discussions, or that the views pupils expressed were influenced by the researcher.

Development of the questionnaire

It is often put forward that as a principal means of collecting quantitative data, the questionnaire only provides what is asked for. This is perhaps true, but the careful piloting and refinement (version twelve) of the instrument provided a sound template for the finished product that elicited answers that were indeed required. Because of the different stages that pupils passed through as general school subjects became GCSE choices it was necessary to re-phrase some of the questions to make them relevant to the contemporary situation faced by the pupils. This needed to be achieved whilst still reflecting the changes and movements in the degrees of agreement or disagreement with given statements over the period of the study, which was central to the theme of the work.

Piloting the questionnaire

This took the form of a semi-structured interview conducted in the Art and Design and Technology department office. This was considered a neutral and non-threatening environment where conversations could be conducted in some privacy and comfort without seeming overly formal. Each pupil was individually interviewed for about thirty minutes.

The main topics were listed on a question sheet together with prompts. Notes were written as the respondents made their replies in addition to the recording of the process on tape. Pupils were relaxed and open during the

interviews and gave their views freely. None declined. This part of the work took place over a period of two to three weeks.

Whilst it was possible to construct a questionnaire that reflected the main research topics, and, on the surface, seemed to adequately address all the requirements of the research, it was deemed necessary and prudent to test the instrument before the data collection proper. This was done by piloting the material with a group that would not be involved in the final research programme. The pilot questionnaires were tested in April 2002 with a sample group in the senior year of the middle school (Year 8); that is, those pupils who were in the year above the group involved in the case study. The whole year group was not used, but, utilising the year group register, a gender split was made and boys' and girls' names were written on paper slips. Ten boys and ten girls were chosen at random. The discussions and interviews were conducted in the Art and Design and Technology department office, during the school day. Pupils were taken individually from lessons and remained in discussion for about twenty to thirty minutes each. The questionnaire template had been prepared beforehand and individual pupils worked through the templates. They were, in effect, answering questions that formed the basis for the questionnaire, in the same order and in the proposed format for the final questionnaire. During the process, interviewees were encouraged to interject with any suggestions or problem areas that they encountered within the question and answer structure. The responses or comments were recorded as notes on paper copies of the proposed questionnaire (these would be looked at together at the end of the exercise). At the conclusion of each interview, reflection about the whole exercise was encouraged, and any misunderstandings or difficult areas explored. A cumulative amendment process became evident during this work, as comments made by interviewees were fed into the exchanges with subsequent pupils in order to refine and develop the process. After all these interviews had taken place, adjustments were made to the final layout and wording of the questionnaire.

Initial work with the students showed some obvious shortcomings in the structure of the questions; it became clear, through the interview process, that there were areas that were perceived as being covered twice, so some

questions were eliminated. Because the questions dealt with extremes (what was perceived as most or least liked, or important) a similar approach was mooted with the notion of influence. Here the pupils had no problem with aspects that had been most influential, but the opposite notion of things that had been least influential was too difficult to conceptualise, so the questions were dropped. Common responses to questions about likes and dislikes appeared and these provided a good grounding for the questionnaire development. During conversations it became clear that there were areas where pupils felt that they had anxieties and worries that needed airing, and so an open question was included in subsequent texts that allowed for expression in this respect.

Within the structure of the questionnaire there were opportunities for triangulation of data, for instance with the inquiry into pupils' perceptions about their favourite or most enjoyed subjects and their feelings about the most important subjects. Question 7 dealt with the degree (using a Likert scale) to which all the subjects were enjoyed, in this way a hierarchy could be established. In question 9, (a prerequisite to the reasons why subjects were enjoyed) a choice of a single, specific, most enjoyed subject was required. In a similar vein, as a precursor to the reasons for subjects being unenjoyable, a least enjoyed subject was sought in question 11. Additionally, (again as a precursor to another inquiry (in this case the changes that might have occurred over a year)) a hierarchy of the top three favourite subjects in the current year was asked for later on in question 17. (A prediction was sought for the same candidates in the year to come, in question 21). Question 8 dealt with the degree (using a Likert scale) to which all the subjects were considered important, in this way a hierarchy of subject importance could be established. In question 13, (a prerequisite to the reasons why subjects were though of as important) a choice of a single, specific, most important subject was required. In a similar vein, as a precursor to the reasons for subjects being unimportant, a least enjoyed subject was sought in question 15. Additionally, (again as a precursor to another inquiry (in this case the changes that might have occurred over a year)) a hierarchy of the top three important subjects in the current year was asked for later on in question 19. (A

prediction was sought for the same candidates in the year to come, in question 23).

During the interviews there were one or two comments made about the language and emphasis in some of the questions, about the phraseology or context of words used. For instance, question 6 sought to explore pupils' perceptions of their talent and ability in each subject; it asked how talented they thought they were (against a Likert scale) for each subject. Originally, the question was phrased so that it asked what they thought they were best at. The understanding of the word ' best', as it appeared was interpreted as meaning 'best' related to other pupils, i.e. who of you in the class is best at this subject, rather than, as was intended, which subject you individually are best at. The revised format (referring to their individual talent) was much more easily recognized by the pupils. Question 10 sought reasons why pupils enjoyed subjects. Having elected a favourite subject, they were asked to look at a selection of reasons for that subject being a favourite, and to say how much each one mattered (again, against a Likert scale). Two of the reasons given were about the teacher as a person, and the teaching done by that person, i.e., 'the teacher is interesting' and 'the teaching it is interesting'. There was some confusion between the two, in that they were perceived, in the reading, as asking the same question. The agreed change to the phraseology resulted in 'the person teaching it is interesting' and ' the way it is taught is interesting', which both proved a satisfactory differentiation. These small yet significant interpretations of the language proved the value of careful piloting, and the subtle differences of interpretation that can occur when using, what appears to be, from an adult perspective, straightforward phraseology.

The final questionnaire format

The questionnaire was eventually delivered in its twelfth version (see appendix A). That is, there were eleven attempts to present the material in as clear and flawless way as possible. Ultimately, the finished product, that which was used for the paper questionnaire in the first year (Year 7) data collection was presented on A4 paper with the questions typed on both sides. Where possible, for the sake of clarity, each question appeared on a separate page. There were seventeen questions altogether, some of which were broken

down into several component parts. The work done later on in analysing the data showed that the breakdown of the questionnaire would have been easier to evaluate if these individual components had been treated as separate questions. A subsequent version of the questionnaire, used for the second year (Year 8) data collection, asked exactly the same questions, in the same order, but the sub-sections were numbered individually, so that the total number of questions now ran to twenty-seven rather than seventeen. The majority of the questions were closed multiple choice requiring responses on a Likert type scale. The degrees of response and the variations in response category were chosen as a result of the pilot interviews using earlier versions of a simplified questionnaire. There were some open questions, which required short written responses. Because of the evolutionary changes that occurred as pupils moved through the school, some of the questions had to be changed to suit the situations faced by the pupils at the time, but without altering the primary thrust of the research. A good example was question 27, the final question, which asked about choices of CGSE subjects. By the third year of the research, the pupils completing the questionnaire phase had already made their GCSE choices so the question was rephrased so that it asked about subjects still, but acknowledged that some were now compulsorily undertaken and some were free choices.

Questionnaire statistical data

The research derived from the questionnaire provided an enormous amount of information that appeared in numerical form, as the majority of questionnaire responses required some form of choice selection. Statistically, the research data derived from the questionnaire was required to provide indications of pupil perceptions about given situations and to give evidence of trends over time. The evidence provided by statistics in this research could be classed as descriptive rather than inductive; its purpose was to simplify a large amount of data and to present the key trends from that data in as an illuminating and interesting way as possible. Although descriptive statistics allow a summary and description of the data, they do not allow inference or conclusion to be drawn from the data alone. Inferential statistics, where statistical significance is a key component, would have required a more

detailed and complex approach, for which this research project was not designed; although the research sample was relatively large, the population as a whole was not, so in this research, a 2% response rate, for instance, would, in some circumstances, indicate the views of a single person.

The statistics have, however, allowed the research to be summarised so that a general picture over the whole period of the research could be presented and a year-on-year picture could be drawn. In cases where a Likert-style question has been used, the percentage and mean of frequency distribution could be illustrated. Using the data in this way and presenting it in a simple bar graph format has meant that the material has successfully supported the research aims and has provided further evidence which complements the finding from the interviews.

Recording and transcribing questionnaire data

Questionnaire data collected during the first year was collated manually, as the exercise was paper-based. Subsequent data collection exercises were carried out using the Excel programme on the school's computers. Although data was stored and tabulated using the programme, tallying was not done automatically, but manually, transferring sets of data from each questionnaire into a summary. Although more time consuming, this allowed each questionnaire to be checked for errors or omissions. Data was tallied by gender, as well as for the group as a whole, so that differences could be observed easily. Likert-style questions were tabulated in two ways: a chart was provided for the responses that reflected the positive extreme, i.e., 'most enjoyed', 'most important', 'most of the time', and so on. A data set was also constructed, to provide a mean figure from the data range; that is, for an average of the responses from across the range 'least' to 'most'. Using these methods, a discrete data set reflecting both open responses and hierarchical maximum and minimum responses was established for each of the four annual questionnaires. Data was then presented in bar chart form in two main ways. Within the longitudinal chapter, data separately reflecting boys' and girls' perceptions was averaged over the four-year period, and this indicated a general trend in pupil responses to the question. Additionally a data set reflecting boys' and girls' responses together from each of the four

years' were collated so that incremental changes over the period of the research could be reflected, and these are shown in Appendix C.

Developing the interview

As with the piloting stage of the questionnaire, the interviews for the first Year of data collection (conducted at the start of Year 8) were also conducted in the Art and Design office, and for the same reasons (see appendix B). The interview technique used here was based on the non-standard or semi-structured format rather than a strict or rigid and highly structured format. It could be suggested that, in this research at least, the more structured data collection exercise that was done through the questionnaire at the end of the academic year was a better vehicle for gathering a more statistical and perhaps less interpretative pool of data than was the interview. The interview was designed to be more open, in that, although the main research topics (seen in the questionnaire) were looked at, there was a greater opportunity for the interviewee to put forward a rationale for the cause and effect, the shifts and changes, that had been picked up as the research progressed. The interview was designed to ask, and to ask repeatedly, why and how? The interview was there to perhaps pick up on those instances that were not directly observable, that could not be quantified easily. There was a desire to try to get a real insider's perspective on the journey through school, as the pupils experienced it.

Over the period of the research, the same ten pupils were interviewed. The case could be made that there is something of a danger in the inevitable relationship that develops between the interviewer and interviewee, over time. By the second year of interviewing (at the beginning of Year 9) there was already a sense from the group that they were somehow, slightly apart from the remainder of the year group. Although all had a definite sense of participation in the bigger exercise, this small group were beginning to see themselves as the 'guinea pigs', as one put it; their role was a little more than that of a questionnaire respondent. A problem may have been that the status that they afforded themselves could have led to a sense of them feeling like spokespeople for the group as a whole; of having a responsibility to articulate the views and feelings of others. There was never any evidence of this during

the interviews themselves however; always the discussions that took place were very personal. This perhaps highlights another facet of the developing relationship apparent across the microphone. A good relationship meant that there was trust and ease; during the second year's interviews, there was never any anxiety about confidentiality or anonymity. It was occasionally voiced during the first year, in that pupils would say things and then need immediately seek reassurance about the confidentiality of the statement; even for something that was, to the adult ear at least, innocuous. By the second year there was a more developed feeling of trust, none of the interviewees required or sought any reassurances. This may have been partly due to the fact that they were now a more mature group, by age, but I believe that they understood that, in that practical and pragmatic way that pupils have, not having experienced any fallout meant that things were all right. One or two people even joked about remembering having said things or made comments about situations the previous year; there was never any feeling that this was a real anxiety, but the point was that they remembered having said the things at all. The same degree of recall was not apparent, for instance, when the incidents were more trivial (to them), e.g., recalling the general thrust of last year's interviews.

Selection and sampling for interview

The research year group participating in the study numbered between eighty-three and eighty-seven pupils. The gender balance of the year was weighted slightly towards the boys (about 60% to 40%). In spite of this, it was considered important that the viewpoint expressed via interview sample was gender balanced, and therefore a ten-pupil group, made up of five boys and five girls was chosen. In order to make the selection as random as possible, all pupils on the school list for that year group had their names, on individual slips of paper, placed in a box. By the simple expedient of drawing slips from the box and writing down the names until five of each gender had been selected, a random list was drawn up. In this way, no account was taken of that individual background or ability level of the pupil.

One perceived drawback to random selection was considered initially because of the structure of the school population. Historically, the institution

under scrutiny has had a long tradition as a boarding school. Even today, the school has a fairly high proportion of boarders (about 20%) and it was thought important that their voice should be heard. It was decided that no positive discrimination should occur because there were other groups who could have, arguably, warranted inclusion as a significant minority: sports team players and musicians, for instance made up a good proportion of the year. In the event, of those selected for interview, two were boarders.

Recording and transcribing interview data

Interview questions were semi-structured and quite informal. The structure of the interview was such that the questions were mainly open enquiries, which followed the broad format, adopted by the questionnaire, inasmuch as importance, enjoyment and change were the main themes. The main difference was that the enquiry as to why things were perceived or felt or observed, what had influenced these perceptions, was more open to individual response. Interviews were recorded in two ways; initially, onto audiocassette, each interviewee having a separate tape, and latterly material was recorded digitally, and stored on computer. Interview transcription, from tape or computer, was carried out as soon after the event as possible. This was done because the interview, as an event, was still fresh in the researcher's mind, which helped in interpreting any difficult or inaudible elements of the recording. Once transcribed into Word, interview data was recorded onto computer Compact Disc. Both the audio and text material was kept private and not stored on the school's networked system, secure though this was.

Interview data analysis

Each interview data set was transcribed from the recording, and the results reproduced on computer using Word. Each separate interviewee was identified with a different typeface, and the transcripts were line numbered. Texts were then printed, double-spaced on A4 paper. Each text was examined manually and sections identified that corresponded to a particular research topic. This was done in the first instance, using the main research topics: enjoyment and importance of school and subjects, and influences and

changes over time. At a secondary level, transcript responses were grouped according to topics that emerged from the interviews themselves, such as 'doss' subjects and social groupings. By simply cutting out the transcript with scissors, the discrete line-numbered and identifiable portions of related text could be removed from the original interviews and assembled together. This process was carried out in the same way each year, in order to provide a consistent approach to the analysis.

The narrative that followed each year's data analysis of both the questionnaires and the interviews was presented as a separate chapter in the research. Questionnaire data was presented in the same order as it was collected so that it matched the layout of the sample questionnaire in Appendix A. The subsequent interview data was presented by research topic (enjoyment, importance and influence).

Main study data collection

Conducting the questionnaires

The first year (Year 7)

The first piece of data collection proper was undertaken in June 2003, whilst the target group of pupils were in Year 7. This was their first encounter with the questionnaire, or indeed, any of the data collection exercises. The exercise was conducted at one time, in one place, when all the pupils were gathered in the school hall having completed their end of year exams. Questionnaires were delivered in a double-sided monochrome A4 photocopy format. Each questionnaire ran to fourteen pages, as questions were well spaced (this was considered important both for clarity of understanding, and to give sufficient space for the responses). The exercise took place in the afternoon of a school day, after the morning examinations had been concluded. The pupils were seated as for the examinations, and only the researcher was present (this was considered important for confidentiality and anonymity). One or two points were clarified as the session started, but there were no structural or comprehension problems apparent. The questionnaire completion took about forty minutes. Due to absences, sixty-seven pupils

(from a possible eighty-two) took part. Those pupils who completed the questionnaires early were allowed to hand them in, and to read, a practice that they were all familiar with from their exam experience. Because the data collection took place near the end of the day, keeping the pupils *in situ* was considered a prudent measure, which would avoid a rush to an early conclusion. Early finishers leaving the hall might have initiated a mass exodus with a corresponding increase in incomplete questionnaires.

Perceived advantages of this method

This was considered the best opportunity to deal with the group because they were together all at once, so there was no issue about time, or time management. The collection could take place in one go, with as few omissions as possible (there were, in the event, some twenty absentees who had commitments elsewhere on the day). It was felt that any instructions and queries could be dealt with easily, and the psychology was advantageous as the seating and spacing was 'exam-like', something with which they were familiar. Having no other teachers present meant that the researcher could give anonymity and privacy to each individual in the group, and to the group as a whole, in one place.

Perceived disadvantages of this method

These were mainly perceived as having to do with the mechanics of the exercise, in that, development and production of (in excess of) eighty separate, fourteen-page, stapled questionnaires did cause some problems. Two attempts were necessary as failure was caused mainly through photocopier problems and automatic sorting and stapling. Distribution and collection were only slightly time-consuming, but there were some issues about handwriting legibility, particularly where it applied to open questions. Manual data collection, transcription and analysis were very time-consuming due to the large number of multi-page scripts involved. Some elementary mathematical errors were made in the transcription of data back into Excel, where the initial data analysis was done. It should be noted that, after the data analysis in the second year had been completed, all the first year's data was re-evaluated, and these errors were corrected.

The second year (Year 8)

The target group of pupils were now in Year 8, their final year at the middle school. This was their second engagement with this particular data collection instrument.

The difference between the first and second year was that, as far as the questionnaire was concerned, the method used in the second year was wholly electronic, using the networked school computer suite, rather than a paper questionnaire. Because of the limitations on access to computer suites, (twenty-two machines) the year group was split, and the questionnaires were administered on a class-by-class basis (five classes). Because of the time needed to complete the exercise, (historically, about forty minutes per questionnaire, plus administration and explanation) two forty-minute lessons were planned per class to complete the task. As had happened the previous year, the timing was such that the end of year summer exams were over, so a suitable time was not too hard to organise. Because of room-booking restrictions (competition for computer room use), and finding time to conduct the exercise when the researcher was not teaching, only three out of the five groups were able to attempt the task in one try during a 'double' lesson. The remaining two classes had to begin the questionnaire on one day, during a single, forty-minute lesson, and had to return to finish on the following day, during another single, forty-minute lesson. This did not cause any problems and no one ran out of time. Absences were minimal; eighty-three from a possible eighty-five pupils took part. The questionnaire was formatted in Excel, and was available on the network, via a shared folder. It is worth noting that the material was only delivered and retrieved during the lesson time booked for the questionnaire sessions. Both the blank and the completed questionnaires were moved on and off the system at the opening and closing of the session by the researcher. Each pupil could access his or her own questionnaire as an individual, named, workbook. Within the workbook, all the questions were presented on a single, screen-wide scrollable page. This in itself was a considerable improvement over the paper version, because it obviated the need to split the questions into appropriately sized pieces that would fit on an A4 page. Generally, the whole layout was considerably

enhanced by the use of colour. All the questions were highlighted in different colours, which helped differentiate the various types. Open questions had a response cell highlighted in red; those that utilised a Likert response had the degrees of response highlighted in graduated shades.

Perceived advantages of this method

The pupils having previous questionnaire experience had obviated most of the teething problems associated with the research in the first year. There were no mechanical production and assembly problems, e.g., fitting the work onto A4 pages and reproducing and stapling the results. Due to the fact that all of the work was done on screen, there was no obvious behavioural change once the questionnaire had been completed; because pupils were allowed to participate in other computer activities once they had saved and closed their own workbooks, there was no collective sense of having to finish, or of being left behind. The introduction of colour was very helpful, making the layout and sense of the questionnaire more user-friendly. It was noticeable that an evident air of concentration was apparent. Data collation and analysis after the event was more straightforward and easier as there was far less manual transcription involved. There was no potential loss of time due to distributing and collecting the work, because the questionnaires could be delivered electronically to individuals and removed securely at the conclusion of the exercise. A great advantage was that all pupils were computer literate and quite familiar with the Excel program.

Perceived disadvantages of this method

Access to computer rooms was slightly problematic because continuity or return within a reasonable time span was hindered due to 'block booking' by other curriculum areas. Data security may have been an issue because when 'live', all students could (theoretically) access their class colleagues' workbook once it had been closed and returned to the shared folder. Because of the layout of the room, every computer screen was visible to the researcher, and evidence of opened windows on the screen taskbar showed that the students only ever had their own workbooks open. Another theoretical concern was the possibility of data loss, should the system crash whilst a 'live'

exercise was being undertaken. Again, this did not happen although, in reality, there was a certain degree of security in that server back-up tapes existed. Because of the room layout and the proximity of computer workstations, there was the possibility that anonymity might be compromised, as, with a little effort, neighbouring screens could be seen from each workstation. In all cases, the high degree of concentration apparent during the exercise evidenced no pupils observing other's screens.

The third year (Year 9)

The third data collection exercise using the questionnaire took place in June 2005. Now, the research group pupils were in Year 9, or third form, as it was called, the first and most junior year of the senior school.

The exercise was conducted with smaller groups than before. These groups were half a class in size (about eight to ten pupils). Because the questionnaire was to be conducted using the school's networked computer system, and because the pupils were now subject to the senior school's timetabling and management, choosing a precise format that suited the pupils, the school, and the researcher, was very difficult. One week of discrete Information Technology lessons was allocated for the task, which meant that the pupils had one forty-minute time slot to complete the questionnaire. Due to the small pupil numbers involved in each session, the physical arrangement was such that pupils were sat at computers with a vacant machine between them, for privacy and confidentiality. Only the researcher was present to monitor progress and to field questions during the exercise.

Named, blank questionnaires for each group of pupils were placed in a shared area on the main computer server, just prior to the lesson. Pupils downloaded their own, named questionnaires. To ensure that each recipient accessed the correct questionnaire, file movement was monitored on the researcher's own machine during the lesson. Finished questionnaires were returned to the shared area. Once they had been checked for content and obvious errors, they were immediately moved from the shared area into a secure area.

Although, since the move to senior school, the year group had grown to over one hundred pupils, only the original cohort that had moved up from the

junior school took part. Due to absences, from a possible field of eighty-four, eighty-two pupils successfully participated in the exercise.

Because GCSE options had been made by the time of the data collection, a change was required to part of the questionnaire; question 27 had previously asked about the degree to which pupils were happy with subjects as possible GCSE options. The re-worded question now distinguished between those subjects that had been chosen and those that had not, and sought to clarify the degree to which each pupil was happy or unhappy with the choice.

Perceived advantages of this method

The advantage of performing the activity via the networked computer system were the same as in the second year; it was paperless and quite secure, once safeguards were in place. Pupils still enjoyed the experience and were, by this stage, much more adept at completing the questionnaire in this format (the mean time for completion was just over twenty minutes, and no-one exceeded the forty minute allocated).

Perceived disadvantage of this method

Having a blank, named questionnaire on a shared work area of the network might have caused some concern, except that each file was only loaded immediately prior to the lesson, and the material was completed whilst the questionnaire was located on a discrete and secure machine, seen only by the pupil. Because pupils had completed the questionnaire before, in Year 8, there might have been some danger that they would become blasé about the exercise, but this proved not to be the case; each respondent appeared to undertake the work seriously and carefully.

The fourth year (Year 10)

The data set was collected in July and August of 2006, when the research group pupils were at the end of Year 10, or fourth form, in the senior school. It was not possible, due to timetabling and manning problems, to gather the pupils in classes or groups at all, for this part of the data collection exercise. It was decided to use the same electronic questionnaire format as in

the two previous years, but to administer it via e-mail. An explanatory letter was sent to each of the pupils, inviting them to apply to a special Hotmail address for a questionnaire. The questionnaire could be downloaded, completed and returned this way. Within one week, 40% of pupils had requested a questionnaire, completed it and returned it successfully. An e-mail reminder was sent to those who had been sent the questionnaire but had not yet returned it. Within a fortnight, 70% of questionnaires were safely collected. The remainder were sent paper questionnaires, which were laid out in exactly the same format as the electronic versions. Failure to respond to, or successfully complete the electronic e-mail questionnaires were due to a number of reasons; the school's Excel program, used for the electronic questionnaire was not compatible with, or could not be successfully read by, some pupils' home computers, or the e-mail system could not cope with the complexity of the task. Some did not have computers at home at all. Some had simply forgotten. Ultimately, out of a possible field of eighty-four pupils, seventy-four successfully completed the questionnaire, in one form or another.

Perceived advantages of this method

By now, the electronic questionnaire was a known quantity to the group, and completing it, even by e-mail, proved to be fairly straightforward. The transmission of data remained secure and completed questionnaires were kept in a secure area. Because it was known that the pupils contacted one another via e-mail or Internet groups regularly, pupils who had completed questionnaires were asked (by e-mail) to utilise these networking services to pass reminders to those who appeared to be responding more slowly. The method worked with some success, and was useful in getting questionnaires returned more quickly.

Perceived disadvantages of this method

There was, by using the individual e-mail method, no control over the conditions under which each respondent completed the questionnaire. Although 70% managed to complete the task, and return the questionnaire within two weeks, it was not possible to say whether there was any collusion

between parties, or interference from other pupils during completion. Because replies were received mainly in the evenings, and arrived in a steady trickle, it was assumed that work was done predominantly at home, and in private. The same was true of the paper questionnaires; these were posted, individually, to home addresses, and were received, discretely, from home addresses, across the country. It was also apparent that there did not appear to be any obvious patters in the questionnaire responses of like-minded individuals, or known associates, that suggested any sort of collusion.

In summary, the questionnaire data was collected each year from a large sample of the year group (see Table 6). In Year 7, from a possible eighty-two pupils, sixty-seven took part (the remaining fifteen were absent and it was not possible to re-schedule the questionnaire exercise). In Year 8, eighty-three, of a possible eighty-five pupils took part. In Year 9, the group size had increased (after transfer to senior school) to one hundred and fifteen, but only the original (junior school) cohort was used in the research; of these, eighty-two took part. In the final year (Year 10) seventy-four pupils took part (ten were absent).

Conducting the interviews

The first year (Year 8)

Although now in Year 8, the interview group were being spoken to for the first time. A calendar of dates was proposed for November and December, near the end of the autumn term. Periods were chosen that coincided with the researcher's non-teaching time. An appointment schedule was drawn up and times and dates allotted to the ten pupils who were to take part in the exercise. The selected group were given a written appointment, on a given date, at a given time, and were asked to attend the junior school design office, located in the Art and Design faculty building. Permission was sought from their class teacher to allow them to leave the class for the forty-minute period. None were declined permission. Only one candidate missed the appointment, having forgotten. Several spare alternative dates were included in the calendar to allow for such an occurrence.

Interviews were conducted individually, with the researcher and the interviewees sat on comfortable easy chairs (in fact part of a three piece suite) facing each other at about seventy degrees, a low table offset between the seats carried the recorder and microphone. The recording machine was a hand-held Dictaphone, which had a built in microphone. The researcher had an interview schedule and pencil. Preliminary questions were asked in order to test the recording function for level and volume and to relax the interviewees. The majority of the pupils were very much at ease, speaking freely once the process was underway. Only one seemed slightly awed by the experience and spoke a little haltingly. The length of the interviews ranged between twenty minutes and forty minutes. All were stored on C-180 cassette tapes; these were considered adequate for the projected time required.

Perceived advantages of this method

Being in the same school with the pupils at this stage made the arrangement of interview times very straightforward, and no problems were encountered during this part of the research. The design office was chosen as a venue because it was a very familiar environment for most of the pupils, all of them having been in and out of the building over the years that they were attending the school. Whilst the Art and Design faculty could be a fairly public space, being somewhere that pupils liked to visit in their break times, it was, nevertheless, possible to have a high degree of privacy; the office's glass areas allowed anyone looking in to see that there was an interview in progress and thus prevented accidental intrusion.

The semi-structured interview format was intended to allow the pupils to have a little more control over what they might like to say, and when, although the use of an interview schedule was more than a foil or device, giving, as it did, some broad structure to the arrangement. The use of tape recording equipment was considered more reliable than manual note taking, which would have presented something of a distraction during the process. The recording equipment also provided something of an opportunity to break the ice, being a useful device to open discussion and set the pupils at ease; within a few minutes of the process being under way, the presence of the equipment was forgotten.

Perceived disadvantages of this method

Although the Art and Design office was a familiar and friendly environment, there was a degree of background noise, especially from the adjacent Design and Technology workshop; this noise only became apparent during the tape transcription, once the interviews had been completed. Although sound levels and recording status were both checked prior to each interview, reliance on a single recording medium was something of a worry. The semi-structured nature of the interviews placed a good deal of responsibility on the pupils; the more loquacious ones had no difficulty in keeping up a narrative, but the more self-conscious members of the group (principally the boys, it has to be said) were apt to offer only monosyllabic responses if they could get away with it.

The second year (Year 9)

Interviewees were conducted in the same Art and Design office, at the same time of year, i.e., at the end of November and the beginning of December. Because the pupils were now in Year 9 and had moved onto the senior school, a slightly more involved appointment regime was brought into play. Each interviewee was contacted by letter during the half term, advising them of the date and appointment time. More spare interview capacity (vacant times and dates) was built into the schedule because it was considered that, as the pupils were now more remotely situated, the interview appointments were perhaps more likely to be missed. Letters were sent to the House Tutors of each pupil as well as the Director of Studies, reminding them of the research programme, and the part being played by the pupils in the year group. It was pointed out by the senior school Director of Studies that some of the pupils class groups were undergoing end of term tests and that re-scheduling might be necessary in some cases. This did not happen in actual fact; all the appointments were booked and only two were missed on the day, one through forgetfulness and one through illness. Each was re-scheduled for a spare date in the calendar.

Perceived advantages of this method

The environment was familiar to the interviewees; all knew where it was and what it was like. The recording of the interviews meant that extensive note taking was not required, which allowed the interview process to be given full attention. Also the phrasing of questions and the use of prompts could be given due care. Having a recording was reassuring for the researcher, because it meant that an accurate and complete piece of data was available, notwithstanding the note taking that went on at the same time. For the interviewee it gave a neutral focus for the start of the process, but one that was soon forgotten once the interview was underway.

Perceived disadvantages of this method

There was some slight concern about the technical efficacy of the method used. Even though thorough testing of the apparatus was always carried out beforehand, there might be a technical hitch and the tape might appear blank after the conclusion of the interview. This never happened in fact, and each time the tape was replayed after an interview had finished all was well. Transcription of the tapes was extremely laborious and took many hours. Some interviewees were very quiet, and even with the tape volume at its peak, elements of some of the dialogue were quite difficult to make out. The speech patterns and speed of delivery also required acute aural examination of the tapes in one or two instances. Even though the tape player had a speed control so that playback could be modified, there were times when it seemed that the quality was rather poor. No material was lost through this; it simply made the transcription process over long.

The third year (Year 10)

The pupils in the research group were now at the beginning of Year 10, or fourth form, in the senior school. Interviews were scheduled for the second half of the autumn term, in the weeks leading up to the Christmas holidays. Because it was practicable to do so, interviews were conducted in the same office as before, in the Art and Design faculty of the junior school. The same group of ten pupils was used as before. Again, each interviewee was contacted by letter, before the autumn half-term, inviting them to choose one

of a number of available times and dates for their interviews. Explanatory letters were sent to the pupils' House tutors, as well as to the senior school's Director of Studies, advising that the interviews were taking place. As before, spare capacity was built into the interview schedule to allow for missed appointments; in the event only one pupil had to re-appoint due to absence. Interviews were recorded onto cassette tape. Because the small hand-held recorder was thought to be more susceptible to the background noise of the faculty, a larger machine was borrowed from the school's language department for the interviews this year. The practice of testing sound levels by recording a test piece with each pupil was again carried out, but a malfunction led to one interview not being recorded correctly, resulting in a blank tape. It was not possible, due to commitments elsewhere, to re-schedule this particular interview again in the autumn term time; to interview during the following term was considered, but it was thought that the interviewee would have gained a sufficiently different perspective by that time. In the event, only nine out of the ten interviews were transcribed and used.

Perceived advantage of this method

The location and methodology were, by now, a known quantity to the ten pupils who were taking part in the interview process each year. All the respondents appeared comfortable and relaxed during their interviews. The larger tape machine provided a better quality recording (for those interviews that succeeded) and the transcription time was reduced accordingly.

Perceived disadvantages of this method

The failure of one interview to record highlighted the need to check the correct functioning of equipment each and every time; nothing should be taken for granted. Scheduling interviews for the back end of a busy Christmas term meant that a failure was unable to be re-recorded because of extraneous constraints. Even though the quality of material gained from the larger recording machine was far superior, the background noise levels in the faculty meant that transcription was still not as straightforward as perhaps it could have been.

The fourth year (Year 11)

The pupils in the research group were now in the early stages of Year 11, or fifth form, in the senior school. Because of the contacts established via e-mail during the questionnaire data collection in the previous summer term, and because all ten of the interviewees had successfully used the system then, it was decided to schedule and arrange appointments via e-mail and mobile-phone messaging service. A range of times and dates were offered to members of the group, including at the end of the school day and on Saturdays. All interviewees responded positively and an appointment schedule was drawn up, with spare capacity over two weeks, to allow for errors and cancellations. Interviews were conducted in the design office once again, as this was a familiar environment. Only two interviewees failed to show at the appointed time, and these were easily re-scheduled. Because of the experience of a failed recording in the third year, recording of data during this round of interviews was done using two systems: a digital recorder and a cassette tape recorder. No failures were experienced and the quality of the digital recordings proved to be much better than the magnetic tape. Interviewees were very much more relaxed and, being used to the regime, reacted wholly positively. Interviews lasted between twenty-five and forty minutes.

Perceived advantages of this method

The familiarity of the venue proved beneficial to both the interviewer and the interviewees. Semi-structured interviews suited the more conversational style now adopted by pupils, who, being much older and more mature, now adopted a more proactive approach to the exercise.

Perceived disadvantages of this method

Having a back-up recording system proved very reassuring, although it proved unnecessary. There was a danger that the pupils' familiarity by now with both interviewing and the venue (not to mention the interviewer) might have caused some to adopt a more laissez-faire attitude to the process, although, in the event, there was no evidence that this was the case; indeed, the opposite was the case, because it was notable that interviews were now

longer and the reactions and views of pupils were more thoughtful and considered than they had been before.

In summary, the interviews involved the same ten pupils (five boys and five girls) each year, none of who were absent for the data collection over the whole period of the research.

Data analysis

Because of the longitudinal nature of the research and the fact that data was collected at two points in each research year, it was considered appropriate to analyse and present the data, for each year, discretely. In other words, at the conclusion of each research year, the questionnaire responses were examined and analysis of the data was offered, together with evidence gathered from analysis of that year's interview transcriptions. This resulted in separate chapters as follows:

questionnaire data (Year 7) and interview data (Year 8)

questionnaire data (Year 8) and interview data (Year 9)

questionnaire data (Year 9) and interview data (Year 10)

questionnaire data (Year 10) and interview data (Year 11)

Once the separate years had been looked at, trends were examined over the period of the study, and data was collected together in the form of a longitudinal analysis over the four years.

Presentation of the data

In its raw state, the research involved a tremendous amount of data, both quantitative, and qualitative. Over the four-year period of the research, the questionnaire data had seen over eight thousand responses to questions, most of which involved further multiple responses. The open questions in this exercise yielded some ten thousand words whilst the interview element of the data collection yielded somewhere in the region of sixty thousand words. The complexity of the data required that some refinement was needed, in order to maintain a reasonable overview, rather than get drawn to deeply into specifics, however interesting that might have appeared. The research was, ultimately, looking at the trends that emerged from the research; how perceptions and views of the pupil group emerged and developed, and why

this might have happened. Individual stories might be told; indeed the identifiable nature of the data collection instruments meant that any one of the eighty pupils involved in the research would have had an individual chronology; those involved in the interview process could perhaps have laid claim to an even richer offering. In the event, each year's data has been presented as a separate picture of the events of that period; evidence from the responses to the questionnaire data has been analysed and presented, with conclusions that can be drawn, together with separate, and supporting, material from the interview exercise. Once each of the four separate year's data had been collated and analysed, it became possible to recognise and examine trends, and these have been grouped and discussed as a longitudinal element of the research.

Chapter 5

First Year Data Analysis

What happened

This first year's data was collected on two separate occasions, first by questionnaire, then, at the beginning of the following academic year, by interview. The questionnaire data was gathered in June of 2003. The target group involved in this study was then concluding Year 7, which is the penultimate year of their time in the junior school. From the eighty-two children in the year group, sixty-seven took part in the questionnaire. Of these, forty-one were boys and twenty-six were girls. The questionnaire had been successfully piloted earlier in the year and consisted of 27 questions (these can be seen in full at Appendix B). These questions were devised to cover those topics set out in the main research questions.

In order to gain some insight into any influences that may have impinged upon the pupils' views and perceptions (as well as being a general enquiry) pupils were asked about their interests outside school, i.e., what they did socially, for hobbies, how they spent their time. They were asked what their parents or carers did for work and what sort of work they saw themselves doing later in life. In terms of school experience, questions were asked about their enjoyment of school as an institution and their enjoyment of particular subjects. Within this they were asked what they saw as their most enjoyable subject and what they saw as their least enjoyable subject and why this might be so. The importance both of school in general and subjects in particular were explored. Children were asked about what they saw as the most important school subjects and what were the least important school subjects and the reasons why this might be so. Because the study takes place over several years there was a need to get some perspective of the changes that occur over time. In this respect, questions were asked about pupils' perceptions of enjoyment and importance of subjects in the current year, whether they had changed since their previous year and what the likelihood was of them changing in the coming year. In cases where there had been changes, reasons as to why these changes had occurred were sought.

As well as the enjoyment and importance of specifics, a more general (open) question was asked about any areas of anxiety and stress in school, again, over the year just gone as well as the year ahead. A concluding question looked

ahead at the public examinations to come, in the shape of GCSE choices. Here pupils were asked, given a completely free choice, what particular subjects they would choose or not choose to study.

The second element of the research took the form of a series of semi-structured interviews (carried out in November 2003) with a sample of pupils from the year group. A gender-balanced sample of ten pupils was selected at random, by the simple expedient of placing all the boys names in a box and drawing five. The process was then repeated with the girls' names. This ten-strong sample was intended to be a continuing focus group throughout the research. The benefits of using the same pupils were that the cumulative evidence collected at each interview stage of the research would add value twice; not only the commentary it provided on the quantitative data collected each year via the questionnaire, but also the narrative (in this case ten separate narratives) which reflect an individual path through the study. A drawback to the random selection was thought to be the possibility that a pupil might have either not taken part in the earlier interview process, or might leave the school before the research was concluded.

It should be made clear that the interviews did not constitute a formal follow-up to the questionnaires. The interviews were designed to be a discrete data collection activity, at a further point in time (the beginning of a following academic year). Although covering the main topics of research explored in the questionnaire the interviews were to allow expression of open topics, views and opinions in a less structured format, and at a stage removed from the questionnaire data collection.

How the data was collected

The data collection, via a questionnaire, took place in the last weeks of the summer term, straight after the end of year exams. Pupils participating in the exercise were situated, as they had been for the exams, in the school hall, as a large group, at exam desks. The exercise was completed with the majority of the group within forty minutes. Before beginning the questionnaire, the pupils had the process explained, as well as the issue of anonymity and confidentiality. Pupils were given the opportunity to decline and none did. Part of the questionnaire data gathering exercise required that individuals from the cohort could be identified. This was so that a small number of individual cases could be followed longitudinally over the length of the study in order to highlight, in more detail, those

trends followed by particular individuals rather than the trends established by the group as a whole. As a result, it was necessary for the children to identify themselves on the questionnaires. Again, none asked to decline and only one or two did forget to name the papers, in the same way that one or two missed answering parts of questions. During the first few minutes of the questionnaires there were some points of clarification sought, more about seeking reassurance on questions rather than any fundamental misunderstanding of the requirements of the research.

The subsequent interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in the design office, inside the Art and Design building. To participate in the interviews, pupils were withdrawn from other lessons during the normal working day. Interviews were conducted confidentially and the usual assurances were given about confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews lasted an average of forty-five minutes.

Analysis of results

The questionnaire data

The first year's results from the questionnaire are shown in Appendix C. The tabulated results show the overall responses for both boys and girls together. Results are also shown as a percentage of those responding (sixty-seven). Mean scores are also shown, where appropriate, base on scoring Likert-type items. Where there are gender differences, these are referred to in the text, as well as in Chapter 9, which looks at longitudinal analysis of the data.

Q1: What do you want to be? What sort of work do you think that you would like to do when you leave school?

This question was posed at the outset in order to gain some idea of the thoughts of the participants about their future careers. This was an open question with adequate space for reply. Responses were grouped according to their closest matches. Overall, nearly a quarter (23%) of the respondents showed a clear leaning towards medicine or veterinary practice, but this was more the preserve of girls (31% of the population) than the boys (15%). 11% expressed an interest in a career in the arts or in design; again, there were more girls (15%) than boys (7%) interested. The third largest category was science and engineering; 10% were

interested in a career here, and this time the boys had a stronger showing than the girls (12% as opposed to 8%). Fourth (9% overall) came a career in the law; more girls (12%) than boys (7%) elected this. Fifth ranked (9%) was a career as a sports professional or being involved in outdoor pursuits; this was only chosen by boys (17% of the population). Next ranked was a career in the forces or government service; 5% chose this, and, again, only boys (10% of the population). Seventh ranked were both a classification as 'other' (no neat correlation between careers), and media and journalism, each chosen by 3% of the group as a whole. In both choices the gender split was the same; 2% of boys and 4% of girls electing a choice in each case. The next ranking, ninth place was also shared; this time 2% of the group had each chosen finance or civil flying as a career. In each case, only boys (5%) had made the choice. Ranked eleventh was business administration, chosen by 2% of the group, and only girls (4%). Finally, ranked last as career choices, each being chosen by 1% of the group, were education and research (boys only, and 2% of the population) and business administration (girls only, and 2% of the population).

Q.2: Your own areas of interest outside school. What do you get up to away from school?

Outdoor activities (38% overall) and socialising (29% overall) were claimed to be the two activities mostly engaged in outside school. Painting and drawing and construction and modelling were claimed to be two activities least engaged in by 38% and 42% of children respectively. Looking at the gender split, 48% of boys spent most of their time engaged in outdoor activities compared to 23% of girls. The girls preferred activity was socialising where 57% claimed to spend most for their free time engaged in this whereas boys showed a 12% response for this as a main activity. As the question posed choices of quantitative times spent on the activities it is easy to see the 'most' and 'least' elements of the raw figures, which look extremely clear. The mean data for the activity told a slightly different story. Socialising (4.1) was in front followed by outdoor activities (3.9). The time spent watching TV (3.1) was not far behind (as a percentage figure, only 6% overall (9% of boys and no girls) claimed to spend most of their time watching TV). Homework came next (2.7) Similarly the mean figure for Internet (2.6) and computer games (2.5) (although only 4% overall (7% of boys and no girls) claimed

to have spent most of their time playing with computer games) are still ahead of old-fashioned activities like painting and drawing (1.8) and modelling (1.5)

Q.3: Your parents' or carers' occupations. What sort of work do they do?

This was an open question requiring a response appropriate to the significant male and female parent or carer and the subsequent data was grouped, by gender, according to the nearest occupational match. Because the occupations cited did not change in any significant degree over the period of the research, the data was static, and so the statistics for this question shown in Appendix C did not appear separately for each of the four years, as was the case for other questions. The spread of occupations was broader for fathers than for mothers. The highest proportion of mothers (25%) were at home full time (no fathers were) and the next ranked occupation for mothers was education (23% worked here; only 8% of fathers did so). 20% of mothers had medical careers; a higher proportion than fathers (14% of fathers worked here, and it was the highest ranked career for fathers). Accounting and finance was a career area for 11% of fathers (but only 5% of mothers). Armed service also claimed 11% of fathers (but no mothers). Only fathers (10%) were farmers. 9% of fathers were small businesses, as were 6% of mothers. 7% of mothers worked in a secretarial role (no fathers did). Property development occupied 6% of fathers (but no mothers). Law accounted for 5% of fathers and only 1% of mothers. 6% of mothers were self-employed (nearly equal to fathers at 5%) and both fathers and mothers (at 5%) were managers, but only 5% of fathers were managing directors. Fathers only were civil pilots (3%). 3% of fathers and 1% of mothers were architects or surveyors. Only mothers (2%) worked in sales.

Q.4: Your enjoyment of school in general. How much do you like school?

Overall, 60% (56% of boys and 65% of girls) enjoyed sports most of all. Friendships were considered most enjoyed by 51% overall (34% of boys and 77% of girls) and breaks and socialising appealed mostly to 29% of the pupils (26% of boys and 34% of girls). This seems to follow the trend established for general interests outside school (Question 2). The ranking order showed that, by a long way, homework was least enjoyed by 42% of pupils overall. Within this figure, 38% of boys and 46% of girls least liked it. All other categories of school life in this question did not elicit a 'least liked' response above 7%. The mean figure for this

question showed that sports (4.4) friendships (4.4) and breaks /socialising (4.1) were clearly the favourite activities. Outings/trips (3.6) and clubs/activities (3.5) came close together next, followed by teachers (2.9) and lessons (2.9). Homework was behind these (2.0).

Q.5: The importance of school in general. How important do you think school is?

Nearly two-thirds (58%) saw that 'doing your best' was the most important part of school life in general. This applied to 53% of boys and 65% of girls. 'Friendships' were seen as most important by 43% (34% of boys and 57% of girls) and 'lessons' were most important to 28% (30% of boys and 23% of girls). 'Learning skills' was seen as most important to 24% of children (24% of boys and 23% of girls). 'Socialising' was seen as most important by 22% (19% of boys and 26% of girls) showing a difference between the concept of having friends and that of spending time with them. At the other end of the scale, 'liking the teacher' was least important to 21% of pupils overall (19% of boys and 23% of girls). The mean data had 'doing your best' in front (4.5) followed by 'friendships' (4.3), 'learning skills' (4.1), 'lessons' (4.0) 'socialising' (3.8) and 'liking teachers' (2.5).

Q6: Your talent and ability. How talented are you?

How good pupils' perceived themselves as being at the various school subjects showed some interesting results. Games and sports were enjoyed in and out of school and 36% overall (34% of boys and 38% of girls) saw themselves as 'very talented' at Games, whilst 19% overall (12% of boys and 30% of girls) saw themselves as 'very talented' at Physical Education. In both cases girls felt more able to claim the laurels than did boys. The next subject where pupils saw themselves as particularly capable was Science. Here 19% saw themselves as 'very talented', although this was predominantly boys (26%) rather than girls (7%). Similarly in Maths the 18% who claimed expertise were made up of 22% of boys and 11% of girls. When perceptions about the least degrees of talent were concerned, boys dominated. In Latin, the 19% who described themselves as 'least talented' were made up of 9% of boys and 3% of girls. In Music, the 17% who felt similarly uninspired were made up of only boys (9%). The mean scores for these different perceptions about degrees of talent for subjects show some variance.

Games (4.1) was ranked first, followed by Science (3.8), Physical Education (3.7) then Design Technology (3.6). Maths scored 3.5 and English scored 3.4.

Q 7: Your enjoyment of subjects. How much do you enjoy your work?

When asked of their different subjects how much they were enjoyed, 76% of pupils claimed that Games was the most enjoyed subject. The gender split was quite even, with 75% of boys and 77% of girls declaring it to be their most enjoyed subject. Then next favourite was Physical Education, where 54% of pupils overall claimed it as a 'most enjoyed' subject (the gender split was 48% of boys liking it and 61% of girls). Design Technology came next with 49% claiming to enjoy it most, but the gender split here showed a more masculine leaning with 58% boys and 34% girls enjoying it. Science was enjoyed most by 36% and the gender split was weighted towards the boys, with 38% of boys and 30% of girls selecting it. Some gender difference was apparent in English, where 26% of girls declared that this was a 'most enjoyed' subject, the figure for boys was 7%. Conversely, Information Technology was declared 'most enjoyed' by 22% of boys, but no girls at all said this. Maths too, was enjoyed by a preponderance of boys (24%) compared to girls (11%). At the other end of the enjoyment spectrum, Religious Education was 'least of all' enjoyed by 28% overall (34% of boys and 19% of girls). Although Music was enjoyed 'least of all' by 15% of pupils overall, the even gender split showed that 14% of boys and 15% of girls felt this. French (14% enjoying it 'least of all') was least enjoyed by 18% of boys and 8% of girls. The mean score ranked Games highest at 4.7, followed by Design Technology (4.5), Physical Education (4.4) and Science (4.1). Art scored 3.8. Maths and English were lower, with 3.5 and 3.4 respectively.

Q 8. The importance of subjects. How important do you think school subjects are?

The ranking of subjects perceived as 'most important' showed Maths (75%) English (72%) and Science (57%) at the top. Maths showed a slight female leaning with 73% of boys and 77% of girls considering it the 'most important' subject. English conversely, showed a slight male leaning, with 73% of boys and 69% of girls choosing this. Science was more strongly oriented towards the girls however, as 46% of boys and 73% of girls chose it. Personal, Social and Health Education was considered next in importance by 29% overall (28% of boys and

30% of girls). At the other end of the scale, subjects considered 'least important' were Religious Education, Latin and Music, with 25%, 24% and 16% respectively. The mean scores for this question put Maths (4.7) and English (4.7) at the top, followed by Science (4.6) and Games (4.0).

Q 9: Reasons why you enjoy subjects. Your favourite subject is?

A precursor in the rationale for enjoyment was a choice of favourite subject. Unlike questions that sought a degree of enjoyment for all subjects, this question sought a specific, single, favourite subject that would be considered above all others. Overall, Games was classed as the 'favourite' of 40% of pupils (38% 0f boys and 42% of girls). Design Technology was the favourite of 16% (split between 19% of boys and 11% of girls) and Science was the favourite of 10% of pupils where the split was between boys at 9% and girls at 11%. Interestingly Physical Education as a discrete subject choice did not rate a mention here and only the top three choices made double digits. Even for these subjects that were less favoured, there were gender differences. Art was most favoured, for instance, by 11% of girls but only 4% of boys. English was most favoured by exactly the same proportion. 7% of girls and 2% of boys favoured French most. Conversely, 2% of boys (but no girls) favoured Maths, 7% of boys (but no girls) favoured Geography, and 2% of boys (but no girls) favoured German.

Q 10: Reasons why you enjoy subjects and how much the reasons matter.

Those subjects chosen as favourite in the previous question were analysed further and a series of reasons for them being enjoyed were put forward. Respondents were asked how much these reasons mattered in their assessment of the enjoyability of the subject. 38% (which was split quite evenly, between 39% of boys and 38% of girls) said that 'the teacher was interesting' mattered most of all. 36% (34% of boys and 38% of girls) said that 'the way it was taught was interesting' mattered most of all. The fact that there were 'more things to do' made 34% (and 34% boys and girls each) find this a key reason. The gender split for all these reasons was fairly even. With the next choice 'I have a talent for it', a weighting was evident, with 34% of boys claiming that this mattered most of all as a reason, compared to 19% of girls. The mean scores for the responses to given reasons, showed that 'the way it was taught being interesting' came top overall (4.1) followed by 'it is fun' (4.0) and 'the person teaching it is interesting and 'there

is more to do', each with 3.9. 'It has a good atmosphere' scored 3.8 and 'it is practical/activity-based' scored 3.6, as did 'I have a talent for it'. Lowest came 'it is easy' (2.9).

Q.11: Reasons why you find a subject unenjoyable. Your least favourite subject is?

Again a precursor to the rationale for this question required the choice of a single, least liked subject. Here 38% overall found Religious Education to be the least enjoyable subject. The gender split was quite even, with 39% of boys and 38% of girls disliking it most. The degree of dislike was far higher for this subject that any other. Latin was most disliked by 16% of pupils, made up predominantly of girls (19%) rather than boys (14%). Geography was chosen by 10% as a most disliked subject, but again the weighting was in the girls' favour, with 4% of boys and 19% of girls disliking it most.

Q.12 Reasons why you find a subject unenjoyable and how much the reasons matter.

This question was structured in the same way as question 10, which dealt with enjoyment. 'It is boring' was the most important reason to 36% overall (marginally weighted in the boys' favour with 37% of boys and 35% of girls choosing this reason). 'Not getting on with the teacher' as a most important reason mattered most to 34% of the pupils. This time, more girls (38%) than boys (32%) selected this as the predominant reason for disliking their chosen subject. 'The way it is taught is no good' mattered as a reason for disliking a subject most to 33% overall. Here the gender split was female weighted, with 32% of boys and 35% of girls electing this as a reason. A greater shift in gender was more apparent when the reason was 'I have no talent for it'. 27% of the pupils thought this reason for disliking their subject mattered most of all and amongst these, 20% of boys and 38% of girls thought so. A similar overall figure (24%) reasoned that 'the work is too hard' rated most highly and the gender split was weighted towards the boys (27%) rather than the girls (19%). Just under a fifth of the sample found that 'I feel stressed' (19%), 'the work is too hard' (18%) and 'there is too much work' (18%) was a main reason for disliking their least liked subject. The gender split was more even, except that more boys felt stressed (22%) than did girls (15%), and slightly more girls (19%) than boys (18%) felt both that the work was

too hard and that there was too much of it. The mean scores told a slightly different story. 'It is boring' still ranked first (3.6) alongside 'the way it is taught is no good' (3.6) followed by 'the work is repetitive' (3.5) and 'the work is too hard' (3.4). The remaining reasons ('I have no talent for it', 'I don't get on with the teacher', 'I am stressed' and 'there is too much work' were equally ranked, with 3.2.

Q13: Reasons why you find a subject important. Your most important subject is?

Once again a single, most important subject choice was sought. Maths and English topped the polls with 45% and 28% of pupils respectively choosing these. The gender split for Maths was weighted toward the boys, with 51% of boys and 35% of girls selecting it as the top choice. More girls (31%) than boys (27%) chose English. Science, with a much smaller number (9%) choosing it overall, was also most important to more girls (15%) than it was to boys (5%). Personal, Social and Health Education was rated as a most important subject by 3% overall, and of these, all were girls (8%). Other subjects that rated a mark at all (and that at only1%,) were Art, Design Technology, French, and German (only by boys), and Geography (only by girls).

Q.14: Reasons why you find a subject important and how much the reasons matter.

In looking at the reasons for the choice of a subject being the most important, 73% of pupils thought that 'the knowledge will be important later in my life' was most apposite, and here 76% of boys and 69% of girls chose this. 'I will need the knowledge for work' was a reason that mattered most of all for 63% of pupils, with a fairly evenly split along gender lines, where 63% of boys and 62% of girls found this most important. 'I will need the knowledge for a particular job' was most important to just over half the pupils (51% overall). The gender split was weighted more towards the boys (59%) than the girls (38%). For a third of pupils (33%) the most important reason for choosing a subject was 'I have friends in the class', again, the gender split had slightly more boys (34%) than girls (31%) thinking this. 'I get on well with the teacher' was a most important reason to nearly a third (28%) of pupils and, among these, 29% of boys and 27% of girls chose this. Over a quarter of the pupils (27%) cited 'I enjoy doing the subject' as a most

important reason for choosing it and the gender split in this instance was even, at 27% in each case. Family influences were apparent in a quarter of the pupils (25%) who said that 'my parents think the subject is important' was a main reason, with 27% of boys and 23% of girls choosing this. Teacher influence was apparent in a fifth of pupils, where 21% overall (22% of boys and 19% of girls) said that 'my teachers tell me the subject is important' was a key reason. Having a talent for the topic fared less well, with 'I am good at the subject' as a main reason attracting only 13% of pupils overall (14% of boys and 11% of girls). 'I find the subject easy' appealed only to 9% of pupils as a main reason for its importance. Here the gender split was weighted more towards the boys, (12%) than girls (4%). The mean scores showed the importance of the knowledge was predominant, with 'the knowledge will be important later in my life' (4.8) followed by 'I will need the knowledge for work' (4.6) and 'I'll need the knowledge for a particular job' (4.5). Next ranked was 'I get on well with the teacher' (3.7), followed by 'I have friends in the class' and 'my parents think the subject is important' (both with 3.6). Lowest ranked were 'I enjoy the subject' (3.5) and 'it is easy' (2.9)

Q15: Reasons why you find a subject unimportant. Your least important subject is?

The single least important subject choice was perhaps predictable, given previous responses. 40% overall (39% of boys and 42% of girls) said that, to them, Religious Education was the least important subject. 28% said Latin was least important (again, the gender split was quite even, with 29% of boys and 27% of girls selecting it). 10% of pupils decided that Music was least important and the subject was less important to boys (12%) than girls (8%). Art was a least important subject choice for 7% of pupils overall and here the gender split was weighted toward boys (10%) rather than girls (4%). Apart from Classics, (which was not a subject taken by all the respondents) the only other subjects recorded as 'least important' (and then only by 1%) were Geography, (only by girls (4%)) German and History (each chosen only by boys (2%)).

Q.16: Reasons why you find a subject unimportant and how much the reasons matter.

The rationale for a subject lacking importance reflected perceptions of its significance. 'I cannot see the relevance of it' appealed as a motivator to 51% of

pupils (more (56%) boys than (42%) girls) and 'I find the work boring' was chosen by 39% overall, (again more (44%) boys than (31%) girls). 'I will not need the knowledge later in life' proved a most compelling reason to 36% of the pupils and in this case the gender split was heavily weighted, with 56% of boys and 4% of girls finding this was the case. 'I don't like the teacher' proved a strong reason for 28% overall but more for girls (30%) than boys (27%). Just over a fifth (22%) cited 'I have no talent for the subject' as a most important reason for the subject being unimportant and within this, 27% of boys and 15% of girls concurred. Parental influence mattered to 21%, who found 'my parents don't find the subject important' a reason that mattered most of all. Of these, the gender balance was fairly even, with 22% of boys and 19% of girls saying so. Influence from teachers was marked, but less so with16% saying that 'other teachers find the subject unimportant' a valid reason for its low esteem. Again, there was a fair gender balance, with 17% of boys and 15% of girls finding this to be so. 13% decided 'I find the subject stressful' to be a good reason and more boys (15%) than girls (12%) found this. 'The work is too hard' as a reason for it being unimportant appealed to 7% overall, (7% boys and 8% girls). The mean scores showed that the perception of the subject as unnecessary came out highest; 'I will not need the knowledge later in life' (4.2) was ranked highest, followed by 'I cannot see the relevance of it' (4.1). 'I find the work boring' (3.6) came next, followed by 'I have no talent for it' (3.1), 'my parents don't find the subject important' (3.0), 'I don't like the teacher' (3.0), 'I find the subject boring' (2.9), 'the work is too hard' (2.7) and 'other teachers find the subject unimportant' (2.5).

Q17: Changes over time –this year. What are your top three favourite subjects this year?

Games was the first choice for 33% of pupils overall. Within this figure, 29% of boys and 38% of girls chose this as their clear favourite subject during the year. Design Technology and Science were both ranked next, each being selected as first choices by 15% of the pupils. Design Technology showed more of a male bias, as it was selected as a favourite by 20% of the boys and 8% of the girls, whilst Science showed more of a female bias, being selected by 10% of the boys and 23% of the girls.

Q18: Changes over time –this year. The reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects this year?

When Pupils were asked if they had changed their favourite three subjects since last year, 52% overall said they had. The gender split here was such that 49% of boys and 58% of girls said that they had altered their choices. In giving reasons as to why they had changed their favourite subjects during the year, a fairly even split was evident, with 20% saying it was because the work had changed, 20% saying it was because the subject was either new or split and 20% saying it was because they felt that they were better at the subject. 17% cited a change in teacher as a reason, 14% said it was because the work had become more interesting and 9% couldn't articulate a specific reason for their change. The gender split showed that 25% of boys found that a change in work moved them to alter choices and 20% changed because of a different teacher. For the girls, 27% found that a split or new subject was influential, and 27% found that self-improvement had prompted a change.

Q 19: Changes over time –this year. What are your top three important subjects this year?

Overall Maths was first choice for 48% of the pupils, English was first choice for 22% and Science was first choice for 13%. The gender splits showed that for Maths there was a male leaning, where 51% of boys thought it most important whilst 42% of girls did. For English, the gender weighting was similarly placed as 24% of boys and 19% of girls chose this as a first choice. Science was weighted the other way, in favour of the girls, where it was selected by 10% of boys and19% of girls.

Q 20: Changes over time –this year. The reasons for changing your top three important subjects this year?

The majority of children said that they had not changed their important subjects since last year, with only 22% overall claiming to have done so. More boys (27%) than girls (15%) said they had done so. Of those that had changed their important subjects, 'it is a new or split subject' was a reason for 47% of children (46% of boys and 50% of girls). 'The subject has changed' was a motivator for 27% of children (27% of boys and 25% of girls) and 'the work has

changed' prompted 13% to change (only boys (18%)). 7% cited 'being better' as a reason (only girls (25%)), and 7% could not give a reason (boys only (10%)).

Q 21: Changes over time –next year. What are likely to be your top three favourite subjects next year?

Looking forward, choices were required for favourite subject in the coming year. Games was seen as the first choice favourite of 33% of pupils, Design Technology was first choice of 13% of pupils and Science was first choice of 12% of pupils. The gender split for these predictions was weighted toward boys in the instance of Games, where 37% of boys and 27% of girls chose it as a first choice. The gender balance was also weighted towards boys, but more so, in the case of Design Technology, where 17% of boys and 8% of girls chose it as a first choice. In the case of Science, the balance was weighted the other way, towards the girls, as 10% of boys and 15% of girls chose this subject as a first choice in the coming year.

Q 22: Changes over time –next year. The reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects next year?

28% of the children predicted that they would change their favourite subjects in the coming year. The gender balance was weighted towards girls, (30%) rather than boys (27%). Of those that thought that there would be a change, 26% overall (27% of boys and 25% of girls) thought 'the subject has changed' was a good reason for changing a choice of favourite subject. The same proportion thought 'I am better' was a good reason. 21% thought 'the teacher has changed' a good reason (27% of boys and 13% of girls). 5% thought that 'the work has changed' would be a good reason (boys only (10%)). 21% overall could not specify a reason for changing (38% of girls and 9% of boys).

Q 23: Changes over time –next year. What are likely to be your top three important subjects next year?

In their prediction for the important subjects for the coming year, 31% of the pupils overall (made up of 35% of girls and 29% of boys) decided that English would be their top subject, 25% (made up of 32% of boys and 15% of girls)

thought that Maths would be their top choice and 12% overall (15% of girls and 10% of boys) elected Science as a most important subject.

Q 24: Changes over time –next year. The reasons for changing your top three most important subjects next year?

19% of the pupils thought that they would change their choice of important subjects in the coming year. The gender balance in this choice was male weighted, with 22% of boys and 15% of girls seeing it as likely. Of those that had predicted a change, 46% overall (made up of 75% of girls and 33% of boys) saw it being 'useful for the future' as a most compelling reason. 23% overall (25% of girls and 22% of boys) decided that 'the subject will change' was a compelling reason and15% of pupils (boys only (22%)) said they would adjust their choices because 'the work will get harder'. 15% overall could not give a specific reason for changing their important subjects in the coming year.

Q 25: Anxiety or stress –this year. What has made you most anxious or stressed this year?

This was an open question. Pupils' responses were grouped according to their nearest related comments. Overall 37% cited a 'specific subject' as causing anxiety or stress this year. Within this figure the gender weighting was inclined towards the boys (42%) rather than the girls (31%). Overall, 25% cited 'tests and/or exams' as being a cause of stress. More girls (35%) than boys (20%) felt this to be the case. 'Workload and/or prep' was cited by 13% overall and 12% of boys and 15% of girls identified this as an effect. 4% thought that a specific teacher had caused problems, and here the gender split had 5% of boys and 4% of girls saying this was the case. Finally, 1% (and this 4% of girls only) referred to 'social issues' and 1% (and this 2% of boys only) cited 'don't know' as causes of anxiety during the year.

Q 26: Anxiety or stress –next year. What do you think will cause you most anxiety or stress next year?

This was an open question. Pupils' responses were grouped according to their nearest related comments. In predicting the causes of anxiety in the coming year, 'tests and/or exams' were cited as a cause by 27% of pupils overall, but within this the gender balance was weighted towards the girls (38%), rather than

boys (20%). 'Specific subject' as a cause of stress was referred to by 21% of pupils overall. More girls (24%) than boys (21%) were concerned by this. 'Workload and/or prep' were predicted to be causes of anxiety by 9% of the pupils. Here the boys (5%) were not as concerned as were the girls (15%). A 'specific teacher' was thought likely to be a problem for 3% of the pupils, and these were all boys (5%). 19% overall did not know specifically what would cause them stress in the coming year (24% of boys and 12% of girls).

Q 27: Thinking ahead –subjects and GCSE choices. If you had a completely free choice of GCSE subjects, what would you choose?

From the range of subjects on offer, the highest placed subjects in the ' I will definitely choose this' category was Science with 51% of pupils opting for it. Maths was second, with 43% and English was next with 36%. The gender split in these choices showed an overall female bias, where 41% of boys and 65% of girls said that they would definitely choose Science, 39% of boys and 50% of girls said they would definitely select Maths, and 24% of boys and 54% of girls said they would definitely choose English. At the other end of the spectrum, dominant choices in the 'I will definitely not chose this' category were topped by Religious Education, with 40% saying that it was not an option. Latin was next with 34% and Classics next with 32%. The gender split was weighted towards the boys for Religious Education, where 43% of boys and 34% of girls said they would definitely not choose it. In Latin it was the reverse, with 28% of boys and 42% of girls. Similarly in Classics, where 30% of boys and 34% of girls said they would not elect to take the subject. The mean calculation for the choices of subjects ranked Science and Maths (both with 3.9) first, followed by English (3.4) and Design Technology (3.1). The bottom three choices were ranked as Classics (1.2), Spanish (1.5) and Religious Education (1.7).

The interview data

The data collected via the interviews was collated and grouped under the principal headings suggested by the research questions, i.e., what was perceived as enjoyable and important, and to what degree, and what influences were brought to bear upon these perceptions. Under these main topic headings there arose further separate and discrete headings which were prompted by the format

of the interview or which arose subsequently as a result of transcription data collation.

The biggest event that affected the pupils at this particular juncture in their school lives was the prospect of transition, at the end of Year 8, to senior school, and this impinged more upon their thinking than anything else. Reflecting on where they were in the hierarchy of school life gave some the opportunity to appreciate the journey that had made:

> …when you get to this age you forget how it was and how much fun you had…you're always wanting to be in the next year and when you get to this stage you could just wish you were in the classroom playing with…like tissue paper...(girl D, Year 8)

and to appreciate too the responsibilities that they were currently enjoying:

> …now that you are monitors and everything it gives you a chance to like run the school a bit more, and some juniors will come up to you and listen to you more...(boy C, Year 8)

and:

> …when we first started we were like 'oh we're top of the school'...and now it's...good cos I like being head of House and looking after all the little ones...(girl C, Year 8)

The passage of time and the maturing process brought with it a feeling of inevitability about the end of things:

> …when I came in (Year 4) this school used to be…wow!…like the biggest thing in the world and it was completely posh or whatever…and it was completely… wow!…and everything and it was completely…really sort of adult and everything…really old and then now I'm in (Y8) it sort of seems like…primary school and it looks to me like it is a young school...(boy D, Year 8)

For some, the move would not come soon enough:

> …like, I keep telling my parents I'm getting so bored with it now, you know, five years…not really outgrown it as outlived it, it's like, I've done this and I'm not really doing much, just sat there, you know, getting through the day...(boy B, Year 8)

The corollary of this was an excitement mixed with nervousness about the future. Senior school was not exactly an unknown quantity, sited as it was less than one hundred metres away. As well as some pupils having siblings there, some pupils were taught by staff that also taught in senior school, and some pupils attended

lessons in classrooms sited there. But knowing about it and being there were two different things. Nervousness was apparent through, for instance, a lack of familiarity with the geography:

> …I'm a bit nervous…it's just…really big…I don't know my way around it or anything...(boy A, Year 8)

and:

> …it looks very big, I mean, this school is quite big but then you look at them and they've got so many different buildings and you must have…like…a lesson in each building. It must get quite confusing…cos you don't know what it is really like, you're sort of guessing...(boy C, Year 8)

There was, too, a feeling that the regime was about to change and become more serious:

> …it just seem sort of…like it'll be different and bigger…maybe slightly harder work...(boy E, Year 8)

The experience of seeing older pupils at work was providing a perception of grown-up activity:

> …when I was going around it just looked scary and you'd see people in classes doing A levels or whatever they were doing and there'd be like four people there and it just…looks really hard and you're kind of by yourself and you can't sit next to one another...(girl B, Year 8)

combined with which, there were the new teachers to get used to:

> …it'll take you a while to know what the teachers are really like, cos you might go in there, sometimes you can tell, but they might be totally different than what you expect...(boy C, Year 8)

.

and:

> …it worries me not knowing the teachers...(girl A, Year 8)

and, for others:

> …it doesn't worry that they're unknown and everything…it would worry me if they were absolutely rubbish teachers when you get up there...(boy D, Year 8)

Although, a fresh batch of teachers did provide the chance to look afresh at subjects:

> …that'll give you a chance to reconsider if you decide what you are gonna do for GCSE…or you like the teacher…might as well give something else a try ...(girl E, Year 8)

The general feeling though was one of looking forward eagerly to a regime that would provide one thing that was perceived to be lacking in junior school:

> …I'm looking forward to having a bit more freedom and...to...getting a common room and stuff like that...(girl C, Year 8)

and:

> …I'm really excited about going to (senior school), I really want to get there, it's so much more, like, freedom, like…you can go into (the locality) at break times or you've got your common room. It's much more involved around Houses than classes…which I think is quite good...(boy B, Year 8)

and:

> …I think the importance goes up because you're not in the middle school; you're in the top school. I think you get more leeway, I think you get more freedom up there because you can use mobile phones and you get common rooms and everything...(girl A, Year 8)

Having friends along, though, was an important element in the equation:

> …it's all very well starting a new school but I mean…this way we are going with our friends…and I know quite a lot about (senior school) cos of what people say about it and…I looked around it a few days ago...It looks quite good…but I don't know how well I'd do if I didn't have…like…my friends already...(girl D, Year 8)

as was the familiarity provided by existing links through families:

> …because the thing is with (senior school) and everything…I feel so sort of settled and we know loads of people…and we know…like…mum and dad go rowing in the (rowing club) and …and it's just we are settled and everything...(boy D, Year 8)

Enjoyment

School appeared to be, for most pupils, a positive, rewarding and wholly familiar experience:

> …I just think it's my school, it's where I've spent most of my days at the moment…it's like a second home really...(boy B, Year 8)

The rationale for enjoyment of the school experience was, as expected, more to do with friendships than anything else:

> …being with your friends...(boy C, Year 8)

because:

> …if you're around people you like it's good fun...(boy B, Year 8)

and:

> …having fun really…(boy E, Year 8)

There was an appreciation of the importance of friends in school as discrete from friendships away from school:

> …you don't realise how integrated and everything you are with your friends and with your class and everything until you've spent time on holiday and: 'God, it'll be nice to see so and so'...(boy D, Year 8)

The value of those friendships impinged heavily on the perception and appreciation of the school experience:

> …I like (junior school) but that's because…if I didn't have a good group if friends I wouldn't like (it)...(girl D, Year 8)

A perception of the value of schoolwork and the 'official' reasons for being at school were there, but friendships still weighed heavily in the balance:

> …being with friends and all that…some people like work, but, um…I think that people count a bit more...(girl A, Year 8)

There was also something of an appreciation of the specific gains that were to be had from friendships and association with a peer group:

> …learning…but not just about subjects…but learning about...people and...how people live together and things like that...(boy E, Year 8)

In terms of subjects, there was a clear perception about the difference between the serious subjects and those that did not matter as much. A definite divide existed between the core subjects of Maths, English and Science, and the less demanding subjects such as Games and Design and Technology:

> …the less important ones would be Games…PE…I mean they're good fun…I enjoy Games and PE but to be honest I'm not going to hold the world record at long jump...so um…Art and DT…in a way the interesting thing is they're the more enjoyable ones yet the less important ones...(boy D, Year 8)

A subject that was perceived as having a more laid back, less rigid environment could therefore be enjoyed, because the work was seen as being more fun:

> …in DT you have loads of fun because (it's) laid back, you can't have fun in Chemistry and Physics and Biology cos (teacher)…he's really strict...(girl A, Year 8)

The perception of classwork as being boring, repetitive or routine was often the reason for a lesson or a subject being seen as less enjoyable:

> …some stuff's more fun…stuff like…Maths and History are boring…in Maths you just sit there and do sums and History you just read off sheets … like…DT you can do something if you want to but…like…if you don't do it you…there is consequences…but it's your own fault...(girl E, Year 8)

The freedom that was perceived as part and parcel of the enjoyable subjects in the spectrum extended to games and sports:

> …Games is fun because it is outside and you are mucking around with your friends and playing a game that you enjoy...(boy B, Year 8)

The perception of subjects as being either 'fun' or 'serious' was broadly accepted in the minds of pupils at this stage:

> …sports like…is fun and Maths isn't…I don't know…or maybe you just…think of saying it cos everyone does…that's maybe why…but I do prefer Games to Maths...(girl B, Year 8)

Enjoyment, then, could be seen as a motivator:

> …cos if you enjoy it loads you'll want to carry on doing it...(boy B, Year 8)

One perception of what constituted an enjoyable lesson (or otherwise) was coloured largely by the relationship with the teacher running the class. At this stage in the pupils' school experience, the responsibility for much of what transpired was put squarely at the feet of the person at the front desk:

> …I like RE a bit more now I don't have (male teacher H)...(boy C, Year 8)

Pupils did have clear perceptions of the effects that teachers generally had on their experiences of school and were able to recognise the extremes:

> …some teachers can get very, very uptight and stressed or whatever and other teachers can be completely laid back…(boy D, Year 8)

and:

> …when the teachers are nice it is better but sometimes you get teachers who are not very nice...(boy C, Year 8)

and:

> …some teachers are more fun and make you understand the subjects better and stuff and some are just generally easier...(girl B, Year 8)

Those adults perceived of as bad teachers were widely for their failure to deliver what was seen as fair:

> …I used to like Maths last year now I hate it…last year I hated DT now I like it…last year I had (female teacher X) for Maths, now I have (male teacher Y) and I hate him…he's just so mean…he doesn't make a laugh out of it…the last day of term everyone was cooking or playing bingo and he gave us a test…he gave us a test on the last day...(girl A, Year 8)

although the reasons for being labelled as a bad teacher were not always to do with teaching, per se, but perhaps were poor personality traits:

> …probably (male teacher H)…he shouts at you all the time...(boy B, Year 8)

Those thought of as bad teachers, for whatever reason, meant trouble, and particularly trouble for pupils:

> …in some subjects it does depend a lot on the teacher…cos...if you get a bad teacher you kind of dread it...and think about…you'll get into trouble all the time...(girl D, Year 8)

The effects of a poor relationship or a perception of failure in that regard could be quite long-lasting:

> …when I was in Year 6 I hated (subject x)...I was terrified of it…I struggled to do the work and I had (male teacher S), yeah? As soon as I got into Year 7 I had (male teacher B), and it all seemed to click into place you know? cos (he) is much more laid back than (male teacher S) and it became so: 'oh I get you', stuff like that, but, err, yeah, so I was terrified of going into school on Friday morning...(boy B, Year 8)

The lot of teachers was not set in stone. Even for those considered as moderate or good teachers, a fall from grace was always a distinct possibility:

> …if I do a piece of work which I think is good and they give me a bad grade I can change my opinion about them completely…I think 'I don't understand it'…(girl D, Year 8)

In defining what it was that encompassed their enjoyment of subjects, pupils were clear that the degree of practicality experienced during the lesson was an important factor:

> …sort of...practical...but not cross country sort of…I mean jumping…sawing…whatever…sort of thing…but when you're sitting behind a desk writing for forty solid minutes or whatever is not as enjoyable as it would be playing badminton or something...(boy D, Year 8)

And, although it was not always easily defined, there was a definite sense that it was not really like proper work:

> …I quite like practical things and Games and…sometimes in lessons you can do loads of work and don't really do anything other than that…lots of writing is not as enjoyable…in Games you don't actually have to think about what you're doing as much…it's just sort of natural…you still have to think...like…rugby and things…how you're going to do things…and it's very quick to understand…you don't actually have to think and write things down…about what you're doing...(boy E, Year 8)

This sense of practicality was perhaps always best exemplified in pupils' minds by the perception of games and sports:

> …I love hockey…I love playing sport and…it's just you get to be out in the fresh air and running about rather than sat in the class room...(girl C, Year 8)

but this was not always the case; there was a perception that even within the academic lessons, practicality or the lack of it defined a subject's enjoyment:

> …some are really slow…like…Geography's quite slow because we talk a lot about…sort of…maps, and we look at maps and do stuff…but in something like Maths, it's quite quick…you're given a page and you do it and when you've finished that you're given another page and you do it and you know, not much hands on and talking...(boy B, Year 8)

A particular difficulty with the perception of the three disciplines of Biology, Chemistry and Physics, that made up the science subjects was perhaps the notion that they were important and difficult, but that they were also in parts practical; something of a dilemma:

> …I'd do Biology if it was important but I'd do Chemistry for the fun factor…cos I just like doing experiments…I think you enjoy projects more and not specific work...(girl A, Year 8)

Of the three disciplines, Chemistry, in fact seemed to provide the greatest opportunity for practicality:

> …like, we're not just doing stuff with Bunsen burners all the time or learning how to light a Bunsen burner without having your arm blown off, but now we're sort of blowing things up deliberately instead of accidentally...so yeah, it's quite a lot different...(boy B, Year 8)

One of the factors that impinged heavily on the perception of enjoyment about a subject, or indeed the teacher, was the sense of boredom that sometimes ensued:

> …in Physics it's really boring now cos we have (female teacher J) now and we do a lot of writing...(boy E, Year 8)

and:

> …Latin is very boring…cos all you do is translate something...(girl C, Year 8)

The danger of suffering through boredom was evident even in those subject areas considered as more practical:

> …Music is one of those things that does depend on the teacher and it does depend on what you're doing cos you could make Music downright boring…you could be sitting there with a pen and paper and they're making you write out loads of music that you don't really have a clue about...(boy D, Year 8)

To some degree, the enjoyment of a subject was coloured also by the way work was done in the lessons. Too much writing was seen as making life difficult:

> …some things make you work harder and some things mean that you have to put more effort…not effort in a way…but you have to work harder like for instance…I dunno…some lessons you have to do lots of writing…I mean for me…I'll do pretty much anything…I enjoy most lessons…but for some people who don't like writing so much some subjects can be less good...(boy D, Year 8)

Enjoying something was affected too by the degree of talent that the pupils perceived that they had for a subject. Being good at something was also seen as a valid reason for pursuing it for GCSE:

> …if you find something you're good at and you enjoy it, you should carry on with that as well...(boy B, Year 8)

In some cases the rationale for enjoying a subject was very straightforward:

> …Art, because I am quite good at it...(boy C, Year 8)

as was the reverse:

> …I hate Art, cos I can't draw...(girl A, Year 8)

A lack of talent meant that the effort was pointless, as the reward was not forthcoming:

> …I used to try hard at DT…I don't any more…I did in (Year 4) like but I don't any more…I just don't really feel the need to…I just don't think I'm very good at it at all…I'm not crafty…or arty…(girl E, Year 8)

and not being able to do something, particularly not as well as others who were seen to be talented, made the leap seem impossible:

> ...I can't read music and that makes it hard, and like you get lost on a keyboard...like there's the (boys) who go off and do this big thing and there's me just going like that and I'm blooming lost...I can't play anything...(girl A, Year 8)

As well as having a talent for something, there was also the perception of creativity that pervaded some subjects. Creativity was seen to be something that could be indulged in, perhaps in spite of a lack of talent; creativity was something that was allowed to happen:

> ...I like English especially creative writing...writing stories...I like making up stories...(girl C, Year 8)

and:

> ...I didn't used to like History very much but now I like that a lot more...we're doing more interesting things...it's a lot more creative...(boy A, Year 8)

Despite the acceptance that the environment was similar to other classes, there was a feeling that the creative subjects allowed a different approach:

> ...because you're not in a classroom, well, you are in a classroom but not like you've got to write in books and everything like that...like in DT and Art ...you can do what you want to do, you have your own leeway, you can choose which design to do and everything like that...you can't choose in Chemistry and Physics...(girl A, Year 8)

Importance

The perception of importance was sometimes multi-faceted, and was often mixed up with what the pupils saw themselves as being good at, or what they liked doing; it was sometimes perceived in a slightly 'Rumsfeldian' way as:

> ...one of those things that you know but you don't know...there's what's important to you and what's important to everything...there's what you like and there's what you think is important and I don't really have an important...I have what I like...(girl E, Year 8)

Important subjects could not be let go easily, like those that were simply enjoyable or fun:

> ...if you really find something important you've got to carry on with it...(boy B, Year 8)

There was the strong perception in the minds of the pupils of an intrinsic link between what was seen to be hard work and its importance; if it hurt it must be doing good:

> …you have to work lots so if they're important you have to work hard and you feel yourself that you have to work hard and because...if say Maths for instance…as I say you have a double lesson…that's eighty minutes you can be writing sums out…doing this algebra whatever…and that's not that enjoyable…it's quite boring…it's hard work…unpleasant for some people who find Maths really hard…but in later life Maths is one of the most important things you can do…whatever you do basically you're gonna need Maths...(boy D, Year 8)

School itself was important, but not for the obvious reasons of attending to get an education. It was strongly thought that a high degree of importance attached to the same things that made school enjoyable; friends:

> …having fun, cos you're still young...enjoying the lessons...(girl A, Year 8)

and:

> …(friends) are important…although I've said before that they weren't compared to…like…education…well they're kind of important in a different kind of way…you've got to have a social life...(girl B, Year 8)

There was too, a strong sense that being at school was important because it gave the opportunity to foster good relationships with others, and to practice the necessary:

> …social skills, you know, when you're with your friends you learn to socialise and be more human, sort of thing, you learn manners and that...(boy B, Year 8)

and:

> …being able to socialise with other people who have the same interests as you…it's quite a good place to meet people...(girl E, Year 8)

and:

> …we, like, learn…well...we make mistakes and we learn from them…and also like…teachers guide you in the right…as well as, like, lessons…how to be polite and…manners…and teach you to...get along with people socially…cos when you're older you've not got someone to tell you what to do, so I think that the thing that is important is, like, learning what's right and what is wrong, basically, like, to get along with people and to make friends and to socialise...(girl C, Year 8)

To some pupils, the importance of school was more starkly defined:

> ...so later on in life you don't have to be a dustbin person or working in MacDonald's...(girl B, Year 8)

Within the school, and its educational structure, the various subjects were perceived as important, or otherwise, according to the value they gave the pupils. The immediacy of a move to senior school, and the concomitant tests which were being sat to determine setting for the coming year provided some focus:

> ...all the subjects have become really important if you see what I mean...like...not...like...as in what we were talking about before, but important for (senior school)...(girl B, Year 8)

The subjects that provided a focus in the minds of the pupils were English, Maths and Science and a very persuasive argument was put forward for their importance. Sometimes, it was simply a given:

> ...the more important ones for me are probably gonna be like...obviously English...Maths...Sciences...(boy D, Year 8)

and sometimes the reasons were couched in terms that reflected perceptions about the value of those subjects in the world of work:

> ...cos English, Maths and Science are needed for most jobs anywhere...(girl C, Year 8)

and:

> ...when you're doing Maths, it is important because there's loads of jobs...like...if you are doing anything with money, or, you know, a lot of things involve Maths...literature, cos there's no point in going for a job if you can't read or write...basic Science is important because a lot of jobs involve some sort of science, whether it be hands on work, or if you're talking to other people...(boy B, Year 8)

But the main thread in the argument was always led by Maths; this was seen as the prime ingredient in education, and the one that was required above all others:

> ...you need Maths because if you're gonna go anywhere you need to be able to do Maths...(girl A, Year 8)

and:

> ...well you'd use that every day...(boy E, Year 8)

and:

> ...I want to carry on with... try and get good at Maths...so...widen the opportunities for jobs and things...(boy A, Year 8)

In addition, but in a secondary position:

> ...English is quite important I guess…cos…like…it just is…it's like our language for a start…I think everyone will speak it soon...(girl E, Year 8)

Science was rationalised as important, not so much in the general sense of 'being useful' for jobs, but interestingly, it was perceived of as more useful in a familiar setting to these pupils because:

> …sometimes you need it…like, Biology; you're gonna have kids, they're gonna need: 'oh where is the sternum?'...(girl A, Year 8)

so, science:

> …can be useful in later life for other things, like, if maybe you have children and they have homework and it may be Science…(boy B, Year 8)

English Maths and Science subjects were set apart from the others because:

> …you need them in the future more than others; like you don't really need RE…like Maths you need it really every day, like you need a good mark in it for a job, to get a decent job...(boy C, Year 8)

The larger picture showed that, in the minds of these pupils, their main concentration was being applied to those subject areas where their effort would be seen to have a payoff in exams:

> …we have to try in the most important things...I wouldn't really revise as much for different subjects I didn't think were as important…but I try my hardest in those things that I really did need the good marks in…you think to yourself: 'I'm not very good at this, why should I have to…' well, not…like…stop doing it, but you shouldn't have to...(girl D, Year 8)

and this occurred even in what were seen as more peripheral subjects, which:

> …do matter, to get good marks, but you don't really need them, like RE, you don't really need that in the future...(boy C, Year 8)

The perception of a subject's lack of importance was often due to its not being seen as useful for anything in the future; if it was useful then it was only because it had a specific and limited use; Religious Education, for instance, was often cited as being least important because:

> …I don't really wanna be a priest or...well...like if you're going to be a teacher and you like…need to understand...(girl B, Year 8)

and a similar rationalisation was effected for other subjects seen as peripheral:

> ...I don't think really History is very necessary...I mean to a certain extent you need to know stuff...it's not like everyone's going to walk up to you and say: 'Oh...when did Guy Fawkes do this, and where did he go to school and where did he live?'...because in life...I mean...I do like Art...but...when you grow up you're not going to need Art as much as things like Maths and English grammar...(girl D, Year 8)

Even Games and Physical Education, whilst thought of as some of the most enjoyable subjects and activities encountered, could be easily dismissed as unimportant in the great scheme of things:

> ...you might need a degree in fitness, or fitness education, or something like that, or if you're going to be a teacher or something, or in the army or something, you need to be quite fit...but...otherwise...professionally you don't need it...(boy B, Year 8)

Although still at junior school, the prospect of impending GCSE choices the following year was impinging on perceptions about the importance or otherwise of subjects:

> ...I give a damn even less about Geography now, cos I know that I'm not going to do that for GCSE at all...(boy D, Year 8)

There was, too, a perception of an institutional hierarchy of subjects, where, it was assumed that the relative values of subjects was judged similarly by the school:

> ...your headmasters and everything, they don't really think that DT and Art are important, cos they're not really, if you're gonna be a DT teacher, fine...but they're not really gonna help you in later life are they?...(girl A, Year 8)

The hierarchy of importance of subjects was evident, but as well as it mattering how the subjects were perceived, it also mattered how the teachers of those subjects were perceived:

> ...some of the staff aren't very nice that teach the important subjects...(boy C, Year 8)

Influences

The influences that were brought to bear on pupils' perceptions of these different aspects of school life were myriad and complex. An important influence was stress or anxiety; pupils were subject to stresses at various points during their time at school, and some could be considered as 'pinch points' where a feeling of anxiety or stress would quickly arise and just as rapidly dissipate after the event (such as examinations). In general, there were some areas though, where stress

appeared to be more consistently felt. One of these seemed to be peer pressure to perform well:

> …in Maths I'm in set one and it's quite hard to keep with the top…I can do it but it just takes me a bit of time...(girl C, Year 8)

and:

> …I got a 3 this year in French and some people got a 1 and it's pressure cos you want to keep up with the ones at the top so you don't get dropped...(girl C, Year 8)

and:

> …it depends how competitive people are…in things like sport…sometimes you really want to be in a team so you don't enjoy sport as much…but in certain subjects you need someone to compare against or else you never know if you're good or bad...(girl D, Year 8)

and:

> …we've only got one lesson a week of Biology and everyone else has got two, and…like…last year, we got really behind. So your (boy friends) and everyone else, they do great on the tests, and (girl friend) is so bright…God…so annoys me when she gets a 1…I got a 4…it makes me feel like I'm not good enough…if you…get a 4 or a 5 you still feel like you're not good enough...(girl A, Year 8)

There was also a sense in some subjects that the teachers were putting the pupils under pressure simply because of the sheer quantity of work that had to be got through:

> …they go: 'oh we have to get through this' and: 'were getting behind' and: 'we have to get going'...(boy C, Year 8)

and:

> …sometimes…you think: 'oh no, it's going to take forever and I've only got half an hour', and that's annoying and you try and explain that you've got more to do and that you, you know, can't do any more...(boy B, Year 8)

The work itself was seen as pressured and relentless at times, particularly in those subjects where the perception was that it mattered:

> …and you've got to try really, really hard so it's not as laid back as it was before…you just feel under pressure because of all the things that you've got to do really well…so you've got to try harder...(girl B, Year 8)

and:

> …when you're doing Maths or something…you know, you just do this, this and this…and it's very dull and you think: 'but I don't get it', and you try and ask for help and it's…sort of like…you're told to just get on with it…so it's not easy...(boy B, Year 8)

The corollary of this was the lack of stress that was perceived in other subject areas. These would often be considered relatively stress free because:

> …when you're more laid back and you're talking, that's far less stressful, and you're having a bit of a laugh...(boy B, Year 8)

or because:

> …sometimes we don't have to go through certain things, like we might have to finish a project but there's no mega rush...(boy C, Year 8)

or because:

> …there's no pressure on you doing anything…there's no tests…there's no nothing…it's just easy, laid back work, and it's not even like work…like I mean with DT you can be doing a few sketches of what you're doing and it is nice work…it's fun work…and children love practical work…I love practical work…it's fun…sawing wood or whatever…it's fun...(boy D, Year 8)

Within the organisation itself, the influence of teachers, for both good and bad, was marked. A good many of the important or significant events in pupils' school lives appeared to be influenced by the actions or behaviour of the teachers that they came into contact with each day:

> …I think the teacher is the biggest influence of all…because if you have a good teacher and…you can spot a good teacher…good teachers are not the nastiest…they're not the people who are the nicest…they're the people who are the best teachers…and…I think that if you are too horrible to your pupils or whatever…I think that also does turn people off certain subjects...(boy D, Year 8)

As positive influences, teachers could be counted on to provide excellent examples of how things could be done well, even if they were also seen to be strict:

> …(male teacher, S), I thought he was you know, really strict, but when you're in a lesson he just makes you laugh all the time, and slams rulers down on the table and makes you jump...(girl A, Year 8)

Engendering a sense of fun, making work interesting and relevant were positive characteristics:

> …the teacher pupil relationship, I think it's important that you get along with the teacher and also that the teacher makes it more interesting…(male teacher, S), he's funny…he makes the lesson go really quickly cos it's…he makes it more interesting...(girl C, Year 8)

There was an appreciation of the talents and specialisms of teachers, particularly where more than one subject was taught:

> …(female teacher, W)…she can't teach (subject A) but she's a damn good (subject B) teacher and I've had a very good French teacher that's why I like French and I'm gonna do well at French and the same with Latin I am gonna do Latin…I like the teacher and it works...(boy D, Year 8)

A bad teacher was recognised as being a strong influence, too, but in the other direction. The implications of failure could be far-reaching:

> …with (subject C) it's just…(female teacher)…she can't teach…I probably won't do (subject C) because of (her)…cos…(subject C)… just…I haven't been taught well at all…and…um…you need to be taught well for the first year when you start (subject C)...(boy D, Year 8)

and:

> …if I have (teacher X) for (subject D) I'd get mum to change schools…I hate him that much…or I'd change sets…or I'd purposely do bad so that I could get out of that set...(girl A, Year 8)

but, in the minds of the pupils, one of the worst things that a teacher could do was to be perceived as lazy:

> …ask any (Year 8)…probably any (Year 7)…and possibly (Year 6)…and they could all tell you which is the laziest teachers...(boy D, Year 8)

There was an expectation that teachers ought to be fair in their dealings with pupils:

> …they have to…like…listen to what you're saying…cos…(female teacher, S)…when you put up your hand she goes: 'no, put your hand down' cos once you put up your hand apparently you switch off from what they're saying but they (pupils) haven't usually…so if they don't listen I don't think that is very good...(girl E, Year 8)

and this was true even of the teachers from 'up there':

> …like we have this teacher for (subject D) and he's from the senior school and he tends to try to make us behave, I think he's always taught seniors and he's not used to young people, he tends to hold people back for all trivial things...(boy C, Year 8)

and teachers who were not perceived as being consistent or fair could expect to have support withdrawn:

> …(female teacher, G), I've changed because, um, last year I got on with her but now I don't think I am because…I think I've deserved…I spent ages on the coursework, and I got 33 out of 60 and I was gutted, cos I spent so much work on that ...(girl A, Year 8)

There was a general feeling that teachers were positive and encouraging for the most part, and were, even at this stage, promoting the perception of successful GCSE study as a reasonable achievement:

> …(female teacher, W), who takes us for (subject C) is always going on about GCSE and A levels, and apparently we're doing GCSE stuff now, and they're supposed to be really easy in (subject C)...(boy B, Year 8)

and:

> …she just talked about them all the time…how all of us could get a 'C' in GCSE any day...(boy E, Year 8)

and:

> … I mean some of our teachers were saying last year we could get a 'C' at GCSE now...(boy D, Year 8)

There was a sense too, that different teachers required different tactics; it was a case of knowing what you could get away with:

> …I work differently…in (subject E)…but that's because I've got (female teacher W) wrapped around my finger…you can spin (her) a yarn and she'll get talking for ages…cos…like…with (female teacher S) you had to work really hard...(boy D, Year 8)

But teachers were not wholly infallible; younger siblings sometimes had a perception that they were indeed following in their older brother's or sister's footsteps, and were not always sure that they could live up to expectations:

> …like (male teacher L)…he's always thinking I'm amazing at (subject F) cos my brother could do it really well and yet I'm not as good as him…I got a 2 last year…and he was like: 'a 2?' cos he was comparing me with my brother…like he was expecting something out of me which I can't...(girl B, Year 8)

Probably the greatest influence on the pupils' perceptions was the family. In some cases, this might be directly influenced by a parent's own experience of the school:

> …cos my dad went there, and he knows them outside of school, I know a lot of the Games teachers…I mean, a lot of them know my dad and they know me through my dad...(boy B, Year 8)

There was always a sense that the family, both in the shape of the parents, but also the siblings (more especially the older ones) provided a dominant influence on thinking and direction. This was not always overt pressure or influence; it could be sometimes very subtly indeed. The involvement was, for the most part, accepted as well meaning, and a natural part of the process:

> … it's just what my parents do and think that influences me quite a lot...(boy B, Year 8)

For some pupils, the involvement of a non-working parent –usually the mother- was evident:

> …my mum doesn't do jobs…but she does push me along a lot and she helps...(girl C, Year 8)

And the influence was sometimes being applied in a more subtle way:

> …my mum keeps saying: 'oh if I had my chance again'…and she wouldn't let me quit the viola for ages...(girl E, Year 8)

The pupils' perception that some subjects were more important than others seemed to reflect some strong influences from parents, although it was sometimes very low key:

> …I just talk to my parents about their choice …my dad's very into…kind of Maths...(boy A, Year 8)

And sometimes the influence was more direct:

> …my parents say that you should…like…concentrate in English, Maths and Science, cos they tell me that's important, so I think that it's important...(girl C, Year 8)

Sometimes the news of a parent's feeling about a subject's value did not accord wit popular wisdom:

> …my mum told me I need Maths for anything, which kind of upset me...(girl E, Year 8)

And sometimes parents' views of the importance of a subject engendered a corresponding expectation of performance. Subjects were important:

> …cos your parents tell you they are…and they're like: 'you've got to do well in it'…so on Sciences and Maths it's coming from my mum and dad… like you'd get: 'why haven't you got good grades in that one?'...(girl B, Year 8)

The antithesis of the 'importance' issue was that there were subjects that parents did not see as being so crucial. Given that positive influences were felt about subjects, it would be difficult to ignore negative influences about subjects as well:

> …they don't care about Music...(boy A, Year 8)

and:

> …Geography…it's a nutty subject…it's just colouring in…my mum thinks it's a nutty subject as well...(boy D, Year 8)

a situation compounded if perceptions about the subject were bound up with feelings towards the teacher:

> …some teachers my mum hates…she thinks RE is useless...(girl A, Year 8)

GCSE subject choices were, at this stage, perhaps slightly less influenced generally by parental involvement, at least on the face of it. The pupils' responses showed that, if they had considered their choices with their parents, then there was either a fairly benign approach:

> …I mean, sometimes my dad asks me what I'm thinking of doing, and I've thought: 'maybe I'll do this or do that', otherwise they don't sort of go on about it...(boy B, Year 8)

Or a desire to wait:

> … I said, when I got back home from open day: 'I've decided what I'm gong to do', and she just switched off then, she goes: 'it's in three years, leave it'...(girl A, Year 8)

but, in the day-to-day monitoring of schoolwork, there was always the expectation that good grades would, and should, be achieved:

> …I told my mum that I got a 5 and she went berserk, and I told her I got a 4 and she really hit the roof...(girl A, Year 8)

Especially if the spectre at the feast was the ubiquitous 'clever sibling':

> …my parents will expect good grades…and I know my brother's going to get good grades cos he's too clever...and…it's like…I'm not as clever as he is...(girl B, Year 8)

Parental influence was evident when pupils' discussed their ideas about the future, beyond school. There was a clear interest in what they might be likely to want to do later on. Sometimes this was perceived as a pressure:

> …cos my parents…like...they're always asking me now…they're like…really pushing me...they're not…like…*telling* me, but they want me to do something good…like, if I said I wanted to be something…and it wasn't, kind of, up to what they'd want me to be, then they'd tell me that…they'd want me to do something else…they want me to do something good…not be…like…a hairdresser…it's like: 'I'm paying so much for you to come to this school'...(girl B, Year 8)

but not in all cases:

> …well I sometimes talk about it with my mum and dad…we sort of discuss it...(boy E, Year 8)

There seemed to be more clear influence about what not to do; the experience of parental occupations seemed to serve as a disincentive in those areas:

> …I don't want to be a teacher or anything like my mum...(girl E, Year 8)

and:

> …we talk about school and things but, my dad, he's in the RAF, and I don't want to do anything like that...(boy C, Year 8)

a perception that was sometimes influenced by the parents themselves:

> ...and my dad (Armed Forces) doesn't want me and my brother to go to the Army...(girl E, Year 8)

and:

> …my dad (medical profession) is really against me going into medicine…he hates it …and he just doesn't like the way that everything works...(girl B, Year 8)

The influence of older siblings –those that attended the senior school already- was something that marked the passage of a number of the pupils:

> …well my brother went there.… and some people talk about what Houses they will be in and that...(boy E, Year 8)

and:

> …my sister…she tells me that at (senior school) it's quite hard…the work seems…from what my sister's doing…she gets loads of work every night…I'm a bit worried about that…I've heard a lot of it...tears and stress (because of) the work and…Orders and stuff…she's quite good actually,

she gets a lot of good effort grades but cos she's in top set she gets 5s and 4s (and) she's a very dramatic person...(girl C, Year 8)

For those without siblings, the influence was second-hand; they gained as much as they could through contact with the siblings of friends and acquaintances:

...well I don't know a lot about it so those people who might have a brother or a sister there will tend to tell you a lot and you think: 'mmm but is it true?'...(boy C, Year 8)

Even those with siblings would, in some cases, defer to the views of others, taking advice from:

...my friends, and...like...what they've said about their sisters and brothers...I don't really listen to my brother...I don't care what he says...(girl B, Year 8)

During their conversations, pupils gave some evidence of the various social groupings that they perceived within their peer group:

...there are different groups...I think it's people who aren't that good at Music tend to be people who are good at sport...and the people who are good at Music tend to be the people who aren't so good at sport...but I mean, some of the people who are good at Music are really snotty about the people they hang around with...but they have to hang around with them because there's no-one else who will accept them in a way...everyone who doesn't fit in tends to go with the geeks...and I think they're at the bottom of the food chain...there's, sort of, three groups of what people do at lunchtime...one group...the geeks...will go and play tig or whatever...another group...which is like the middle group...will go and play handball ...and the top group will go and play rugby or bulldog or whatever...and the trouble is, that people always try and get in with that top group and they look up to them...why the hell should they look up to them...what have they done to enhance your life or anything?...(boy D, Year 8)

The influence of the peer group on pupils' perceptions appeared to be greater in some respects than in others. For most pupils the enjoyment of school was certainly coloured by the degree to which good friendships were fostered within peer groups:

...we don't really say anything...serious...like...we say: 'oh we're gonna live together in a mansion' and stuff...but sometimes me and (girl friend) discuss about...cos I want to be a criminal lawyer and then I'll ask her what she wants to be and she'll go: 'oh I want to be a criminal lawyer as well'...(girl B, Year 8)

There was a sense that, although the friendships that were established were strong and very important, a good deal of what passed between them was perceived as frivolous:

> …we talk about soaps all the time it's so ridiculous all the time…it's so stupid…some of the stuff that we talk about…and we're a very silly lot...(girl E, Year 8)

Whilst a good deal of store was put by friendships and their importance in the day to day life of school, and in the seeking of information about the next school, particularly in feeling secure about getting into Houses together:

> …I know what I'm going to and that's quite (good)…so…I'm probably going to the same (House) as (girl friend) and we're like best friends...(girl E, Year 8)

and:

> …I'm going up with (girl friend)…her brother's already there so we've got more chance of getting into (specific House)...(girl A, Year 8)

There appeared to be something of a strong individualistic streak in the characters of the pupils:

> …I don't just copy my friends I just think that's stupid...(boy B, Year 8)

This may have had something to do with the strong competitive culture that was part of the institution; it seemed that competing and striving to achieve a better result or place than ones peers was a dominant characteristic, and one which many of the pupils relished:

> ...like if we're working in a group and probably if the people are really annoying me I wouldn't like to try hard for their benefit...(girl D, Year 8)

In terms of their liking for the things that they did, the activities that they chose to pursue, a consensus seemed to be:

> …no-one sort of tells me…I just like it and that's it...(boy E, Year 8)

and:

> …I don't really like doing…(what they say)…I more…like…rely on my own, but you listen to what they have to say...(girl C, Year 8)

As far as the pursuit of academic subjects was concerned, there was also a strong desire to be an individual and to perhaps question what might be seen as accepted wisdom

> …some people say things like: 'oh you've really got to be good at this subject'…and I think…it's kind of…it's really (up to) you…if...suppose someone comes up to you and starts saying: 'you've got to be good at Geography'…it could make you think to yourself: 'but why do I have to be good at that'?...(girl D, Year 8)

As far as recognising the effect of influences that might be considered important but were outside the orbit of family and the peer group, the one factor that seemed to be common across the board was provided by the media:

> …this is gonna sound really stupid…blonde…yeah; films…TV and films...(girl B, Year 8)

and:

> …I like the programme 'Friends' and I quite want to be a comedy actress cos people say I'm funny sometimes…but I'm not. Celebrities influence people…I think (television) influences everyone really...(girl E, Year 8)

Not all influence was frivolous, however, and perceptions could be broadened in directions other than fame and celebrity:

> …some of the things you see you think: 'I'd really like to do that'…if you see other people and you wonder if you could do the same…like…I quite like the idea of being…(an) Archaeologist…because it looks quite interesting...(girl D, Year 8)

As well as evidence that reflected those influences that were brought to bear on the pupils, there was also, in their conversation, some insight into what it was that sometimes motivated them to behave in the ways that they did at school. In some cases the changes might have been brought about simply because a pupil had matured:

> …I've stopped talking a bit more and am listening a bit more...(girl C, Year 8)

and perhaps obtained more of a sense of perspective of their own capabilities:

> …I think that if I get bad marks then I think I've got to sort of buck my ideas up a bit…though I think I'm doing a lot better…than I was before...(boy A, Year 8)

or perhaps it was simply the case that effort had to be put in, in order to get anything out of the exercise, whatever that was:

> ...like at sport I'm not really good at all...I always come last...but it's the same in any subject ...you just have to keep trying cos...if you don't put in any effort it's not really worth it...(girl D, Year 8)

As far as working hard in class and applying effort to particular subjects, for some pupils a sufficient motivator was:

> ...probably how much you enjoy it, cos if you enjoy it loads you'll want to carry on doing it...(boy B, Year 8)

For some, enjoyment was a factor alongside the perceived importance of a subject:

> ...you work at something that you enjoy and something you think you might need...unlike Latin...sorry, I hate it...(girl E, Year 8)

and:

> ...I think you should try hard at everything really but I do spend more time concentrating on...rather than RE...concentrating on English...mainly because I enjoy it more and it makes it easier for me to work harder...(girl C, Year 8)

Especially, to some, the advent of public examinations was becoming a motivating factor:

> ...you have to do it for GCSE so you have to concentrate...(girl C, Year 8)

although, motivation was not always heightened by worries about the difficulty of work, sometimes quite the opposite:

> ...you're doing really hard work and everything and then I thought: 'I'll do rubbish at the Maths test' and it was so easy...it was so, so easy...and that was a standardised test for our school...and we're like: 'imagine what GCSE is gonna be like', and we were just laughing at that and people were saying: 'it's gonna be so easy', because we work so hard...(boy D, Year 8)

As well as the factors that had a positive motivational effect, there were those that were liable to have a de-motivating effect. One of these was the crucial relationship that existed with the teacher:

> ...I used to try hard at Maths because I knew it was important but now I just have a laugh because I know that he hates me...he hates me, and I hate him...(girl A, Year 8)

also, the prospect of not achieving a good result was liable to make the effort seem less worthwhile:

> ...if I try hard and I don't get any result it kind of puts me off a bit and then you really just want to not have to do that ...(girl D, Year 8)

The sense of competitiveness was apparent within and between the various class sets that existed. Pupil aspirations were clearly to get up into the higher sets:

> ...If you're top set you work harder and then you try...but I suppose...if you're in set two it's even better cos...then you're trying to get to set one...(girl C, Year 8)

Effort grades were, for most pupils a motivator. The three-week period of each grade gave an opportunity to maintain a measurement of position, which was most easily pursued by the ablest pupils, who were motivated by:

> ... the effort grades...cos you keep trying you hardest to get a maximum...(boy E, Year 8)

Effort grades were ranked on a scale from A to D. Rarely were D's awarded and for the ablest pupils expectations were always high:

> ...in IT...I think I've tried really hard but I only got a B in my effort grades and I tried really hard in that so...
> ***Interviewer**: A 'B' is not good?*
> ...er to me I don't think it is...but to most people it's alright...(boy E, Year 8)

The attainment grading system that existed at this level was widely reviled by the pupils, and there was a clear perception that the hierarchy that awarded grades from 1 to 5 was not reflective of their worth, especially if they were in higher sets:

> ...if you are in set one and you get a 5 you feel a bit...like...put down ...(*so, a grade*) 3 and above I would like...If I got a 4 I would be a bit...(makes a face)...(girl C, Year 8)

For the less able, there seemed to be a sense of inevitability about the system, which did not serve to motivate them as readily:

> ...you know (boy friend) and (boy friend)...they're all going to get 1's and you can pretty much tell who's gonna get the 5's...well you can't tell who's gonna get the 5's but you can see who're <u>not</u> gonna be getting the 1's...and it's not really fair on them cos they probably know it as well...and they probably don't even try cos they're gonna get a 5...(girl E, Year 8)

Even at this early stage in their school career, some pupils were aware of the qualifications required for certain careers. To aspire towards a particular career

goal was certainly a motivational tester for some. To become a vet, for instance was seen as a daunting challenge:

> ...I probably won't do it...you need loads of A stars and things...I'll never get it...you need lots more qualifications to be a vet than a human doctor don't you?...and things put me off being a vet...like...the training is five years...(boy C, Year 8)

the outcome, though, could be dependant on performance. For some, motivation alone was not enough:

> ...if I wanted to be a vet I should have to be good at sciences but then I'm not doing too well at them at the moment...so I can't really...(girl D, Year 8)

Enjoying a subject suited to a particular career was also insufficient motivation if the security provided by that career path was perceived as inadequate:

> ...I want to do Art GCSE...but...if I was an artist I'd want to be something else as well...it's the whole influence from the parents thing again...yeah...and also I feel that if you're an artist it's not...kind of...secure it's not...like...secure money and a secure life...(girl B, Year 8)

For some, there were clear motivations inspired by the promise of security and opportunity perhaps reflected in their own experiences:

> ...I was asked this question yesterday by one of the people that's gonna be...well applying for the headmasters at (senior school)...cos I was showing him round and...um...he said: 'I hear you wanna be a barrister when you're older', and I said: 'yeah yeah', and he said: 'why do you wanna be a barrister?', and I said: 'well, you get lots of money for arguing', and he said: 'but why is money important?', and I said: 'to give my children the opportunity that was given to me by my parents' work', and that is why in a way...(boy D, Year 8)

At this stage in their school careers, the pupils were aware of the prospect of public examinations to some degree; some were better informed than others. Although still in the junior school, they were clear that the GCSE course was inevitable, and coming quickly; choices would have to be made at the end of the following year. For some, the difference between the compulsory and elective subjects was not clear:

> ...I'm not really sure what things I can do...(boy E, Year 8)

but for others the choices already seemed to have been made:

> ...I've already chosen what I want to do...(girl A, Year 8)

and:

> …I think I could tell you now what I'll do for GCSE...(boy D, Year 8)

The sense of inevitability was not always encouraging and the time-scales could be made to seem relatively far away, but the impact of examinations and their possible influence was not lost:

> …I just don't really want to think about them cos they come across as really hard…everyone's always talking about them...they're so big and…but things (are) always changing…on the news and stuff like that and...you get worried about how much of an impact they make on your life…cos if you get really bad GCSE...(girl D, Year 8)

It was possible to:

> …get scared about them…you just know that they're getting closer and that like one day you'll just be by yourself...(girl B, Year 8)

This feeling of dread was, for some, ameliorated by the experiences of their own siblings who were going through exams, giving pause for thought:

> …with my brother doing it I do actually probably (think about them)...(girl E, Year 8)

or the advice and discussion which came to them, second hand:

> …all my friends seem to get it …cos they've got …like…older brothers and sisters talking about 'A stars' or whatever...(boy A, Year 8)

For those who were more proactive, the future beyond GCSE, and even beyond the confines of school had already occupied a good deal of time. In some cases, the path had been plotted very carefully:

> …I want to go to Oxford and Cambridge and do that…but I want to take a gap year and do all those things that people talk about...(boy D, Year 8)

but for others there was a reassuring vagueness about the future:

> …I don't really go into sessions where I think: 'hmm wonder what I'm going to do after school?'…sometimes I'm just doing something and my mind sort of strays and I just think about that sort of thing and what's going to happen to me in the future, but I don't really think: 'ooh, what's going to happen?'...(boy B, Year 8)

Chapter 6

Second Year Data Analysis,

What happened

As happened in the first year, this year's data was collected on two separate occasions. The first data point was June 2004, and the data was collected via questionnaire. The second data point was at the beginning of the following academic year, and data was collected by interview.

Initial questionnaire data was collected from the entire year group (Year 8) who were then in the concluding year of their time at junior school. Eighty-five children made up the year group and all but two participated in the questionnaire. The gender split was forty-nine boys and thirty-four girls. The format of the questionnaire was the same as the previous year, covering the same topics and in the same order.

The interviews were conducted in November 2004. A gender-balanced sample of five boys and five girls was selected last year. These same pupils were used for the interviews this year. Again, the interview structure was the same format as before and the questions were conducted in the same way.

How the data was collected

The data collection, via the questionnaire, took place at the end of the summer term, after the school exams. This time, the exercise was conducted using the networked school computer system rather than being paper-based, as happened last year. The format of the questionnaire was the same however, except that it appeared as an excel worksheet on the computer network.

The sample size meant that pupils had to fill the questionnaire in groups, rather than all at once. This was done by class group, over a period of two days. A class was taken from normal lessons and filled the questionnaire over a period of about forty minutes; some completed the exercise in one attempt, some completed the work during the second visit. As previously, the pupils were given assurance over anonymity and confidentiality. No other staff or pupils were present during the questionnaire filling.

Each questionnaire was identified by pupil name, so that they could retrieve it from the database at the appropriate time. To ensure confidentiality, all material was uploaded onto a shared workspace at the start of the session and

downloaded at the end of the session; this ensured that no pupil had access to any other pupil's work before, during or after the completion of the work. Because the material was addressed via the computer, there was more opportunity for inclusion of written material and comment, as the space for commentary was not limited as happened in the paper exercise.

The subsequent interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in the design office in the Art and Design building. This year, pupils participating in the research had moved on to the senior school, so a negotiated withdrawal from normal lessons was arranged. Interviews took about forty minutes.

Analysis of results.

The questionnaire data

The second year's results from the questionnaire are shown in Appendix C. The tabulated results show the overall responses for both boys and girls together. Results are also shown as a percentage of those responding (eighty-three). Mean scores are also shown, where appropriate, base on scoring Likert-type items. Where there are gender differences, these are referred to in the text, as well as in Chapter 9, which looks at longitudinal analysis of the data.

Q1: What do you want to be? What sort of work do you think that you would like to do when you leave school?

This was an open question, and, using the same format as last year, results were grouped together into the same categories as before. The choice spread was, as happened last year, far broader for boys than it was for girls. The greatest proportion (18%) of pupils (in general) expressed an interest in a medical or veterinary career, and this was a career that was far more interesting to the girls (23% of the gender group) than it was to the boys (12% of the gender group). Close behind this, art and design as a career was attractive to 18% of the pupils overall, but in this case, to far more girls (29%) than boys (6%). The third most alluring career was the law; 13% of pupils considered this, and the gender split was not so great here; slightly more girls (15%) than boys (12%) chose it. A professional interest in sports and outdoor pursuits was attractive to 7% of pupils; and all boys (14% of the gender group). A career in science and engineering was also an interest of 7% of pupils, but more boys (8%) than girls (6%). A career in

the armed forces or government service (6% of pupils) was similarly boy-weighted (8% of boys and 3% of girls). Education or research as a career choice was more gender balanced; 5% of pupils overall were interested in this, comprising 4% of boys and 6% of girls. 3% of pupils expressed an interest in a career that related to property or land including architecture or surveying, and these were all boys (6% of the gender group). A career in media or journalism was only of interest to girls (6%of the gender group, and 3% of the population overall). 2% of pupils were interested in a career that involved business administration of some sort. The gender split was 2% of boys and 3% of girls. Farming attracted 2% of pupils, and it attracted only boys (4%), as did careers in both accountancy and flying (1% of the population, and 2% of the gender group).

Q.2: Your own areas of interest outside school. What do you get up to away from school?

Looking at the 'most of all' category, 'being with friends' was the most popular activity away from school for 43% of pupils, and more so for girls (68%) than for boys (27%). 'Outdoor activities' (35%) were the second preferred activity, and here more by boys (39%) than girls (29%). The third choice was specified in the 'other' category (25%), and this included additional activities such as eating, reading, swimming, cooking, music practice and shopping. Other given choices were less appealing; the best being 'watching TV', which was indulged in by only 6% of children. The mean scores do, however tell a different story. 'Outdoor activities' (4.2) was ranked first, followed by 'being with friends' (3.9), and 'watching TV' (3.2). Although scoring zero as a 'most of all' activity, 'homework' comes next (3.1), followed by 'internet' (2.5), 'computer games' (2.4), 'construction and models' (2.1) and 'painting and drawing' (2.0).

Q.3: Your parents' or carers' occupations. What sort of work do they do?

Relevant information is described in Chapter five, which deals with the first year's data.

Q.4: Your enjoyment of school in general. How much do you like school?

The element of school most enjoyed by pupils was 'friendships', cited by 72% of respondents. The gender split was heavily weighted to the girls (91%) rather than the boys (59%). The swing was the other way for the second choice;

'sports' was chosen by 42% overall, and here the breakdown was 49% of boys and 32% of girls choosing it. The third choice fell to 'breaks and socialising' picked by 36% of pupils overall. Perhaps predictably, this was more female weighted, as it was more popular with the girls (50%) than the boys (27%). There was quite a gap before the next choice: 'outings and trips' which scored as a favourite with 15% of pupils (12% of boys and 21% of girls). This aspect was followed by 'clubs and activities', which was most appealing to 6% of pupils (more girls (9%) than boys (4%) choosing it). Educational aspects came at the bottom, with 'teachers' being most popular with 1% of pupils, and these all boys (2%). Exactly the same occurred with 'lessons'. 'Homework' scored zero. The mean data gives a very similar picture, with the place rankings being in much the same order, topped by 'friendships' (4.6), followed by 'sports' and 'breaks and socialising' (each with 4.2), 'outings and trips' (3.6), 'clubs and activities' (3.3), 'lessons' (2.7), and 'teachers' (2.6). 'Homework' scored (1.8).

Q.5: The importance of school in general. How important do you think school is?

The most important aspect of school to pupils was 'friendships' and this was chosen by 63% of pupils (63% of boys and 62% of girls). Next came 'doing your best' which was most important to 58% overall. Again, the gender breakdown was fairly even, with 57% of boys and 59% of girls choosing this. 'Lessons' was most important to 30% overall (once more, fairly evenly split with 29% of boys and 32% of girls picking it). 'Socialising' also was chosen by 30% overall (27% of boys and 35% of girls). 'Learning skills' was a more male oriented aspect. 27% overall picked it as most important, more so the boys (33%) than the girls (18%). 'Liking the teacher' came bottom, being picked by 1% of pupils as a most important aspect of school (all girls (3%)). The mean data showed that 'friendships' ranked first (4.6), followed by 'doing your best' (4.5) then 'socialising' (4.1). 'Lessons' and 'learning skills' both ranked next (4.0), and 'liking the teacher' ranked last (2.2).

Q6: Your talent and ability. How talented are you?

The subjects that pupils saw themselves as being most talented at were headed by Physical Education, picked by 23% overall, and more so by boys (29%) than girls (15%). This was closely followed by Games, chosen by 22% of pupils (24% of boys and 18% of girls). Science was a third choice (14% overall) and

again, more boys (18%) than girls (9%) chose it. Maths and English were each chosen by 13% of pupils, but Maths was a boy-weighted choice (18% of boys and 6% of girls saw themselves as most talented at it) whereas English was girl-weighted (24% choosing it, against 6% of boys). The 12% who chose French were equally weighted (12% of boys and 12% of girls). Music was very male oriented, as the 10% who saw themselves as most talented at it was made up of 14% of boys and 3% of girls. Information Technology too, was male oriented, the 8% who chose it being boys only (14%). Art, German and Spanish were each selected by 7% of pupils. Art was girl rather than boy oriented (9% against 6%), as was German (12% against 4%). Spanish was more male than female oriented (8% against 6 %), but the 6% who chose History was equally weighted at 6% each. Latin (seen as a talent hotspot by 6% of pupils) was favoured more by boys (8%) than girls (3%), as was Design Technology, where the 5% who picked it were all boys (8%). Geography and Personal, Social and Health Education were also chosen by 5% of pupils, but most geographers were boys (6%) not girls (3%). Personal, Social and Health Education showed a reverse with 6% of girls and 4% of boys choosing it. The least popular choices were Religious Education (selected by 4% of pupils) and Classics (chosen by 2% of children). Religious Education was more popular with girls than boys (6% as against 2%) as was Classics (3% as against 2%). The mean calculation for talent still shows Physical Education and Games in front (3.6) followed by Science (3.5), Spanish (3.4), Maths, English and German (3.3) and French and Information Technology (3.2). A large group follows, with History, Latin, Design Technology and Personal, Social and Health Education (3.1). The bottom ranks are held by Art and Geography (2.9) and Music (2.7).

Q 7: Your enjoyment of subjects. How much do you enjoy your work?

When considering the subjects that they enjoyed most, 67% of pupils chose Games (made up by 73% of boys and 59% of girls) followed by Design Technology, which was most enjoyed by 51% overall (55% of boys and 44% of girls). The third most enjoyed subject was Physical Education (43% overall) and this again was mostly boys (45%) rather than girls (41%). Science came next (24% overall; 27% of boys and 21% of girls chose this). At the other end of the spectrum, Religious Education was most enjoyed by 1% of pupils (and these girls only (3%)), Classics was most enjoyed by 2% of pupils (2% of boys and 3% of girls) and French was most enjoyed by 4% of pupils (4% of boys and 3% of girls).

Mean figures for enjoyment placed Games (4.5), Design Technology (4.3) and Physical Education (4.1) at the top and History (2.7), German (2.6) and Religious Education (2.5) at the bottom.

Q 8. The importance of subjects. How important do you think school subjects are?

In the minds of pupils there was a clear hierarchical subject ranking. The place for most important subject went to Maths, selected by 70% of pupils (fairly equally distributed between 69% of boys and 71% of girls). Next came English (61% overall, made up from 55% of boys and 71% of girls) and Science (29% overall, weighted towards the girls (56%) rather than the boys (37%). Personal, Social and Health Education was also selected as most important by 29% of pupils and these overwhelmingly girls (44%) not boys (18%). Games was considered most important to 23% of pupils, mostly boys (29%) rather than girls (15%). French (18% overall) was female weighted (24% of girls and 14% of boys chose it), but Physical Education (16% overall) was male weighted (18% of boys only). At the other end of the scale, Classics and Latin failed to score at all and Religious Education was chosen by 1% of pupils (all girls (3%)). Music and Art were selected by 1% also; Music only by boys (2%) and Art only by girls (3%). Design Technology was only marginally more important (to 2% of pupils, (all boys (4%)). The mean figures for a subject's importance showed the rankings to be much the same, headed by Maths, English and Science (4.6, 4.5 and 4.3), with Music placed last (2.1) behind Classics (2.2) and Religious Education (2.2).

Q 9: Reasons why you enjoy subjects. Your favourite subject is?

The single, specific, favourite subject choice had only nine selections made. Games was in first place, as the favourite of 37% of pupils overall, and more boys (47%) than girls (24%). Next came Science, (16%), favoured by more girls (21%) than boys (12%). Design Technology was the third favourite, selected by 14% overall, but by more boys (18%) than girls (9%). English (7%) was a favourite of girls (15%) rather than boys (2%), as was Art (9% overall; 9% of girls and 4% of boys). The 5% who chose History were predominantly girls (6%) rather than boys (4%), as was the case with French, where the 4% was made up only of girls (9%). The last two choices of firm favourite went to Geography (4% overall and then only boys (7%)) and Physical Education (1% overall, made up of girls only (3%).

Q 10: Reasons why you enjoy subjects and how much the reasons matter.

Following the identification of a specific favourite, this question explored the reasons why it was thought to be so. Of the reasons that mattered most, 'the way it is taught is interesting' and 'the person teaching it is interesting' were most important reasons for 37% of pupils in each case. 33% of boys and 37% of girls chose the first, and 45% of boys and 37% of girls chose the second. A third (30%) thought 'it is fun' a most important reason (37% of boys and 30% of girls thought this). 24% thought 'I have a talent for it' was a compelling reason; slightly more compelling to boys (29%) than girls (24%). 24% also chose 'it is practical/activity based' as a motivator. Here the gender balance was equal, with 24% of boys and 24% of girls choosing this. 18% found that 'there are more things to do' made them enjoy it most, with slightly more girls (18%) than boys (16%) finding this to be so. 'The atmosphere is good' appealed to 14% overall (and 14% each of boys and girls) as a most important reason, and 'it is easy' appealed to 10% of pupils, though slightly more boys (16%) than girls (10%). The mean calculation ranked 'it is fun' and 'the way it is taught is interesting' first (4.1), followed by 'the person teaching it is interesting' (3.9). Equally ranked next were: 'the atmosphere is good', 'it is practical/activity based', and 'I have a talent for it' (3.7). 'There are more things to do' was ranked next (3.5) and 'it is easy' (2.7) ranked lowest.

Q.11: Reasons why you find a subject unenjoyable. Your least favourite subject is?

The single, specific, least enjoyed subject yielded 14 selections. The least enjoyed was Religious Education, chosen by 16% of pupils overall (20% of boys and 9% of girls). Maths was the next least enjoyed subject, chosen by 11% of pupils, again more boys (12%) than girls (9%). History was least enjoyed by 10% of pupils overall, but by more girls (15%) than boys (6%). French (8% overall) was girl weighted (12%) rather than boy weighted (6%). Geography and Latin both were least enjoyed by 7% of pupils. Both were disliked more by girls than boys; Geography had a girl/boy balance of 15% to 2%, and Latin was12% to 4% in favour of girls. English was least enjoyed by 6% of the pupils. More boys (8%) than girls (3%) expressed this sentiment. German fared exactly the same. Spanish was least enjoyed by 4% of pupils (4% of boys and 3% of girls). Art and Music both were least enjoyed by only 2% of pupils. Art was only selected by boys (4%),

and Music by both boys (2%) and girls (3%). Personal, Social and Health Education, Science and Information Technology were only selected as least enjoyed by 1% of pupils; both Personal, Social and Health Education and Science were chosen only by boys (2%) and Information Technology only by girls (3%). The only subjects that did not rate a score at all were Classics, Design Technology, Games and Physical Education.

Q.12 Reasons why you find a subject unenjoyable and how much the reasons matter.

Reasons why these particular subjects were singled out as least enjoyed yielded 'I don't get on with the teacher' as the most compelling reason for the largest proportion of the pupils. 36% chose this; 35% of boys and 38% of girls. The next most important reason was' the way it is taught is not good'. This was chosen by 34% overall; 31% of boys and 38% of girls. 'It is boring' was a strongest reason for 28% of pupils failing to enjoy the lesson; here 31% of boys thought this, and so did 24% of girls. 'The work is repetitive' was selected by 27% overall, though more boys (31%) than girls (21%) found this to be the case. A smaller proportion said 'I feel stressed' was a reason (16%) and of these, 14% of boys and 18% of girls said so. 'The work is too hard' and 'there is too much work' were both elected by 14% of pupils overall; the gender breakdown was such that 10% of boys and 21% of girls thought the work was too hard and 12% of boys and 18% of girls thought there was too much of it. 10% of pupils overall said that 'I have no talent for it' was a reason; 10% of boys and 9% of girls said this. The mean data ranked 'it is boring' and 'the way it is taught is not good' in first place (3.8) followed by 'I don't get on with the teacher' (3.6). Next came 'the work is repetitive' (3.4). Equally ranked next were 'there is too much work' and 'I feel stressed' (3.2) Ranked last were 'the work is too hard' (3.1) and 'I have no talent for it' (2.9).

Q13: Reasons why you find a subject important. Your most important subject is?

In order to determine some of the reasons for a subject's perceived importance, a single, most important subject was chosen. In first place came Maths (35% overall chose this) picked by 37% of boys and 32% of girls. English (34% overall) was chosen by 37% of boys and 29% of girls. Science was placed third, chosen by 14% overall (12% of boys and 18% of girls). Personal, Social and

Health Education was placed next, chosen by 4% of pupils, again by more girls (6%) than boys (2%). Art (2% overall) was only selected by girls (6%). Physical Education, Information Technology, French and Design Technology were selected by only 1% of pupils. Classics, Games, Geography, German, History, Latin, Music, Religious Education and Spanish did not have any response at all.

Q.14: Reasons why you find a subject important and how much the reasons matter.

Why the most important subject should be considered so was looked at. From a selection of reasons, the one that mattered most of all to the highest number of pupils was 'the knowledge will be important later in my life'; 59% chose this, with more boys (67%) than girls (47%). The next most important reason was 'I'll need the knowledge for work' and this was most important to 47% of pupils (43% of boys and 53% of girls) and close behind was 'I'll need the knowledge for a particular job'; most important to 42% of pupils (45% of boys and 38% of girls. Those reasons that were important to less than a fifth of pupils included: 'I have friends in the class' (17% overall, made up from 10% of boys an 26% of girls), 'I enjoy doing the subject' (most important to 14% of pupils (16% of boys and 12% of girls)) and 'my parents think the subject is important' (chosen by 13% overall made up from 14% of boys and 12% of girls). Less than 10% of pupils thought the following reasons were most important: 'I get on with the teacher (7%), 'I am good at the subject' (6%) and 'I find the subject easy' (1%). The mean data ranked 'the knowledge will be important later in my life' and 'I'll need the knowledge for work' in first place (4.4) followed by 'I'll need the knowledge for a particular job' (4.0). 'I enjoy doing the subject' was next (3.6), followed by 'I am good at the subject' (3.1). Equal next were 'my parents' think the subject important' and 'I have friends in the class' (2.9). Finally, came 'I get on well with the teacher' (2.8) and 'I find the subject easy' (2.7)

Q15: Reasons why you find a subject unimportant. Your least important subject is?

This question was looking from the other end of the spectrum, in seeking to find out why subjects were considered unimportant. The ordering for a single, least important subject showed Religious Education to be at the top, with 33% of pupils (37% of boys and 27% of girls) placing it first. Next was Latin, where 18% overall

(and 18% each of boys and girls) placed it second. Music was third, with 16% of pupils (14% of boys and 18% of girls) choosing it. 11% considered Art next, with 10% of boys and 12% of girls placing it. Up to 5% of pupils placed the following subjects: Classics (5%), History (4%), French and Information Technology (2%), Geography, German and Spanish (1%). Not placed at all were the remaining subjects: Design Technology, English, Games, Maths, Physical Education, Personal, Social and Health Education and Science.

Q.16: Reasons why you find a subject unimportant and how much the reasons matter.

The perceptions about why subjects were unimportant showed 'I will not need the knowledge later in life' placed first, chosen by 46% of pupils (41% of boys and 49% of girls). 'I cannot see the relevance of it' was second, chosen by 36% overall (26% of boys and 43% of girls). 'I find the work boring' was third; 23% of pupils (17% of boys and 26% of girls) chose this. 16% said 'I don't like the teacher' was a reason that mattered most, and here 15% of boys and 16% of girls found this to be the case. The perception that 'other teachers find the subject unimportant' mattered most to 13% overall (9% of boys and 16% of girls). 'I have no talent for it' mattered most to 11% of pupils (12% of boys and 10% of girls) and a similar proportion (10%) said 'I find the subject stressful' was most compelling (here 12% of boys and 8% of girls agreed). In each case for 'my parents don't find the subject important' and 'the work is too hard', 7% thought this a reason that mattered most (the boy/girl split was 3% to 10% in the former and 9% to 6% in the latter). The mean data ranked 'I will not need the knowledge later in life' at the top (4.1), followed by 'I cannot see the relevance of it' (3.8) and 'I find the work boring' (3.3). Ranked equally next (2.7) were: 'I have no talent for it', 'I don't like the teacher' and 'I find the subject stressful'. Ranked equally last (2.5) were 'my parents don't find the subject important', 'the work is too hard' and 'other teachers find the subject unimportant'.

Q17: Changes over time –this year. What are your top three favourite subjects this year?

In looking at the possible changes that are made, the top three favourite subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the year gone) the best liked were Games, (39%) Design Technology (19%) and Science (15%). Here the gender

split was: for Games, 47% of boys and 26% of girls chose it, for Design Technology, 18% of boys and 21% of girls chose it, and for Science, 12% of boys and 21% of girls chose it.

Q18: Changes over time –this year. The reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects this year?

67% of pupils said they had changed their top three favourite subjects since last year. Of these, 62% of boys and 76% of girls claimed to have done so. The reasons why they had changed were deduced from an open question, and the results were grouped according to the same criteria as last year. 'The work has changed' and 'the teacher has changed' were cited as reasons by 21% of pupils in each case (each made up of 23% of boys and 19% of girls). 20% said 'it is more interesting' was a reason (17% of boys and 23% of girls said this), and 16% thought ' I am better' was a good reason (10% of boys and 23% of girls). That it was 'a split or new subject' was cited as a reason by 11% of pupils (10% of boys and 12% of girls), and 11% said that they could not give a reason (17% of boys and 4% of girls said this).

Q 19: Changes over time –this year. What are your top three important subjects this year?

In looking at the possible changes that are made, the top three most important subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the year gone) the most important were English (36%), Maths (35%) and Science (16%). Here the gender split showed: for English, 59% of boys and 29% of girls chose it, for Maths, 62% of boys and 24% of girls chose it, and for Science, 12% of boys and 26% of girls chose it.

Q 20: Changes over time –this year. The reasons for changing your top three important subjects this year?

Overall, 39% of pupils said they had changed their top three most important subjects since last year. Of these, 33% of boys and 47% of girls claimed to have done so. The reasons why they had changed were deduced from an open question, and the results were grouped according to the same criteria as last year. The main reason cited (by 47% of pupils) was 'the subject is more important' (44% of boys and 50% of girls said this. Next was 'the work has changed', chosen by

28% overall (44% of boys and 13% of girls). Having other reasons or not being sure accounted for 19% of responses (6% of boys and 31% of girls). 3% thought it was because 'I am better (6% of girls only) and 3% because 'it is a new or split subject' (6% of boys only).

Q 21: Changes over time –next year. What are likely to be your top three favourite subjects next year?

In looking ahead to next year and the possible changes that might be made, the top three favourite subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the coming year) the best liked were Games, (34%) Science (16%) and Design Technology (11%). Here the gender split was: for Games 56% of boys and 26% of girls chose it, for Science, 24% of boys and 15% of girls chose it and for Design Technology, 24% of boys and 3% of girls chose it.

Q 22: Changes over time –next year. The reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects next year?

Overall, 43% of pupils thought that they might have changed their top three favourite subjects by next year; 43% of boys and 44% of girls thought so. The main reason for changing was thought to be because 'the teacher has changed', and 53% overall (52% of boys and 53% of girls) thought this. Next 'the subject has changed' was a reason for 19% of pupils (24% of boys and 13% of girls). 11% thought 'I am better' a reason (14% of boys and 7% of girls), and 11% didn't know precisely why they might change (5% of boys and 20% of girls). 6% overall (5% of boys and 6% of girls) thought it might be because 'the work has got harder'.

Q 23: Changes over time –next year. What are likely to be your top three important subjects next year?

In looking ahead at the possible changes that might be made, the top three most important subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the coming year) the most important were Maths (36%), English (34%) and Science (14%). Here the gender split was: for Maths, 68% of boys and 21% of girls chose it, for English, 53% of boys and 29% of girls chose it, and for Science, 12% of boys and 24% of girls chose it.

Q 24: Changes over time –next year. The reasons for changing your top three most important subjects next year?

Overall, 29% thought that they might change their top three important subjects in the coming year. The reasons given were: 'it is useful for the future' (63% overall (46% of boys and 81% of girls), 'the subject will get harder' (17% of pupils (23% of boys and 9% of girls) and 'the work will get harder' (13% overall (15% of boys and 9% of girls)). 8% (all boys, (15%)) couldn't give a reason for possible changes.

Q 25: Anxiety or stress –this year. What has made you most anxious or stressed this year?

This was an open question, and responses were grouped according to the same criteria used last year. The highest cause of stress was 'tests and exams' (33% overall cited this as a reason (29% of boys and 38% of girls)). A 'specific subject' was stressful to 22% of pupils (22% of boys and 21% of girls) and 'workload/prep' was stressful for 14% of pupils (16% of boys and 12% of girls). A 'specific teacher' was cause for concern for 10% overall (10% of boys and 9% of girls) and 'social issues' were cited by 8% of pupils (6% of boys and 12% of girls).

Q 26: Anxiety or stress –next year. What do you think will cause you most anxiety or stress next year?

The main cause of anxiety in the coming year was considered to be 'tests and exams' by 29% of pupils (38% of boys and 18% of girls). The next most pressing was 'social issues', and here 28% were concerned (28% of boys and 29% of girls). 'Workload and prep' came next, a cause of stress to 22% of pupils (21% of boys and 24% of girls). 12% thought a 'specific subject' was possibly going to cause problems (11% of boys and 15% of girls) and 2% (2% of boys and 3% of girls) thought 'a specific teacher' might be stressful. 2% couldn't say exactly what might be stressful in the future, and these were girls (6%).

Q 27: Thinking ahead –subjects and GCSE choices. If you had a completely free choice of GCSE subjects, what would you choose?

Looking at the definite choices that pupil's thought that they would make for GCSE study, Maths, Science and English were placed in top position. 51% of pupils said that they would definitely study Maths, 48% said that they would

definitely study Science and 47% said that they would definitely study English. The gender split in each case was 53% of boys and 47% of girls for Maths, 45% of boys and 53% of girls for Science and 43% of boys and 53% of girls for English. French attracted 37% of pupils (35% of boys and 41% of girls) and History attracted 22% (20% of boys and 24% of girls). Both Spanish and Design Technology were chosen by 18% of pupils (14% of boys and 24% of girls for Spanish and 20% of boys and 15% of girls for Design Technology). Information Technology attracted 17% of pupils (27% of boys and 3% of girls) and both Geography and German were chosen by 16% of pupils (22% of boys and 6% of girls for Geography and 16% of boys and 15% of girls for German). Physical Education and Games were chosen by 14% of pupils (16% of boys and 12% of girls picked Physical Education and 18% of boys and 9% of girls picked Games). Art was a definite choice of 13% overall (12% of boys and 15% of girls) and Music was preferred by 12% (14% of boys and 9% of girls). 11% selected Latin (12% of boys and 9% of girls) and 10% selected Religious Education (8% of boys and 12% of girls) as a definite choice. Personal, Social and Health Education was a preference for 4% overall (2% of boys and 6% of girls) and Classics came last, as a preferred choice for 2% of pupils (2% of boys only). The mean calculation for subject choices ranked Maths and Science first (each with 3.7) followed by English (3.6) and French(3.4). History ranked next (3.0) followed equally (2.9) by Geography and Spanish. Design Technology (2.8) followed closely, then Information Technology and Physical Education (each with 2.6). Games and Latin came next (each with 2.5), followed by Art, Music and Religious Education (each with 2.4). Ranked last were Personal, Social and Health Education (2.1) and Classics (1.8).

The interview data.

The interview data was collated in the same way as in the first year. Material was transcribed and grouped according to how it fitted against the research questions, which were looking at the pupils' perceptions of the enjoyment and importance of school and its activities, as well as their perceptions about the influences that were brought to bear upon them during the year. In addition to the expected data collected under these headings, any other unforeseen issues that arose during the interviews were noted and the data grouped accordingly.

Enjoyment

The pupils were now at senior school, and had been for almost half a term. The fears and anxieties expressed about the move were now gone and the general consensus was that the experience was very positive:

> ...it's all good...I think being with friends...being in a good environment...I like everything...it's just good fun...except Geography...(boy D, Year 9)

The strength drawn from the friendship groups was evident too:

> ...my friends seem to be enjoying it as well, and that sort of make you enjoy it...(boy A, Year 9)

The perception of a much greater sense of freedom and responsibility was one that seemed to be most enduring. It was simply expressed as:

> ...it's a lot more free...to do stuff...(girl E, Year 9)

There was a feeling that the structure was more liberal:

> ...I like the, sort of...times...the flexibility...if you finish early, you can just hang about, and do what you want, and okay...come along at this time or whatever, I like that...(girl C, Year 9)

A sense had quickly developed that responsibility was now placed upon the pupil:

> ...there is no one walking round outside telling you (that) you should be inside now...it's kind of everything is your responsibility...it's your choice, I mean, if you don't do your prep...it's just your fault, and you'll just get lines or whatever for it...(boy D, Year 9)

Having just completed a period at the junior school, there was the obvious comparison with the regime that had been left behind. Being at the lower end of the school was not felt to be such a burden in Year 9:

> ...a lot of people told me that it would be really difficult (moving to senior school) but it's not...you find it very easy because...when you come to (junior school) in Year 4, it's all a very...you're at the bottom of the heap...but at (senior school) you just get treated like an adult, the same as everybody else, so you don't feel at the bottom of the heap...you just feel that you are...maybe...shorter than the sixth formers, but you're not and the bottom of any heap, or at a bottom of anything...it feels quite relaxed...(boy B, Year 9)

The hierarchical nature of the school did not seem to be so overbearing and oppressive to these new incumbents; the regime offered:

> ...a lot more freedom, definitely, cos when you get to Year 8 and you find (junior school) very restricted as to what you can and can't do...but at (senior school) it's, sort of, very open and, you know, you do what you have

> to do…you get treated a lot more like an adult (because) most people expect that once you have come from primary school, or whatever…you know basic stuff, and that you're usually…you're like a young person who is, you know, a nice person, so they treat you like a young adult, rather than an older child, which is quite a big difference, so it feels, you know, a lot better just to be able to go around, like, without hearing (a teacher) coming at you: 'what are you doing in the corridors?'…(boy B, Year 9)

The relationship with the older members of the school was clearly put into perspective:

> …you'd think the older year groups would…like…have quite a lot to do and things, but they are just…you just sort of don't really see them…well, you see them, but they don't do anything…they just ignore you, and your year group is just sort of left to get on…(boy A, Year 9)

The sense of enjoyment extended even to lessons and activities, principally:

> …probably the sport stuff...(boy E, Year 9)

but not exclusively:

> …some of the lessons are okay…I get a bit more free time…there is a lot more sport and activities as well…(boy C, Year 9)

The icing on the cake seemed to be the solace and seclusion offered by the common rooms:

> ...cos it's somewhere to be…cos at (junior school) you can walk around, and you don't really do much…whereas you got a common room, so you can just, kind of, go and do what you want, and that's fun…(girl B, Year 9)

One of the most enjoyed aspects of school was:

> …the common room…and being with friends...because our books and stuff are there and we just go and sit there...it's a bit like a lounge...we just go and sit and talk…(girl D, Year 9)

The experience brought on a feeling of munificence:

> …common rooms are the best thing ever…you need to get some down here...(girl A, Year 9)

In terms of the subjects studied and the lessons attended, those that were most enjoyed were not always those which were considered to be the less important ones. These did still figure in the minds of pupils, though; subjects such as:

> …IT and Games, because they're subjects that you just don't have to do any work…(boy D, Year 9)

It was the case that subject areas that had once seemed to be frighteningly important were now very much more enjoyable; Maths was now considered better for a variety of reasons:

> …I think the teachers' just really good…I listen, and…I sit at the front …so I, kind of, have to…(girl C, Year 9)

and:

> …probably…because it's getting harder and it's…sort of…it sounds a bit more…crucial…it's like GCSEs are coming…you've got to get this…and know this…because you're only going to do it once…(girl D, Year 9)

The sciences were enjoyed in the usual variety of ways. Physics was seen as more stimulating because the pupils were:

> …doing more exciting topics…I think that (before) it was sort of like teaching us the basics and now we are developing that…(boy A, Year 9)

and Chemistry was seen as:

> …better…it's easier...well, it was just, like, things on separation we had done in (Year 7) but we're, like, moving on, cos you know the basics…it's easier to grasp it…now were going on to atomic structure…that is quite hard…(boy C, Year 9)

Biology, although a popular lesson, was suffering because of the increase in lesson times:

> … last year, we had, like, two Physics, and two Chemistry , but we had only one Biology , and now we have three Biology…it's awful…(girl B, Year 9)

The rationale for disliking a subject was still complex, and especially useful if it could be blamed on Maths:

> … I'm not particularly liking Physics, because Physics is Maths…(girl A, Year 9)

For some pupils, the move to senior school seemed to have allowed them to address the work in a different way, something that affected even GCSE considerations:

> …I know I'm going to take Geography (because)…just the work…I didn't seem to understand it, but now…going up there... it suddenly all clicked…(girl A, Year 9)

The attitude to Geography, for some, seemed to have been transformed:

> …I used to hate Geography and now I like it and I'll do it when I like it…(girl D, Year 9)

And the type of work being undertaken appeared to have a large impact on the popularity of the subject:

> …it's just, sort of, doing more interesting topics...like, we're doing Bangladesh in Geography…I'm not sure about the point of learning about Bangladesh really, but it seems more interesting…(boy A, Year 9)

The teacher, and the type of work, then, now being done in subjects, seemed to have a good deal of sway on pupil perceptions. History, for instance:

> …can be quite fun sometimes, if you're doing the right topic…(boy A, Year 9)

and:

> … the teacher's actually nice…and the stuff we are, like, studying is better…(boy C, Year 9)

The move to a more grown up environment had engendered in some pupils, almost a sense of awe about the possibilities:

> …I quite like the Art…cos you see all these fantastic pieces of art and you think you're never going to do anything that good…(girl D, Year 9)

There seemed to be a feeling, generally, that, compared to what had gone before, the world of school was opening up more and learning had taken a new direction:

> …in (junior school) it was very set and certain, and you know, you had to keep to a guideline…but now, you can explore new areas...(boy B, Year 9)

The positive effect of teachers was an area that heavily influenced perceptions in the junior school. There was still a feeling that teachers as a species had a lot to answer for, in the minds of pupils; their place was key in the lives of pupils:

> …it depends on the teacher and the subject…and I think the key of enjoyment, and where do you take interest, and everything in the subject is the teacher…and I think your first teachers are the key people, because it's just…if you had a really good teacher...for whatever subject, I think if you weren't that skilled at it and wouldn't have liked it otherwise...you could still go on and enjoy it and everything…it really does depend on the teacher, I think…(boy D, Year 9)

In terms of the effect that a 'nice' teacher had on perceptions of a subject, the role of the teacher in the senior school was little different. Having a sense of humour, for instance, was seen as crucial:

> …I like Geography, because (female teacher H) is quite nice…she's really funny…(girl E, Year 9)

and:

> …I quite like Maths, because I've got quite a good teacher…he's quite funny…(boy A, Year 9)

and:

> …RE is fun…I like that best…it's great…I asked him a question yesterday and it took him about twenty minutes…he was going:, 'but no, but no , you're wrong'...he's funny…(girl E, Year 9)

even after a wobbly start:

> …Classics…I'm liking more…(because of) the teacher…he was a bit weird at first but he is all right now…(girl A, Year 9)

Teachers who made the subject interesting were highly thought of by pupils.

Subjects were seen to be interesting by virtue of the humour injected into the work:

> …(male teacher H), who I had last year was very good, because he sets you interesting questions, which were like: 'if', you know, 'somebody kicked a ball at 63 miles per hour, and it hits the goalie in the head, and he goes flying backwards at 13 miles an hour, blah blah blah...', you would just laugh at it and…but you would try and work it out with interest…(boy B, Year 9)

The level of discussion and debate and were also significant imperatives to engagement:

> …I actually find RE quite interesting at the moment, cos we've got (male teacher D) and he teaches really well, and makes it interesting…and he talks more…(and) it's a bit harder, because you listen more and you take it all in…to understand other people's views…I think it's quite important…(girl B, Year 9)

How teachers were seen in a supporting role was also a significant factor. It was a good deal easier to relate to an individual who was perceived as caring:

> …this year…I have (female teacher W)... she's my tutor as well…it's quite nice, cos she knows me, so it, sort of...she understands…she…like…talks to me if she thinks I'm not doing well…(girl D, Year 9)

Teaching in a more relaxed way, with less stress placed on getting though topics seemed to be appreciated:

> …once you have got over the pleasantries and stuff, you just get straight on with the work...it's not difficult...you look at it and you think, 'God, that's impossible', you know, you'll never do it…you know, but the teachers, or

> whatever, just talk it through in a relaxed way, you know: 'if you don't understand it, it doesn't matter, we'll go over it again', sort of thing, but you just get it straight away, because of the way it's put forward...(boy B, Year 9)

There was also a sense of the effect that teachers could have, long term:

> ...if I had (female teacher H) who is now my (subject A) teacher, for (subject A) in (junior school), I reckon I might be doing (subject A) for GCSE...(boy D, Year 9)

The obvious corollary of good teachers, and the effects that they had, was what were seen as bad teachers and the perceptions that pupils had of them:

> ...I don't like (subject B) much...because we have (male teacher D)...(boy D, Year 9)

For some pupils, the relationships with new teachers seemed to have started less that satisfactorily because:

> ...the teacher's terrible...evil...(male teacher B) was fine, but (female teacher T)...she is such a freak...I hate (subject C) as well (because) my teacher's horrible...he gave me a '4C' for leaning back in my chair...(boy C, Year 9)

How poor teachers were perceived often had to do with how they were seen relative to other teachers:

> ...he is really so rigid , I mean, you can't have an adult conversation with him...and you're not allowed to get out of your seat in class, even to ask for a rubber, you know...you have to ask...and nobody likes that, people would like to just get up and get something and then sit down and use it and take it back. He's just very tight about everything, whereas other classes, you get out, get something, sit down, and the teachers don't mind, just as long as you're not getting up and dancing around in a merry jig...(boy B, Year 9)

For some, the relationship changed depending on the circumstances:

> ...I am scared of (male teacher E)...he's like a goblin...well, I'm not scared of him when he has us for, like, (subject D), but when we are (doing sporting activity)...I am scared of him...(girl E, Year 9)

What made lessons in certain subjects fail dismally, or work successfully, was sometimes perceived as something to do with how the labour was approached. A positive reaction was always gained from those subject areas where the activities were practical:

> ...the reason that I like the Maths and Science and stuff is lots of practical things, because you're doing things...and in Maths you do games as well,

which are different, and then there's things where you've got to think all the time, where you can't just sort of sit along for a bit…you're kept awake…(boy E, Year 9)

Conversely, boredom was a factor in many subjects, perceived as being the result of repetitious or un-stimulating work; for some English was:

…a bit boring really...it's what format it takes…cos, if you're writing all the time it's gonna be boring…but, if you're doing different things, and it changes, it's not so bad…(boy E, Year 9)

The teacher was thought to bear a good deal of responsibility for a subject's appeal:

… the teacher helps, cos, some subjects are really, like, boring cos of the way that they are taught…(boy A, Year 9)

and:

…I don't find (Religious Education and Music) interesting…I don't really see the point of it…and the teacher is a bit boring as well…(boy A, Year 9)

and:

…I couldn't stand (subject E), because he just made it seem so boring and uninteresting and difficult…(boy B, Year 9)

The inevitable comparisons were often drawn between the more exciting practical activities and the more mundane rote learning:

…if it is boring I just can't be bothered…I just look out of the window if the lesson is not interesting...like, if we're just reciting verbs. Like, today in Chemistry we did a really good lesson…we were in the lecture theatre and we were like blowing up potassium and stuff, so that was quite fun...but if we doing something like in German…God…German...I just stare out the window…(girl E, Year 9)

Even within the sciences, comparisons were drawn between the more appealing work and what was perceived as humdrum:

…I like the bits that aren't boring…I don't like Physics, cos that's all boring…but the bits in Biology are fun and interesting and, like, okay to listen to, but other bits you kind of switch off…well the bits that are kind of fun…you get to do lots of practical, which is fun, whereas just sitting and listening for ages is absolutely boring…(girl B, Year 9)

The degree to which a pupil saw themselves as talented in a particular subject was a factor that had some bearing on how much it was enjoyed, and perceiving

oneself as being good at something had an effect on the forthcoming GCSE choices:

> ...it's after Christmas, we decide (GCSEs)...but I don't know...I know we have to do certain ones that...I know I'm going to do Art, because I'm useless at DT...if I am good at a subject , then I will try hard, then if I'm not very good, then, I just sort of...I don't really try...(girl D, Year 9)

and, apart from being talented at something, simply being involved creatively was a factor in the enjoyment of a subject:

> ...I'm enjoying DT, cos we've been making these pod things...(boy B, Year 9)

Importance

The things that were perceived as being most important in the minds of these pupils, in the everyday world of school were still their friendships:

> ...I still think the friendships that you make...really, you should make the most of them...(girl C, Year 9)

and:

> ...I think it is important to, like, get along with your friends and things...getting on with your friends, I think matters, cos that affects how you work I think...as well...(boy A, Year 9)

There was still a sense that socialisation and the interaction between one person and another was seen as being very important in the great scheme of things:

> ...learning manners, is a kind of thing I think that is more important...is even more important than the teaching...because obviously teaching is a very close second and everything...but that ethos...that learning about life and manners and everything is just gonna be there for the whole of your life and you are going to need...well, not necessarily need it, but it is a great foundation for everything...(boy D, Year 9)

There was also a sense that enjoying life and having fun was important too:

> ...doing well, enjoying it...having fun...(girl A, Year 9)

Especially with the prospect of more serious work on the horizon:

> ...having good fun...I need to have fun before I...like...get into coursework...(girl E, Year 9)

and:

> ...have fun really, and enjoy it while it lasts...(boy E, Year 9)

The acknowledgement that working was also an important consideration, was sometimes offered with a caveat:

> …learning is the most important, but it's not the most fun…(boy A, Year 9)

The importance of work was emphasised at this point, by the imminence of GCSE subject choices and the subsequent public examinations:

> …I think I know now that I'm getting towards GCSEs…I think learning is quite important…(girl C, Year 9)

and:

> …work is very important because I've got GCSEs and stuff…(boy B, Year 9)

In terms of the importance of subjects, there was a feeling that:

> …everything I have to do just seems quite important , because…I know I have to carry on with it, so I might as well try and enjoy it and stuff…(girl E, Year 9)

But the primary consideration was given to the three core subjects of Maths, English and Science. The rationale for this was sometimes simply a given:

> …because they just, are you know, they're just…English…Maths…Science …(boy D, Year 9)

But GCSE was part of the equation:

> …you've got to do those, like, they are set for GCSE, which means that they are kind of important, and they are the most important…cos they just are…they're things that you need…(girl B, Year 9)

and:

> …there's GCSEs and everything…it's your core subjects, so you must do well and everything like that…(girl A, Year 9)

Looking at the three subjects separately, questions were asked about why these were considered so important. As far as Maths was concerned, the priority that it was given was sometimes simply part of the accepted wisdom:

> …Maths, well, you'll definitely need that…(boy A, Year 9)

or because:

> …it's going to be useful…sort of thing…(boy E, Year 9)

and sometimes because it was seen as being important for work:

...because, you know, loads of jobs...involve Maths...(boy B, Year 9)

The importance could sometimes be explained more eloquently:

...Maths is one of the staples of life, it's where all the theories come from...I mean, if Maths didn't exist, then you wouldn't be able to have that filing cabinet, because they wouldn't have been able to work out the theories of...I mean, everyday life...you use Maths all the time, you go to buy a CD and you buy some sweets, and you think : 'have I got enough money to go to the cinema later?' or whatever...(boy D, Year 9)

Particularly for the girls in the group, there was less of an unreserved acceptance of the overwhelming importance of Maths:

...I don't think you need Maths...I don't mind doing badly at Maths...(girl B, Year 9)

or a qualified acceptance:

...you need to be able to add up don't you? But I don't see why we need to learn algebra...(girl A, Year 9)

The importance of English, as a subject, was seen by many of the pupils as being another important and necessary part of the requirement for success later on:

...I think you need English in your life...and...you'll need it for your jobs and everything like that...(girl A, Year 9)

and:

...you need English cos...if you want to be something, like, a...well if you get loads of paperwork you've got to be good at English...(girl B, Year 9)

Although sometimes there were more erudite observations:

...because it is the language of our country...we have spoken it for hundreds of years, and it's not just, say, learning how to speak, it's a, kind of, understanding of text...it's the reading...people should be able to communicate...people should be able to expand their vocabulary...people should want to learn about the works of Shakespeare and Dickens...I mean, we had some of the best authors of history...(boy D, Year 9)

and, like Maths, the subject was accepted as important:

...even though I don't really like it...(boy E, Year 9)

The Science discipline was, for some pupils, accepted as important because it was a given:

...I have been told it's important...(girl B, Year 9)

In general terms, there was a sense that, being educated in the ways of science gave pupils some general knowledge that would prove useful at some point later on, although it was fine to pick and chose:

> …Science is sort of important…just a general knowledge…it's useful to have, cos, like, you don't really need to know stuff like, what happens if you chuck potassium into a bowl of milk, you know, but, um, you do need to know certain little things like, you know, in Biology, you need to know how plants work or something, cos that useful, cos you'll probably use it sometime…it depends what jobs you want really…(boy B, Year 9)

although the reasons for learning about specific disciplines could still be pinned down. Chemistry, for instance was important:

> …so we know what around us , so we know about our atmosphere, so we know what's on this earth, as well as us…and that kind of thing, the minerals and such forth…(boy D, Year 9)

and Biology was important because:

> …so we know what we are, actually, so we know, if we put stuff in us - depending on what we put in- it is going to be good or bad for us… (boy D, Year 9)

Although not necessarily seen as important for the world of work, or as a useful skill in a specific job, Physics as a discipline had positive connotations, particularly in the minds of boys, either because it fitted neatly against another subject:

> …because, well…Physics is like Maths, really…Physics is Maths, basically…(boy D, Year 9)

or because it had obvious practical considerations:

> …Physics is pretty useful, but…for when you are doing sport as well…rowing and rugby when you are catching a ball…you can, like, thinking of where it will end up…(boy E, Year 9)

For some, particularly girls, Physics did not have the allure that other sciences had. Not needing to do well in Physics could be rationalised as being due to not desiring a career in the subject:

> …I don't think you need to do well in Physics…I'm not going to be a physicist…I don't see why I have to do well in it…(girl A, Year 9)

For some pupils, although not the majority, other subjects than the principals mentioned above were considered important, provided there were practical reasons for this:

> ...like, for Geography, you'll need to know how to read a map when you're older...(boy A, Year 9)

Enjoying a subject was not always enough to make it important. Elevating a subject's status and therefore importance, to some, required that a specific need was established for the subject:

> ...I like Art , but I don't think it's important...well , unless you want to be something arty...(girl B, Year 9)

or, that there was some understanding of its usefulness:

> ...German, I don't think I'll go there...and...things that I enjoy but are not necessarily useful things, like...History isn't really that useful...past a certain level...(boy E, Year 9)

The imminence of GCSE choices had, by this stage, made most of the pupils think hard about the subjects that they were going to carry on with, and those that they were going to drop. There was a tendency to question more openly the value of subjects:

> ...when we ask a question like: 'why is this useful in real life?' when we're doing about Pythagoras, we get: 'if you're a builder, blah blah blah'...and why is Latin useful?...(girl E, Year 9)

Latin was a subject that, for most pupils, was placed far down the list of priorities.

Consequently, it was already being sidelined:

> ...because I can't be bothered, because I'm not going to do it for GCSE...(girl C, Year 9)

and:

> ...today I had Latin , and I had a test, nobody was worried, because nobody is doing Latin after this year so there is no point, um, unless you are going to be ace at languages like Spanish or German or French. Nobody is going to do Latin...I'm not going to use Latin, like, ever again so I don't really see the point in it...(boy B, Year 9)

and:

> ...I'm doing, like, the most I can in the things that are going to be setted for next year and stuff, but with things that I'm not going to carry on next year...like Latin, I don't really care how I do in that...(girl B, Year 9)

Decisions were being made about other subjects that would be dropped, and which were already being sidelined:

> ...things I'm going to drop are...like...Music...DT...probably Art and stuff like that...because...I don't do anything in Music anyway...or DT...(girl E, Year 9)

The subject that caused the most consternation was probably Religious Education. This was disliked principally because it was a subject that was compulsory at GCSE, but it was perceived as a subject that was not useful in that it did not provide a benefit later on in life:

> ...you're not going to need to know (Religious Education) when you're older, are you...(boy A, Year 9)

unless a particular career path was going to be followed.

> ...I just think what is needed in a job really, and unless I'm gonna be a vicar or something...I don't really need RE...(girl C, Year 9)

and, even then, to compound it's perceived lack of worth:

> ...it's a bit unfair...because how are we going to need RE unless we want to be priests?...and, you don't even need to do it to be a priest...(girl E, Year 9)

There was an acceptance that the subject had become more important in the minds of pupils, if, for no other reason, than simply:

> ...because we have to do it for GCSE...(last year) it didn't really matter, but now (it does)...cos you start your GCSE course in third form...(boy C, Year 9)

and:

> ...you have to do it for GCSE, but I'm not going to do it after that, because, I mean, you really only need that if you are doing Theology, or whatever...(boy B, Year 9)

Even for those who were wiling to make allowances for the subject's place in the great scheme of things, the acceptance of the status quo was not easy:

> ...I really can understand you need a basic knowledge, a very basic knowledge...some people...I mean, more than half the people in our class don't believe in God...more than three quarters of our class are definitely not Christians, and I just think that it's really not what people need to learn...I just don't think it is that useful. We are never, never going to use it later in life, unless you become a Bishop. But then, you can have a choice to do RE and that's fine, if you like religion, if you want to do this, or if you think you might become a Bishop later in life, but it is really pointless...I

> have nothing at all against RE, it's the fact that they are making one hundred and twenty kids do RE when there are probably about one hundred and ten , who are not going to carry on, I mean, I actually like the other side of RE, I like the…what's it called…Philosophy…I think that's really interesting, but we don't do that for GCSE…I mean, that side of it is useful…if you could just do a Philosophy GCSE, rather than an RE GCSE, I'm sure a hell of a lot more people would do it because Philosophy is far more interesting than RE… there are so many pointless essays I have written this term about RE…I mean, who cares what the Toronto Blessing is, who really, really, cares?…(boy D, Year 9)

In the minds of pupils, there had always been those subjects that were perceived as less important, for all sorts of reasons; they might be good fun, but they did not matter. These were the 'doss' subjects, where one was allowed to rest and relax, and these were often subjects like:

> …Music, because I realise that I'm, like, a musician…it would, kind of, be like a doss thing…apparently, Music GCSE is supposed to be like the equivalent of Grade 5 theory…it's not that hard so, I think that would be quite easy…(boy D, Year 9)

Also, particularly for third formers, there was a message that 'dossing' was part of the scheme of things; the calm before the storm:

> …in class, I don't work as hard…everybody goes: 'it's a doss year', and it is...it's really good…we get quite a lot of prep but it's really easy…(girl E, Year 9)

These pupils were, even at this stage in their lives, prepared to think about, and look ahead into the future, beyond the here and now. How far ahead they looked depended on circumstances. To some, the anxiety brought on by the prospect of public exams left little space for anything else because:

> …too worried about GCSEs…(boy C, Year 9)

Instead of GCSE being the only significant event on the horizon, there was now a tentative link between GCSE and the next stage:

> …I think about A levels sometimes, cos…I know that I've got my GCSEs, and when I've done my GCSEs I'll probably do my A-levels anyway…because for GCSE that's, like, your first base, and once you've got that, then you work up to AS and A…(boy B, Year 9)

Having a peer group that included much older colleagues did allow pupils to observe the concluding chapter of school life first hand:

> …it's quite scary thinking though, that you're gonna move up a year, and the sixth formers who are there…they're just gonna go and do university and stuff and that's frightening…(girl D, Year 9)

The immediate future, in the shape of sixth form, did cause pupils to ponder:

> …definitely more than you did at (junior school)…it sort of…it's more looming, cos you see the sixth formers and you think: 'oh, God…they're going'…(girl D, Year 9)

and:

> …you can see them working…I don't look forward to it…I like spending time in the first year…(girl C, Year 9)

The experience of being in senior school probably instigated something of a broadening and deepening in pupils thinking about the future. To some, the picture was now too big:

> …I used to think quite far…but now I am really confused…well, I don't know what I want to do…I think it is stupid thinking about it because, well…I've thought about it and got confused…and…I don't know…I'm quite young, and to think of something so…like, faraway…it's just really confusing…it's like thinking into the future, but I like where I am now…and I don't want to think about anything else…(girl B, Year 9)

Perhaps the increased awareness of career choices, which in turn required decisions about subject choices for A level, and perhaps even GCSE was instrumental:

> …it depends what jobs you want really, so…if you want to be an engineer or anything, you know, building things, you need to have a degree in Physics, cos, you know, if you're going to be a pilot you have to have a degree in Physics, so Physics is very useful and Biology…anything to do with being a doctor or nurse, or whatever, like, you need Biology for that…so there's no point in taking a degree in Biology, if you're squeamish, because Biology is pretty much good for anything to do with medicine or botany or whatever, and a lot of it is to do with plants and animals, so if you can't stand plants and animals there is no point in studying Biology, so you really have to think about it…((boy B, Year 9)

In fact, the sequence of events that led from the immediate future through to the world of work was beginning to take on a recognisable form:

> …I think you've just got to…I suppose, after your GCSEs, you've got to decide what to do…and then, if you get the right A-levels... then, you've, sort of, got to...then there's university…I'd quite like to go to university in America…(girl D, Year 9)

The experience of now being in a school full of what were largely perceived as grown-ups had put the junior school experience into context, and consequently any comparisons drawn between the junior school and the senior school were becoming by now more marked:

> …up there (senior school) it's all: 'the exams are coming…and then you're in university…and then you have to get a job'… and down here (junior school) it's sort of: 'I want to get through Year 8 next year' and stuff…(girl D, Year 9)

and:

> …that (senior school) is a lot older; this (junior school) is a really young and junior school…(boy C, Year 9)

The perceptions of the junior school were now that:

> …everybody looks so small…that sounds really mean, but it looks smaller, and then, kind of, really far away…(girl B, Year 9)

and infantile:

> …everything seems smaller and younger and … more, kind of, primary-schoolish, and more, kind of…'happy colours, la, la, la'...(boy D, Year 9)

and was being run on more regimented lines:

> …it looks sort of…it looks like people down here are sort of in line, with numbers branded on their backs: 'you go there…and then there'…(boy A, Year 9)

The senior school, by comparison, presented a far more serious business, where:

> …you can't act as like as silly as you did in (junior school)... I remember having a really good laugh when I was here…(girl C, Year 9)

The regime now offered more freedom and responsibility:

> …we are the ones who have our books in certain places, and we are the ones that look after…like…the keys to lockers…and they give us the time …and they say: 'be at that place at that time'…or else…'do this'…and in (junior school) it was like: 'you've got sport next', so you go to sport…no-one is watching you in (senior school)…no-one is saying: 'hurry up get changed quickly'…or: 'come on, lets go to the swimming pool now'…you just sort of…you've got to go and do things on your own a lot more…(girl D, Year 9)

and:

> ...we have a lot of independence…because…for…say…the effort grades…down here, you all sat down and all got to write them...with Orders

> you've got to carry a piece of paper round, and if you miss the lesson you've got to find them...so you've got more independence...and you don't have to all line up to go to Chapel, you just drift down at half-past eight...(girl A, Year 9)

There was also a sense that the anxiety felt before the move had been assuaged somewhat by experience:

> ...I thought it would be really awful, being at the bottom, but it's not, cos you make friends with people in the years above, and they just treat you normally, they don't like treat you all funny...I was really scared before I went, because I thought, like, everyone's going to beat me up ... but they're really nice...(girl B, Year 9)

For those with older siblings, and those with friends who had older siblings, the move was even more familiar and a good deal less onerous:

> ...it's really not like moving to a new school...I mean, most of us, who went to (junior school) in Year 4 and Year 5 anyway...know (senior school) pretty much...I mean, most of us have...I mean I don't...but all my friends have sisters or brothers in (senior school) and everyone knows it anyway. It is basically, (junior school) with a twist...(boy D, Year 9)

The pupil hierarchy of senior school was perhaps easier to acclimatise to than had been thought, and the anxieties about fitting into the pecking order were perceived as being much more straightforward and positive than had been feared:

> ...you don't get treated, like, really badly by the sixth formers...you get more attention than the fourth formers...I think, cos you are new...(girl C, Year 9)

Because the older pupils had been acquaintances over the years, and for most, had been a known quantity right back in the early years of junior school, there was much more familiarity:

> ...I can remember when they were Year 8s... now I remember, I look at them, and I think, and I can remember seeing them wandering around school and telling me not to hide under the tables when the monitors come in, and...they're doing their A-levels soon, and that's just weird you know, and they're, like, they're not much older than us...that's the funny thing, isn't it, cos you think they're so much older than you, but they're not...it's only like three or four years...(girl D, Year 9)

There was, in the great scheme of things a perceived difference between the third, fourth and fifth formers, and the sixth formers; if the third formers were new, then consequently:

> …I think the fifth formers like to think they are top of the pecking order in a way…they are far more boulshy than the sixth formers, because they are top of the people who wear uniforms…(boy D, Year 9)

On the positive side, the older pupils had their uses when it came to getting to grips with work in the new regime:

> …that's really useful having the sixth formers, like, cos we've got a six former on our floor, and a couple of fifth formers, so it's really easy, you just go and ask them if you're stuck, and they go: 'oh, we did that ages ago'…(boy B, Year 9)

But a hierarchy was still a hierarchy, and however benign it was, the bottom, now, was not the same as the top had been last year:

> …I went into school really early yesterday…I was in school about ten past seven…like, super early…I hadn't had breakfast, and I was thinking of going to the boarder breakfast, and I think, if I'd still been at (junior school) I would have done, because I was top of the pile…confident…but I think it brings you a bit of…humility…it makes you more kind of humble…you feel more…small…(boy D, Year 9)

Familiarisation with the geography and the system was difficult at first:

> …it's a lot bigger, cos you get lost so easily…your first three weeks are the worst, cos some of the rooms are called, like, 'U' , and on the other side of the school, 'U1', 'U2'… too confusing…and the folders are annoying as well, cos you get the same…that grey one, like, for subjects, and if you're, like, rushing, you can pick the wrong one up so easily…(boy C, Year 9)

Much of the anxiety felt about having to relate to new and comparatively unknown teachers was also unwarranted, although having been used to recognizable faces meant that many pupils:

> …don't really walk into a lesson and see a familiar face any more. I know that some people had (male teacher L) but I don't have anyone that I had last year…they are bit more strict...(girl D, Year 9)

Much of the worry was hypothetical:

> …everyone said that it was going to be really scary…all the teachers were going to be really tight, but they're not, they're like…the teachers are kind of like the same...if you are late to a lesson or you don't do your prep, so it's cool…(girl B, Year 9)

The sheer number of staff apparent on the senior school campus was somewhat confusing:

> …there are so many more teachers up there…I think it's kind of weird, cos you don't know…it's like…is he a teacher, or is he not?…(girl C, Year 9)

and:

> …it's a bit strange, like, there's so many teachers that, if you don't have them, you don't really know who they are at all, and there's some like, you probably never have…you just don't really know who's who at all…there's probably about…ten English teachers and you probably see about three…(boy E, Year 9)

and the fact that not all the teachers taught all the pupils meant that some remained enigmatic:

> …I don't really see them much. I mean, I see them in Chapel and stuff, but you know, you will vaguely know them, but it doesn't really matter…they don't teach us…they're not very important…you just be quiet, if they come near you…(girl E, Year 9)

Consequently, the reaction that might be received from one of these unknown quantities was less easy to forecast, especially if mischief was afoot:

> …you don't often talk to them or see them…you've just got to be careful, cos you might get caught by someone that you don't have…(boy C, Year 9)

There was a general consensus though, that the good points far outweighed the bad:

> …I sort of…didn't see how it could be better, but now that you've gone up it's sort of, a lot, you know…you think: 'this is all right, I'll stay here'…(boy A, Year 9)

The influences that were perceived as having an effect on pupils' perceptions of school life were similar to the previous year. Stress and anxiety were an inevitable part of the pressure, but the move to senior school had served to remove a good deal of the anxiety expressed the previous year:

> …I don't know…it's quite a funny feeling because it's more relaxed in the way that you're not thinking: 'oh, I hope I get into (senior school)…I hope I get into the top set'…but it is…I mean…there you've got the GCSEs looming…and A-levels and stuff…and that just quite…(girl D, Year 9)

so for the moment, the biggest cause of anxiety was the prospect of GCSE examinations, making some feel much more:

> …under pressure really…cos…if your name's gonna come up...if you look at the thing with '(senior school)' all the results are there…the majority are As and Bs, you might get a few Cs...and, like, one E or something…(it is) quite encouraging…in the way that so many other people have done it…and some of the French things we do are GCSE standard anyway , and Maths…and they're not really hard…when you think of it…(boy E, Year 9)

The perception was clearly that GCSE and A levels and all such potentially grown-up elements of school were becoming more profound:

> …next year, (GCSEs) will look a lot closer…because it's, like, I know we'll have to choose our GCSEs, we will have to do our A-levels…it's, like…it's a long time before we actually do our…I mean, we have to be like eighteen…I'm not fourteen yet…(girl E, Year 9)

although the prospect was perhaps tempered by reassurance from the older hands that had been through the mill:

> …a couple of weeks ago, I was getting a bit worried about…starting my GCSEs and I'm a bit worried about that sometimes, but, I talk to, like, the fourth formers and the fifth formers, and they say: 'you'll be surprised how little stress it really is', you know:, 'yes, it's an important exam, but so is a whole load of other ones...just don't let it get you'…(boy B, Year 9)

The increase in workload was perceived as being subtle but noticeable, particularly with homework:

> …I'll always get at least…two of my preps done before I come home because I know that I'll be too tired. At (junior school) most perhaps, even though they were supposed to take twenty minutes, they don't take twenty minutes unless it's History, and it takes an hour, but in (senior school) each prep is gonna take that long, and I think they just work you a lot harder. I don't know how it is…it's just everyone after that first term was absolutely shattered they just seemed to work a lot harder. I don't know how they did it…it doesn't actually feel like you are working that much harder…and you get to the end of the day and you are knackered...(boy D, Year 9)

and the pace of work, particularly for those in the higher sets was quick:

> … I'm sitting next to the same person in quite a lot of classes, and in the top class they seem to be sort of working quite quickly, so you have to work quite hard to keep up…(boy A, Year 9)

Working to fewer but more significant deadlines seemed to be preferable, allowing more time for the establishment of better self-discipline and the development of a better work ethic:

> …the things that you do, you seem to get more time for them, cos it's not, sort of, so fast and pressured…it's like, for deadlines, you get loads more work time it seems…whether that's just cos I learnt to do work when I got the time, rather than at the last minute…(boy E, Year 9)

The teachers still provided some of the strongest influences; they had a profound effect on pupils' perceptions of a subject that might be damned because:

> …we've got a bad teacher…(girl B, Year 9)

Teaching was compared and tolerance of poor performance was tested where:

> …he drifts, and he can't teach very well, and he'll show you one way that is easy to do something, and then he'll show you another way that really confusing, and…he's just a really bad teacher. Set four are getting taught really well cos they've got a good teacher…(girl B, Year 9)

and a style that was perceived as unfair or dogmatic was not appreciated:

> …a lot of people ask (male teacher S): 'what is the point in this, that and the other?', and he says: 'because I tell you to', and that's not really an answer…(boy B, Year 9)

It was also perceived that GCSEs, which impinged upon pupils so much, had a similar effect on teachers:

> …they are bit more strict, because I think they're just worried that you won't do as well in your GCSEs…(girl D, Year 9)

A good deal of the reaction to teachers was very positive, particularly where GCSE was concerned; even right at the beginning of third form, there seemed to be plenty of encouragement given about prospects:

> …the first lesson we went to in French…well…the first lesson we went to in everything…we were told: 'you've started your GCSE course now, not next year…now…okay…thank you'. So it's the first lesson, great! But, French…it's like: 'you're all going to get A stars'…(girl B, Year 9)

and:

> …they sort of…are all trying to, umm, sort of bring us in…like: 'coursework isn't hard, you can do it'…we do, like, funny little lessons where they say: 'you know, you can do this as coursework'…I mean…Art…when our teacher is trying to tell us that we can do Art, because it's not…I mean there's not tons of coursework, and it's not difficult…she sat us down and she said to us; 'Art isn't as hard as everyone is saying'…lots of people had just…last year…had heard that, and <u>they</u> did DT…and she thinks they regret it…after doing that…and um…I just think they're trying to tell us that all the subjects aren't as hard as we make them out to be…(girl D, Year 9)

The evidence from previous years had been there for all to see, and there almost seemed to be an acceptance of consistent results at a high standard, and the reassurance about achievement of the same was embedded at an early stage:

> …when you look at the results and you see the 'As' and 'A stars' and you think: 'woah, I'm not that clever' but, um, the teachers, they really prep you for it without, sort of: 'the GCSEs are coming you're all and going to die!' Its sort of, like, you know: 'here they are, we'll do a bit of basic work, they're

not that difficult, you're all smart enough to know it', so you get treated as if: 'yeah, important exams, but you're all smart kids, and you should be fine with it'...(boy B, Year 9)

Apart from the incentives provided to perform well in the forthcoming public examinations, there was also a perception that the teachers were more willing to accept pupils as grown up:

> ...you are treated more grown-up...(and) they set you...some...like, really hard work, and you don't know what to do...and things like, you're not getting told off for leaning back on your chair, cos they think that, if you kill yourself, then that's your problem...(boy A, Year 9)

There were comparisons drawn between the old regime and the new; the teaching style in senior school was perceived as being:

> ... older...I think the only teachers (in junior school) who teach, in a way, like they do in (senior school)...are kind of (male teacher L), (female teacher R), kind of teachers...less spoon feeding...kind of, more, do it yourself... kind of thing...more, take notes...(boy D, Year 9)

As in the past, teachers were sorted into those who could be easily dealt with and those who could not:

> ...some of them are really strict...some of them are really like a bit of a pushover...then you get some that change lesson to lesson...(boy C, Year 9)

The relationship that had been established in junior school, between pupils and teachers, could, at last be broken, and a new start attempted:

> ...they are quite friendly still, and you're not on the bad side of any of them, cos, like at (junior school)...you know, if you got told off in (Year 6) really badly or something, then they still hate you...you got a reputation...but like, at (senior school) you've got a new chance to, you know...(boy B, Year 9)

Now, perhaps as a result of the common interest that both teachers and pupils had in success at GCSE:

> ...a lot of the teachers are saying how well everyone can do...(boy E, Year 9)

there seemed to be a perception of different expectations and a sense of mutuality:

> ...they all have (male teacher H)...so it's quite good that we know we've got a good teacher...but then they don't want to let him down...(girl E, Year 9)

and a greater involvement in the process:

> …like last year, (male teacher S) would say: 'do sixty laps of this, climb up that', or whatever, and this year, (male teacher J) says *why* you have to do it, and also he *shows* you your results…(boy B, Year 9)

There was still an appreciation that different teachers lent their own idiosyncratic touch to their dealings with pupils; sometimes the characteristics were deliberately apparent:

> …like, occasionally, some subject, I think it's Chemistry, I had (male teacher L), who is a bit of a wacko, cos he…rather than saying: 'don't touch that, that is hot, it will burn your fingers', he would say: 'don't touch that, your lungs will explode, you will have the most painful death imaginable', and you think: 'hmmm…'(boy B, Year 9)

and sometimes the peculiarities were simply observed:

> …some teachers are nice, but some are some are very unusual; weirder than at (junior school)...the way that they like to do things…they like to do certain things as hobbies…it's so weird…(male teacher E) likes to do experiments and (male teacher L)…likes to watch tea diffuse…(boy C, Year 9)

or endured stoically:

> ...I like (male teacher N)…but his voice makes me want to sleep…honestly… (girl E, Year 9)

Even at this early stage in their senior school careers, the positive perception of teachers, by pupils, was universal, and the benefits of the good relationships were clear to most of them. The influence of the family on pupils' perceptions was still a major one, and, for the most part, was wholly positive. Pupils accepted this because:

> …they're clever, and they know things…(girl B, Year 9)

and there was often an expectation borne of the parents' own performance and experiences of school:

> … my dad was really clever when he was at school, so he expects me to be really clever…(boy C, Year 9)

A good deal of the influence was perceived as coming through the mother; fathers were often in the background as support figures; a typical father might be seen as someone who:

> …just sort of reinforces what my mum says…(boy A, Year 9)

The relationships with parents or carers were perhaps not untypical of any family household, where adolescence and the assertion of independence meant:

> …there's a lot more shouting…(girl B, Year 9)

For the general run of the mill day-to-day schooling, parents were perceived as being good overseers of the activities in which their children were engaged:

> …they are interested in what I do, cos they always want to see what Orders I've got…(girl C, Year 9)

As was often the case, mum would be the one who:

> …gets on my case…if I forgot to hand in a piece of work…or left a file at home…cos I've got the timetable at home…she'll go into my room, check if I've got it and then text me saying: 'you have left it…you have a subject today'…(girl A, Year 9)

Although the effects of a strong matriarchal influence were felt to have paid off in some cases:

> …my mum was checking my prep last year cos she really wanted me to get in the top class, and I was actually *doing* my learning prep last year…(this year) …I started doing my homework in my bedroom, rather than, like, music on and…(boy A, Year 9)

As far as the GCSE choices were concerned, there was a sense that parents were an important factor in the decision making process. Although, for some pupils, parental influence *per se* was sometimes regarded as benign:

> …I think parents do play a big role, because at the end of the day everyone listens to their parents, but I don't think any parents in our year are going to say: 'right, you must do History, Latin and Music'…(boy D, Year 9)

there was evidence that they did have an overt influence over subject choice:

> …I would probably (take mum's advice) …I would do it, cos I would probably be too scared…I would do it because…half and half…mm…half scared and half think she was right…(girl A, Year 9)

and:

> …as long as I do everything else that they want me to do…that's important…it should be okay…(girl B, Year 9)

In some cases, the influence was subtler; forthright opinions were not expressed openly, giving more of a feeling of independence:

> …I think I can do what I like…like, mum doesn't think I should do Art…cos of the work…I'm more a sort of 'do it now' person…(girl C, Year 9)

and:

> …they seem to think I'd be, like, more good at some things than others…they seem to think, like, you might be good at Art…(girl E, Year 9)

and:

> …(mine) say: 'do whatever you want…just do whatever you want, but if you want to make money don't be an academic'…(boy D, Year 9)

True independence was less common, but when expressed, the opinion was clear:

> …I have told them to butt out…I've decided to choose what I want to do…not what they want, cos it is my life that I'm choosing…(boy C, Year 9)

Occasionally, something of a dichotomy existed between the influences derived from friends and family. A duality existed, where feelings about GCSE choices could be influenced, in terms of:

> …(enjoyment) probably by my friends, I should think…(importance), by my family…(girl B, Year 9)

There was a clear influence from the family, in some cases, with regard to the future beyond school. There was a feeling of security and trust for some, surrounding the family and its knowledge and experience:

> …I would like my dad's help anyway, because, you know, I don't really know what I want to do, I haven't thought about anything, so I would like to know what...cos my dad probably knows what most jobs…their basic requirements are…(boy B, Year 9)

but this did not extend to blind acceptance of everything; the observation of, and perceptions about, a parent's career still had the power to influence:

> …I don't want to be a lawyer…I couldn't stand it…anything where you have to sit, like, twenty-four hours a day behind a desk...cos it's, like, what my dad is…my dad is a solicitor...he doesn't work on, like, massive cases or anything, he does divorces and things with children and that…(boy B, Year 9)

Within the family, older siblings, particularly those who were at the school, were still a rich vein of experience to be tapped, as and when required. A useful sibling was crucial because:

> …he can tell me what to expect…(girl A, Year 9)

Siblings were a very useful way of motivating younger brothers or sisters to achieve:

> ...cos I've got (brother) in front of me... so I'll just be glad if I can beat him... (girl A, Year 9)

as were members of the extended family, in the shape of:

> ... my cousin...it's good that my cousin didn't do very well...so that means that I don't have to do well...I can't do worse than her...but then my brother got, like, really, really good as well...well, not good, but quite a lot better than her, so I think she's quite depressed...so I want to do...in between there...I'd like to beat my brother, but that's not going to happen...cos he's really clever...he is really clever...it's really annoying, and he told me how bad I am...(girl B, Year 9)

The fact that older siblings were once themselves third formers helped put things into perspective, from the viewpoint of one who knew what they were talking about, rather than an observer:

> ...my sister did say: 'just take the third form as a sort of easy year, cos fourth form is really hard...so is fifth form'...(girl C, Year 9)

Siblings were also candidates who were either currently going through, or had recently gone through, the rigours of GCSE coursework and exams:

> ...mine's a bit stressful, so she takes everything really dramatically, but, yeah, it is good she's been through it all, so...(girl C, Year 9)

and:

> ...I have a cousin, and she...and she's give me all her GCSE workbooks...so they'll really, really help me...I've got a big bagful of lots of workbooks...(girl D, Year 9)

Siblings were also influential because GCSE choices had shortly to be made; they had after all, experienced the subjects and the teachers themselves, so were a good source of inside knowledge, both as judges of the subjects:

> ...my sister did it, and she said it was really good, and I'm not a keen History fan, and it was either Geography or History for me...(and)...she doesn't think I should do Art, because it's too much work for me, and I don't like spending all my free time doing it...(girl C, Year 9)

and the teachers:

> ...(brother) had (teacher X) for History and he says: 'oh she's a rubbish teacher and everything...she reads with a ruler'...how could she be a teacher?...(girl A, Year 9)

Even for those who did not enjoy the benefit of older siblings, there was still a good deal of useful advice to be had second-hand:

> …cos I am the oldest in the family, like, I don't have an older brother or sister to say what it's like…quite a lot of my friends do, so I sort of ask them…(boy A, Year 9)

One could always listen to friends:

> …like, going: 'oh, my brother did this and he said it was really good…and it was a better subject to do…so I'll do that'…(girl D, Year 9)

What a sibling was doing could provide some influence beyond even this stage, causing some to:

> …look at universities, and I think: 'aah, that will be really cool', I want to go to lots of parties and stuff…cos my sister's looking at them, I'll look at them as well…but I don't really know what I'm going to do…(girl C, Year 9)

As pupils had grown and matured, they had developed in their attitude to the peer group around them. The maturing process had thrown up some interesting perspectives on the effects of adolescence on the group; for some, in particular, it had been revealing:

> …some boys are getting more boulshy , some boys are getting, totally, unbelievably, annoyingly cocky…. all the boys' hormones are coming out, and no one wants to be the boy with a high voice , who hasn't actually reached puberty yet, so everyone is talking like this (deep voice)…(boy D, Year 9)

To most of the pupils, the influence of friends and the wider peer group was quite significant, and this was especially so at this point in their school careers, having just moved into the senior school. Friendships provided a social anchor for some, putting other considerations into second place:

> …I'm not that bothered as long as I'm with my friends…I know I couldn't handle being in a set where there's people I didn't know…that happened last year in French and I think…and I just felt very lonely…(girl D, Year 9)

Friends had some influence over pupils' likes and dislikes of different aspects of school; in some cases they were more influential over perceptions of:

> …whether…the teacher is nice, or whatever…it is more to do with friends…(girl B, Year 9)

but the feelings about the importance of or liking for subjects:

> ...if they like something that I don't, I won't say that I like it just because they do...(girl B, Year 9)

especially with GCSE choices pending, was less influenced by friends:

> ...I don't think my friends have much influence...(boy A, Year 9)

and:

> ...I just choose for myself really, nobody really influences me...(girl C, Year 9)

How pupils worked in lessons, or how they approached tasks outside the classroom was also less influenced, negatively at any rate, by the actions of the peer group:

> ...I am not as friend-oriented...sort of...don't depend on my friends as much, cos you, sort of, think: 'well, I have got to get this done'...(girl D, Year 9)

For some pupils, the perception of the peer group at large was of a series of social groupings or cliques, each being identified along different social or sporting lines and containing particular types of character:

> ...like music...sort of scholarship people...some of them are only like three or four people...it's more like...much worse when they're all together, and they're sort of bearable by themselves...there definitely seems to be, sort of...especially in the girls...there seems to be a 'new person' crowd...(boy A, Year 9)

These groupings were often delineated by Houses, with each different House being identified with a certain type of clique:

> ...so (House G)...it's all the rugby players, and you get like (boy O)and (boy S) that just get in there...and then there's the clever people in (House S) and (House T)...(House Q) is quite a clever House...and you get (House C)...it's all the really nice people but they're not so clever...(these cliques) don't really mix, especially the boys...like the boys from one House might not mix with the others, cos some think they're superior to others...especially the rugby players...(boy C, Year 9)

Integrating into the mix was perceived as more difficult as the years passed:

> ...there are tons of new people, I'm not sure how well they are settling in, they don't seem to settle in as well...and all the people from (prep school T) still...kind of...sit next to the people from (prep school T)...yeah, it's a lot harder to break in, as you get older...it's a lot harder to break into groups...I mean, it was harder say for (boy friend E) last year, and it would be for (boy friend J)...in Year 6 for instance, when he came...it's harder the older we

> get, cos friendships get more and more defined the older you get…they get more and more set…(boy D, Year 9)

Although labels attached to groups may have been unique to each year group, even older siblings were seen to belong to a clique of some description:

> …in my brother's year, they have…what do they call them…'crews'…it's really funny…'Bob's Crew'…it's not really to do with sport, it's just, like, really funny people go together, the not so interesting and boring people , all talk to each other, I don't know…(girl B, Year 9)

The House system with its vertical divide was a strong influence over the everyday lives of the pupils. Although the junior school had a House system, pupils were still in classes or year groups for most activities. Now, the House system in the senior school had split the year group such that:

> …I haven't seen some people that I saw last year…because in (junior school) you see people every day…you're bound to see every person in your year, unless they're ill…but at (senior school) you don't see them until you walk around the building, like, Maths is a time when you see most people, cos we're all in one building …then we all come out at the same time…or, if you go to someone's common room you might see them, but they might be in a different one, cos everyone is in different places at different times…and if you're friends with someone in one House, and, (like, say, at (junior school) you were in the same class), and you got split out and you were in different Houses…but you drift apart, you drift apart very quickly…(boy C, Year 9)

Getting used to the new system required a shift in perception, which most were happy to make, and which they rationalised in different ways:

> …it doesn't really seem as crucial to have a best friend and a group of people here, because…I think it's, again, about the Houses, because these people are in your House... they are your friends…(girl D, Year 9)

and:

> …it's a lot less class (group) oriented... it's a lot more to do with your House, which is quite cool, because if it was just class oriented you would get, you know, to see just a small group of people, but with your House, you get to know all through the year groups, and people who aren't in your class, and people you may not see unless it's during House, and so that's good, and the Houses aren't very strict, you can go and see other people, you know, you don't get confined to just your House…but some people are really unlucky, like, you know they are in a House with hundreds, like, say they are in (House Q)…and then, like, pretty much all the third form in (House Q) are in their class, and then they're all in the same set, it's just really unlucky cos you only get to meet, like, two or three other people…but I have got a really mixed group, so I'm quite lucky…(boy B, Year 9)

The benefits of mixing with older peers obviously broke down some of the hierarchical barriers that naturally formed, allowing relationships to build vertically as well as horizontally:

> …you meet people from like, fourth form, and you get on with them, especially boarding Houses, cos you are, like, living together…so you have to get on…like…if you go into the fourth form rooms, they register that you are there, but they don't like tell you to get out…you can talk with them, or watch TV with them or whatever…(boy B, Year 9)

Having friendly relationships with older peers allowed the new entrants, particularly those without the benefit of older siblings, to gain some useful insight into, at least, the effects of GCSE courses:

> …all the fourth formers...if you speak to them…they seem to be worried about their coursework, and their mocks…(boy A, Year 9)

as well as providing some influences on choices of subjects:

> …I wasn't even thinking about going to do Latin, but then, you know (girl friend Y), she told me it was good…she's doing it for A-level…and she said how quite a few people do it for GCSE…(girl E, Year 9)

The influence of mixing vertically may have had some drawbacks, because now pupils in the year group had, sometimes, to meet the pressures of modern adolescence head on:

> ….I'm sure fourth form and fifth form is going to be lots of peer pressure…there is going to be lots of peer pressure in the fifth form on…like drinking…clubbing…because I know…some of the girls…go out on a Friday night, and it's just stupid…the thing that, really, really annoys me is, some of the boys in our year, they say they love beer…and they probably hate beer…I mean…like…I don't like beer…but I don't mind admitting it or anything…we're only thirteen…and they're saying: 'oh, yeah, I love beer'….(boy D, Year 9)

As well as the influences provided by family and friends, there was an acknowledgement of the effect and influence of the media on pupils' perceptions of the word. Film and TV, for instance, influenced the perception of school itself:

> …I think, if you're watching…like…your favourite show…and your favourite character hates school…then you hate school…but…like…Harry Potter makes me love…school, cos it's just like Harry Potter, I think…I love old schools…it's nice thinking about…so long ago…people would have been running through those corridors and they're…like…really, really old now...it's quite funny to think about that…all what they achieved and stuff…(girl D, Year 9)

and for those looking at examples of the world of work, the polished image of the television lawyer, for instance, was perhaps more transparent than was intended:

> …you watch stuff on TV, and you go: 'that's cool' , but that's just the TV thing...when you look at the real thing, most of the time, it's behind a desk, and it's very uneventful, you might get, like, one or two cases in your whole lifetime, where it's a real serious thing…I mean, now you're a lot more critical of (TV)…when you are small you just think: 'wow, I want to do this', or: 'I want to do that', but when you're older, you think: 'that's fake; that's bollocks'…(boy B, Year 9)

The question as to what it was that drove pupils to do things in the way that they did was not a simple one to answer; pupils were motivated by a number of different things at this time. For some the main impetus could be summed up as:

> …mostly just being happy…cos if you hate the school you're not going to do anything…(girl D, Year 9)

For others, the three weekly effort and attainment grades kept them working hard at all their subjects, despite the beginnings of the mental weeding process that occurred before GCSE options were finally made:

> …I'm really concentrating…I don't just…I don't think I am going to do History, but I still try hard in that, cos I want to get good marks…(girl C, Year 9)

Even on a minimalist level, if it was the case that:

> …you don't care...but if you, like, know when the Orders are coming, you can, sort of pick yourself up…(play the system)…everyone does it…(boy C, Year 9)

These were quite competitive pupils, on the whole, and the perception of their world as being highly competitive was a spur for some, particularly in sports:

> …in (junior school) you kind of stay in the (hockey) team all the time, but you get moved about a lot more in it here (senior school)…so…sort of, you have to work a lot more for your place, which I like…(girl C, Year 9)

The academic setting of classes too, provided an environment in which the competitive side of their characters thrived:

> …I kind of try harder…cos we're in…kind of…setted classes…it's kind of, more competition to do better, cos you don't want to be…like…in the class, cos, everyone else is clever…you don't want to be the loser...well, I don't really know, cos I'm in okay sets, but I think it does matter…I wouldn't like to be in set six for French…I think that would bother me…(girl B, Year 9)

Competition was not limited to those in higher sets:

> …it's like the sets...it's quite competitive in most of them, especially in Maths, cos we're in set five, so everyone's like: 'I got it right'…but we don't actually get it right…it means you can't go down any further, although we have been told we might need a set six next year, which isn't too…(girl D, Year 9)

and there was some comparison between the perception of teaching in previous years and this year:

> …in (junior school)... you couldn't really doss about, but you could get along with not trying because the teachers in a way spoon-fed you…well helped you do this…got you ready, and so on…I think, I don't know…(senior school) is a far more competitive atmosphere in some ways…much more like: 'we have to win at this…we want to do this'…(boy D, Year 9)

For most pupils, there was an understanding that the GCSE, being the biggest event yet to happen, provided an enormous motivation to achieve, and to achieve well; the known achievements of the past lent an air of what might be thought as elitism:

> …we're all going to do well in exams anyway, aren't we?…because we are above…like…normal anyway…so it's not really a big deal…(girl E, Year 9)

and, definitely a feeling of reassurance; for many pupils, certainly, the evidence provided by the past results:

> …makes me think I'll do well, cos you look at people who you don't think are clever, and they've all done well…it's like: 'whew, I'm gonna do well' …(girl B, Year 9)

For many, the reality of getting through the work at school meant realising that it was a hard task that simply had to be done, and doing it for ones self was a serious motivator, particularly for the boys:

> …I worked really hard in the last two terms of (Year 8), but if you work hard, then, and get into the top class and you're sort of sorted…(boy A, Year 9)

and:

> …you have to work for yourself a lot more...you have to write more notes and stuff…(boy D, Year 9)

and:

> …as long as I know that I can do it, and sort of keep up, I know that I have done all I can…(boy E, Year 9)

This revised discipline now extended to homework as well:

> …now I think: 'get it done when I get it, or as soon as possible', rather than saying: 'I'll do it tomorrow'. Sometimes you just really don't want to do prep, but it's always best to do it then…(boy E, Year 9)

The prospect of the forthcoming GCSE exams, although some time away, was a strong influence on the majority of pupils. Elements of GCSE, in the shape of coursework, had already started in third form, and the huge amount of publicity from teachers about the subjects and the pupils prospects in them, had caused most to 'buy in' to the system in a big way. In general terms:

> …GCSEs are the main thing coming up, so that's what I'm really concentrating on…(girl C, Year 9)

There was, too, a comparison with what had gone before, and a sense of the realisation of inevitability:

> …you do feel that it's coming up on you…well, you don't, when you are in Year 8 and Year 7...you don't even think about it, and this is only third form, and it's a year away, and you've got to start thinking about it and you're sort of: 'woah, where is that come from?' but…you don't really notice until it's very close, but you tend to find yourself prepared, even if you didn't try to be prepared…(boy B, Year 9)

The importance of the GCSE was recognised as being relatively, of more value than tests that had gone before:

> …before last year, the most big exam I had was our SATs, and that doesn't go to anything, it's just for the Government to see how bright you are, but now it's for something that will actually help us, rather than help somebody else, so that's really important…(boy B, Year 9)

There was also a sense of the place of GCSE in the greater scheme of things; once they had been such an important milestone, that they obscured almost everything else, but there was beginning to be a realisation that they were only a part of the picture:

> …they're a bit like a bridge, kind of thing…you're almost at the other side then you are there…(boy E, Year 9)

and:

> …I think they are just GCSEs now…but, like, I think the next are AS…I think they're really important…(girl B, Year 9)

even to the extent that:

> ...I mean, GCSEs aren't very important, I mean, I suppose they show you what you are good at, a bit, but apart from that, what are they actually for?...(girl E, Year 9)

Teachers, from the very beginning of third form, reinforced the significance of GCSE exams:

> ...the first RE lesson we had, we were told how we have three papers, and the first ones on Christianity and the next ones on...blah, blah...and the last ones on Philosophy...blah, blah, and we had to do it...and we got told in French that there was like...in set one...there was all As and A stars and stuff, straight away in the first lesson as well...(girl E, Year 9)

and:

> ...the teachers have said: 'if you're in set one, then you're likely to get an A star',...it makes you think, like, they're not going to be as hard as everybody makes them out to be...(girl C, Year 9)

One of the significant concerns was the prospect of grades for GCSE exams. The historical success caused some anxiety:

> ...I think we're all just scared about...well I mean, you read the paper, and they've all got 10 A stars, and you're thinking: 'oh, God...I'm going to be that one with, like, no A stars'...well, I don't think I'll get ...I don't think I'll get many Cs and...I mean ...I'm not being like...but...judging by how well people have done...it's not like they're smarter than us, or getting better teachers than anyone else...I know I'm going to get a B in Maths , because I'm doing a lower-level maths paper...I just want to get a B, instead of a C...(girl D, Year 9)

and the perception of what signified an acceptable or unacceptable grade added to the apprehension:

> ...I mean...I know that...(male teacher E) has said: 'if you have a 5, it doesn't mean that you're going to get a D or an E'...I mean, we're all relatively gonna get a B or an A...God...I would cry if I got a C or a D...I've got a fear that I might get bad grades in Physics and French and everything like that...but I know they're my weaker subject and I'm expecting it...(girl A, Year 9)

as did the perception of one's place in the pool of available talent:

> ...it's a bit worrying...like...they say: 'you're bound to get an A, cos you're at this school', or something ...but then, when you think: 'but I'm really bad at that subject'...it doesn't...cos, like...if we went to a state school we'd be, like, amazing...but because we are here...and some people are weaker...if you are weak at a subject, you think you are going to do terrible, but in theory you're gonna do better than people at state schools...but you're still really bad at this school...(boy C, Year 9)

There was, probably due to the positive messages that proliferated, also a widespread sense that the work was not going to be overly difficult for most people:

> …you're more relaxed now, cos you're older and you understand what's going on, and, you know, teachers give you lectures and…to tell you that they're coming up…when they're coming up…what to do…we're getting all these leaflets and information to tell us, so it won't be that hard…but some very serious people will take it and panic…(boy C, Year 9)

and a sense of perspective was developing:

> …I realised that GCSEs are incredibly easy…in our last French lesson we were going and listening with the machine thingies and we were just doing a GCSE test, just as a practising listening thing, and it was reasonably easy, apart from some of the vocabulary…but we haven't learnt it yet but…I think we are realising now…that…everyone is going to get a B at worst…and everyone…I mean …everyone in my class…cos they've kinda done a higher class...the minimum someone's going to get is a B, no one in my class will get lower than a B in any subject…and when you start looking at it like that you start thinking, well, you don't need to work hard, do you? I think everybody last year was just, kind of, worrying about it because some of the teachers were talking about it at (junior school)…some of the teachers were saying: 'I don't know, you're going to have to work hard for you GCSEs when you get to (senior school), you won't survive with that', and everything…(boy D, Year 9)

Again, the value of older siblings or older peers having gone through the mill, was something that lent credibility to the exercise:

> …you see a fifth former and you're thinking: 'it doesn't seem a minute since they were in Year 8 and now they're doing their GCSEs', which is weird…(girl D, Year 9)

The older peers had the effect of showing these new pupils that the path through school and beyond, was something that they could tread without fear; these older pupils were, after all, once like them, so:

> …when you see the sixth formers all doing their personal statement and stuff…that makes you actually think about it…but you don't think about it as much as to say: 'I definitely want to apply to this university or this degree' …you just get an idea of what people are doing…it makes you think about it more…(boy C, Year 9)

Ideas about what to do beyond school, and even university, were less fixed at this time than they had been before; there was a sense that more thought was being given to the possibilities, and the breadth of those possibilities and the implications of choices were having an influence on the process:

...lots of people think about work now, cos they're just thinking, like: 'what do I want to do definitely?'...before, you know, you say: 'I would like to do this,' or: 'I would like to do that', and most people would say: 'I'd love to be a pro footballer', or something , and it's like, well, the chance of that is very, very slim, you know, so, um, you've really got to think about a very ground-based job, where it is a level playing like a desk job most of the time, but, um, it's interesting to know whether or not, you know, what you want to do is actually possible...when you are in Year 6 you say: 'oh, I want to do this', or: 'I want to do that', but you don't really think that you know that you are going to be something like a veterinary nurse, or a receptionist in a doctors thing, where you have to know basic first aid and basic biology...(boy B, Year 9)

and:

...last year, I definitely wanted to be a pilot...now I'm not quite so sure...I think I'll just take it as it goes, really...now it's closer, and you actually think about it more, rather than just saying something...so you're thinking about it...like, what you want to do and what lifestyle you want to have, and things like that...(boy E, Year 9)

and:

...I really don't have a clear...because loads of Science teachers have said: 'you are a really good scientist' and loads of History teachers have said: 'you're a historian', or whatever...I'm just not sure...which way I am going to go ...it depends...obviously, but in a way, the A-levels I'd choose doesn't really make that much of a difference, unless it's something like, you want to be a doctor, then you do...Latin, French, German or whatever...but, don't know what I'm going to end up as...I thought about being a lawyer before, but then, everybody seems to hate lawyers, so...I quite want to be a barrister, cos you make lots of money at it...argue and so on...(but) I realise that my options are really open...(boy D, Year 9)

and:

...I used to have, like, a set pattern, and what I wanted to be...about what I could do (but)...we talk about different things and stuff...and things sound more fun...(girl E, Year 9)

Chapter 7

Third Year Data Analysis

What happened

As happened in the first and second years, this year's data was collected on two separate occasions. The first data point was June 2005, and the data was collected via questionnaire. The second data point was at the beginning of the following academic year, and data was collected by interview.

Initial questionnaire data was collected from the entire year group (Year 9) who were then in the first year of their time at the secondary school. Because of the increased intake into the school from outside, the numbers in the year group had risen to one hundred and twelve. In order to keep the data sample the same throughout, it was decided to use only the original group who had passed through junior school and had been involved on the first two years' research.

Consequently, allowing for the non-attendance of four pupils, and for natural wastage, eighty-two children (from a possible eighty-four) participated in the questionnaire. The gender split was forty-six boys and thirty-six girls. The format of the questionnaire was broadly the same as the previous year, covering the same topics and in the same order, except that the choices for GCSE having now been made alterations had to be made to one of the questions. Question 27: 'thinking ahead –subjects and GCSE choices. If you had a completely free choice of GCSE subjects, what would you choose?' was no longer appropriate. The sense of the question needed to reflect the same perceptions about GCSE choices, but now from a different standpoint, so the question was altered to: 'Question 27.Subjects and GCSE choices: you have made a choice of GCSE subjects, think about the subjects that you are studying; think about the subjects that you are not studying.' The question allowed responses to be categorised against two criteria: 'I am studying this subject for GCSE', and 'I am not studying this subject for GCSE'.

Under the heading: 'I am studying this subject for GCSE', the pupil could respond against two further criteria: ' and am happy to be doing so' or 'but would have liked not to'. Similarly, under 'I am not studying this subject for GCSE' the pupils could respond against 'and am happy not to be doing so' or against 'but would have liked to'.

In previous questionnaires, Science had been treated as a discrete subject; in this questionnaire the subject was split into three separate areas: Biology, Chemistry

and Physics. Drama had been introduced into some areas of the questionnaire as pupils had now been given it as a GCSE option for the coming year.

The interviews were conducted in November 2005. The same gender-balanced sample of five boys and five girls was used as in the previous two years. Again, the interview structure was the same format as before and the questions were conducted in the same way.

How the data was collected

The data collection, via the questionnaire, took place at the end of the summer term, after the school exams. This time, as last year, the exercise was conducted using the networked school computer system rather than being paper-based. The format of the questionnaire was the same, in that it appeared as an Excel worksheet, accessible from a shared work area on the computer network. Again, the sample size meant that pupils had to fill the questionnaire in groups, rather than all at once. This was done by half-class groups of between eight and ten pupils, over a period of six days. Negotiations with the Information Technology department meant that one period of the curriculum-time used for computer teaching could be utilised, during a week after the end of year exams. This meant that no special arrangements had to be made for timetabling pupils separately, interrupting a range of scheduled classes or moving pupils to different locations at different times. All the pupils completed the questionnaires comfortably within the forty-minute period allowed. As had happened previously, the pupils were given assurance over anonymity and confidentiality. No other staff or pupils were present during the questionnaire filling. As before, each pupil's questionnaire was identified by name so that they could download it from the database at the appropriate time. To ensure confidentiality, all material was removed from the database immediately the questionnaire had been completed. This ensured that no pupil had access to any other pupil's work before, during, or after the completion of the work. Because the material was addressed via the computer, there was more opportunity for inclusion of written material and comment, as the space for commentary was not limited as happened in the paper exercise.

The subsequent interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in the design office in the Art and Design building. This year, pupils participating in the research had moved on to the senior school, so a negotiated withdrawal from normal lessons was arranged. Interviews took about forty minutes.

Analysis of results

The questionnaire data

The third year's results from the questionnaire are shown in Appendix C. The tabulated results show the overall responses for both boys and girls together. Results are also shown as a percentage of those responding (eighty-two). Mean scores are also shown, where appropriate, base on scoring Likert-type items. Where there are gender differences, these are referred to in the text, as well as in Chapter 9, which looks at longitudinal analysis of the data.

Q1: What do you want to be? What sort of work do you think that you would like to do when you leave school?

This was an open question, and, using the same format as last year, results were grouped together according to a nearest career match. Although the spread of career choices elicited from boys was widest, the girls' choices had broadened this year. Overall, the largest group (18% of pupils) had opted for a career in the arts or design field; predominantly this was girls (31% of the population) rather than boys (6% of the population). A medical or veterinary career interested 17% of pupils, and the gender balance was more even in this case, with 17% of boys and 17% of girls choosing it. The third ranked choice (13% of pupils) was media or journalism as a career, and it was heavily weighted towards girls (22% of the population) rather than the boys (4%). Law as a career choice was ranked fourth, and inspired 8% of pupils. This was more gender balanced; 9% of boys and 8% of girls having chosen it. Of the 8% of pupils who opted for it, more boys (13%) than girls (3%) foresaw a career in science or engineering. Ranked similarly, as a career (chosen by 8% of pupils), was professional sports or outdoor pursuits; all those who chose this were boys (15% of the population). Similarly, only boys (11% of the population, and 5% overall) chose a career involving land or property, including architecture and surveying. 5% of pupils saw themselves taking up a career in flying, although slightly more boys (6%) than girls (3%) did. Business administration appealed to 3% of pupils but only to boys (6%) and the 1% who foresaw a career in agriculture were only boys (2% of the population). Careers in both finance and education did not attract either boys or girls.

Q.2: Your own areas of interest outside school. What do you get up to away from school?

Looking at the 'most of all' category, 'being with friends' was the most popular activity away from school for 49% of pupils, and more so for girls (69%) than for boys (32%). 'Outdoor activities' (41%) were the second preferred activity, and here more by boys (50%) than girls (31%). The third choice was specified in the 'other' category (15%), and this included a high proportion of musical activities such as playing the guitar, drumming, playing in a band, and musical practice. Although boys predominantly expressed these sentiments, girls cited musical activities such as singing or listening to music. Horse riding and being with animals was mentioned as was shopping and talking to people on the Internet. The Internet as an activity was indulged in 'most of all' by 12% of pupils overall (9% of boys and 17% of girls). Other given choices were less appealing, the best being 'watching TV', which was selected by 9% of children (7% of boys and 11% of girls). 'Computer games' was cited by 6% of pupils, all boys (11%). 'Construction and modelling' as a pastime was indulged in heavily only by 4% of pupils, (4% of boys and 3% of girls). 'Painting and drawing ' involved 3% of pupils altogether (made up of 2% of boys and 3% of girls), and 'homework' also was undertaken to the extreme by only 3% of pupils (again, made up of 2% of boys and 3% of girls). The mean scores did, however tell a different story. 'Being with friends' (4.2) was placed top, followed by 'outdoor activities' (4.0), and 'watching TV' and 'Internet' came next (each with 3.4), then 'homework' (2.8), followed by 'computer games' (2.5) and 'painting and drawing' (2.0). 'Construction and modelling' (1.7) was ranked last.

Q.3: Your parents' or carers' occupations. What sort of work do they do?

Relevant information is described in Chapter five, which deals with the first year's data.

Q.4: Your enjoyment of school in general. How much do you like school?

The element of school most enjoyed by pupils was 'friendships', cited by 71% of respondents. The gender split was heavily weighted to the girls (94%) rather than the boys (52%). The swing was the other way for the second choice; 'sports' was chosen by 43% overall, and here the breakdown was 56% of boys and 25% of girls choosing it. The third choice fell to 'breaks and socialising' picked

by 29% of pupils overall. This was more popular with the girls (42%) than the boys (20%). There was quite a gap before the next choice: 'outings and trips' which scored as a favourite with 11% of pupils (13% of boys and 8% of girls). 'Clubs and activities' was chosen by 9% overall (fairly evenly split with 9% of boys and 8% of girls choosing it). Educational aspects came at the bottom, with 'teachers' being most popular with 1% of pupils, and these all boys (2%). 'Lessons' and 'homework' scored zero. The mean data gave a very similar picture, with the place rankings being in much the same order, topped by 'friendships' (4.6), followed by 'breaks/socialising' and 'sports' (each with 4.1), 'outings/trips' (3.5), 'clubs/activities' (3.4), 'lessons' (2.8), 'teachers' (2.6) and finally 'homework' (1.8).

Q.5: The importance of school in general. How important do you think school is?

Pupils found the most important aspect of school was 'doing your best' which was chosen by 59% of pupils overall (56% of boys and 61% of girls). Next came 'friendships' and this was chosen by 55% of pupils. Here the gender breakdown was heavily female biased, with 41% of boys and 72% of girls choosing this. 'Learning skills' was most important to 34% overall (having a male bias, with 43% of boys and 22% of girls picking it). 'Socialising' was chosen by 26% overall (22% of boys and 31% of girls). 'Lessons' was slightly male biased, where 23% overall picked it as most important, (24% of boys and 22% of girls). 'Liking the teacher' came bottom, being picked by 4% of pupils as a most important aspect of school (2% of boys and 6% of girls). The mean figures followed almost the same pattern, except that 'friendships' appears at the top, alongside 'doing your best' (each with 4.5), followed by 'learning skills' (4.2), 'socialising' (4.1), 'lessons' (4.0), 'other' (3.8) and finally 'liking teachers' (2.5).

Q6: Your talent and ability. How talented are you?

Those subjects that pupils saw themselves as most talented at were headed by Games, picked by 30% of pupils (comprising 32% of boys and 28% of girls). Second choice was Physical Education, chosen by 22% overall, and slightly more so by boys (26%) than girls (17%). English was chosen by 18% overall, but with a heavy female bias, (25% of girls and 13% of boys). Chemistry was also a subject chosen by 18% of pupils (in this case by 22% of boys and 14% of girls). Biology was next, chosen by 16 % of pupils (20% of boys and 11% of girls). (The

other science, Physics, was chosen by 11% of pupils, but was male biased, being picked by 17% of boys and only 3% of girls.) Maths was selected by 16% of pupils (again, male-biased, being chosen by 22% of boys and 8% of girls). French and Art were chosen at the same level as physics, at 11% overall; both were also equally female biased, being chosen by 14% of girls and 9% of boys. Geography, History, Information Technology and Latin were chosen by 10% of pupils; Geography and Latin were slightly female weighted (11% to 9% in favour of girls) whilst History and Information Technology were slightly male weighted (11% to 8% in favour of boys). German and Design Technology were chosen by 9% of pupils, and here German was slightly female weighted (11% to 7% in favour of girls) and Design Technology was slightly male weighted (11% to 6% in favour of boys). Personal, Social and Health Education was chosen by 7% of pupils (11% of girls and 4% of boys), Music was chosen by 6% of pupils (9% of boys and 3% of girls). Spanish and Religious Education were each chosen by 5% of pupils; Spanish was boy weighted (9% of boys and no girls) as was Religious Education (7% of boys and 3% of girls). Classics was a boy-weighted subject; the 4% who chose it were all boys (7% of the population). The mean calculation for talent still showed Games in front (3.8) followed by Physical Education and Biology (each with 3.6), then Chemistry (3.5), English and History (each with 3.4), Maths and Physics (each with 3.2). Religious Education, Latin and Music were ranked lowest, with 2.7, 2.6 and 2.4 respectively.

Q 7: Your enjoyment of subjects. How much do you enjoy your work?

When considering the subjects that they enjoyed most, 56% of pupils chose Games (comprising 67% of boys and 42% of girls) followed by Physical Education, which was most enjoyed by 39% overall (45% of boys and 31% of girls). The third most enjoyed subject was Art (32% overall) and this was mostly girls (50%) rather than boys (17%). Chemistry was chosen by 21% of pupils, (made up of 22% of boys and 19 % of girls), Design Technology followed, being chosen by 20% overall (26% of boys and 11% of girls). English came next, chosen by 17% of pupils, made up by 15% of boys and 19% of girls. One of the other sciences; Biology came next, chosen by 15% of pupils (13% of boys and 19% of girls). Maths followed, chosen by 13% overall (13 % of boys and 14% of girls). Geography was chosen by 11% overall, equal with Physics and with History. (These were female weighted with 9% of boys and 14% of girls for both History

and Geography, but male weighted for Physics, with 15% of boys and 6% of girls choosing it). Classics, Information Technology and Personal, Social and Health Education were chosen by 10% of pupils; 9% of boys and 11 % of girls chose both Classics and Personal, Social and Health Education and Information Technology was chosen by 13% of boys and 6% of girls. French (chosen by 7% of boys and 8% of girls) and Music (chosen by 9% of boys and 6% of girls) were placed next by 7% of pupils overall. Spanish was chosen by 5% of pupils (4% of boys and 6% of girls). 4% of pupils each chose German (only girls (8%)) and Latin (2% of boys and 6% of girls). Chosen by the least number of pupils (1%) was Religious Education, and this only by girls (3% of the population). Mean figures for enjoyment placed Games (4.4) at the top, followed by PE (4.0), Chemistry, Design Technology and Biology (each at 3.5), History, Art and English (each at 3.4), then Maths (3.2). Geography and French shared the next place (with 3.1 each). Physics, Classics and Personal, Social and Health Education were ranked next with 3.0. Information Technology and Spanish were ranked next with 2.9, followed by German with 2.6. Music was next (2.5), followed by Religious Education with 2.2. Latin (2.1) was ranked lowest.

Q 8. The importance of subjects. How important do you think school subjects are?

The place for most important subject went to Maths, selected by 73% of pupils (slightly female-weighted, being chosen by 78% of girls and 70% of boys). Next came English (52% overall, made up from 50% of boys and 56% of girls) and a science (Biology) was ranked third (38% overall, weighted towards the girls (44%) rather than the boys (33%). Chemistry followed (34% overall; 30% of boys and 39% of girls) and Physics was placed next (33% overall; 30% of boys and 36% of girls). Games followed this, chosen by 29% overall (35% of boys and 22% of girls). Information Technology was ranked 7th, by 28% of pupils (chosen equally by 28% of boys and 28% of girls). Personal, Social and Health Education (chosen by 24% overall) was also fairly balanced, with 24% of boys and 25% of girls choosing it. Physical Education was slightly boy weighted; 20% overall chose it but of these, 22% of boys picked it and 17% of girls did so. Geography was quite evenly spit; the 15% who picked it was made up of 15% of boys and 14% of girls. History was male weighted; 10% chose it overall (13% of boys and 6% of girls). French was more balanced (9% overall and of this number 9% of boys and 8% of

girls chose it). Spanish was very male weighted; 7% of pupils overall picked it, (11% of boys and 3% of girls). Art was quite balanced; 4% overall, with 4% of boys and 3% of girls choosing it. German was wholly male dominated; the 4% who chose this were only boys (7%). Classics and Design Technology were each chosen by 2% overall, and these were boys too: each being chosen by 4%. Latin was chosen by 2% also, (split between 2% of boys and 3% of girls). Music was the lowest single figure score being chosen by 1% overall (2% of boys). Religious Education scored nothing at all. The mean figures for a subject's importance ranked Maths (4.7) first, followed by English (4.4) then Biology (4.0). Games, Chemistry and Physics ranked next (each with 3.9). At the other end of the scale, Music and Latin (each with 1.9) were ranked behind Classics (2.2).

Q 9: Reasons why you enjoy subjects. Your favourite subject is?

The single, specific, favourite subject choice had selections made for each subject, with the exception of Personal, Social and Health Education and Religious Education, which were chosen by no-one. Games was in first place, as the favourite of 24% of pupils overall, and of more boys (35%) than girls (11%). Next came Art, (17%), favoured by more girls (28%) than boys (9%). English was the third favourite, selected by 9% overall, but by more girls (17%) than boys (2%). History (7%) was a favourite of more girls (8%) than boys (7%). Maths (6% overall) was a favourite of more boys (9%) than girls (3%). Latin and Biology were each a favourite of 5% overall, and each was split between 2% of boys and 8% of girls. Chemistry was chosen by 5% overall (4% of boys and 6% of girls). Classics and Design Technology were each chosen by 4% overall, and, in each case, by 7% of boys only. Geography was chosen by 2% overall (2% of boys and 3% of girls) and German was also chosen by 2% overall, but in this case it was all girls (6%). Spanish was boy weighted; the 2% who chose it were all boys (4%). French was female weighted; the 1% who chose it were all girls (3%). Information Technology, Music, Physical Education and Physics were all chosen by 1% of pupils as a favourite subject and by boys only (2%).

Q 10: Reasons why you enjoy subjects and how much the reasons matter.

Following the identification of a specific favourite, this question explored the reasons why it was thought to be so. Of the reasons that mattered, ' I have a talent for it' was a key reason for 32% of pupils overall (26% of boys and 31% of girls).

Next came 'the person teaching it is interesting', chosen by 29% overall (split equally between 17% of boys and 17% of girls). The third most noteworthy reason was 'it is fun', chosen by 28% overall (20% of boys and 11% of girls). 'The way it is taught is interesting' was chosen by 25% overall but by more boys (11%) than girls (8%). 'The atmosphere is good' appealed to 17% overall (26% of boys and 31% of girls) as a key reason, and 16% chose 'it is practical/activity based' as a motivator. Here the gender balance was nearly equal, with 9% of boys and 8% of girls choosing it. 'Any other reason' was specified by 15% of pupils (26% of boys and 39% of girls). 10% of pupils found that 'there are more things to do' a key reason, with slightly more girls (31%) than boys (28%) finding this to be so. 'It is easy' appealed to 9% of pupils, though to more girls (19%) than boys (11%). The mean calculation for the significance of the given reasons showed 'it is fun' and 'the way it is taught is interesting' ranked top (each with 4.0). ' I have a talent for it' (3.9) came next, then 'the atmosphere is good' and 'the person teaching it is interesting' (each with 3.7). 'It is practical/activity based' followed, alongside 'there are more things to do' (each with 3.5), and ranked lowest was 'it is easy' (2.9).

Q.11: Reasons why you find a subject unenjoyable. Your least favourite subject is?

A single, specific, least enjoyed subject yielded 16 selections. The least enjoyed was Religious Education, chosen by 18% of pupils overall (26% of boys and 8% of girls). Physics was the next least enjoyed subject, chosen by 17% of pupils, but by more girls (25%) than boys (11%). Latin was next, chosen by 15% of pupils (9% of boys and 22% of girls). Geography, Maths and Music were disliked most by 6% of pupils. The gender breakdown showed that Geography was boy weighted (9%) rather than girl weighted (3%). Maths was the opposite (11% of girls and 2% of boys) and Music was boy weighted (9% of boys and 3% of girls). Art, French, German, Biology and Chemistry were all chosen by 4% of pupils. Art was disliked by boys only (7%). French was girl weighted (6% as opposed to 2% of boys). German and Biology were gender split the same way, with 4% of boys and 3% of girls choosing it. Chemistry was girl weighted, with 6% of girls and 2% of boys choosing it. History and Information Technology were disliked by 2% of pupils; the gender split was the same in each, with 2% of boys and 3% of girls choosing it. Classics, Design Technology and English were least liked by 1% of

pupils; Classics and Design Technology by girls only (3%) and English by boys only (2%).

Q.12 Reasons why you find a subject unenjoyable and how much the reasons matter.

Reasons why these particular subjects were singled out as least enjoyed yielded ' the way it is taught is not good' as being most compelling to 39% of pupils overall. The gender split showed that more boys (43%) than girls (33%) thought this. 'It is boring' was a most compelling reason for 37% of pupils overall. Here slightly more girls (39%) than boys (35%) thought this. 'I don't get on with the teacher' was selected by 28% overall and more boys (30%) than girls (25%) chose this. ' I have no talent for it' came next, selected by 24% of pupils overall. The gender split had fewer boys (22%) than girls (28%) choosing it. 'I feel stressed' followed, with 20% overall choosing it; the gender split was more equal, with 20% of boys and 19% of girls choosing this reason. 'The work is repetitive' was picked by 16% overall. Slightly more girls (22%) than boys (16%) chose this. 'There is too much work' was picked by 13% overall; slightly more girls (17%) than boys (13%) chose this. Finally 'the work is too hard' was chosen by 13% overall. More boys (15%) than girls (11%) chose this. The mean figures for this question put the order of responses slightly differently. 'It is boring' came first (4.0), followed by ' the way it is taught is not good' (3.9), then ' I have no talent for it' and 'the work is repetitive' (each with 3.5). 'The work is too hard' and 'there is too much work' each scored 3.3, and both 'I feel stressed' and 'I don't get on with the teacher' scored 3.2.

Q13: Reasons why you find a subject important. Your most important subject is?

In order to determine some of the reasons for a subject's perceived importance, a single, most important subject was chosen. In first place came Maths (43% overall chose this) picked by 36% of boys and 43% of girls. English (26% overall) was chosen by 36% of boys and 26% of girls. Biology was placed third, chosen by 8% overall (3% of boys and 13% of girls). Chemistry was placed next, chosen by 4% of pupils, and by more girls (4%) than boys (3%). Physics (3% overall) was next, again selected by more girls (4%) than boys (1%).Games and History were chosen by 2% overall; Games by boys only (4%) and History by more

girls (3%) than boys (2%). Art, Classics, Geography, Information Technology, Religious Education and Spanish were selected by only 1% of pupils. Design Technology, French, German, Latin, Music, Physical Education and Personal, Social and Health Education did not elicit any response at all.

Q.14: Reasons why you find a subject important and how much the reasons matter.

Why the most important subject should be considered so was looked at. From a selection of reasons, the one that mattered most of all to the highest number of pupils was 'the knowledge will be important later in my life'; 67% chose this, with an equal proportion of boys and girls (67% of each choosing it). The next most noteworthy reason was 'I'll need the knowledge for work' and this was chosen by 43% of pupils (46% of boys and 39% of girls) and close behind was 'I'll need the knowledge for a particular job'; a key reason to 39% of pupils (35% of boys and 44% of girls. 'I enjoy doing the subject' as a reason was chosen by 20% of pupils overall but was very female weighted, being chosen by 13% of boys and 28% of girls. 'I am good at the subject' was chosen by 12% of pupils and with a more even distribution, being selected by 11% of boys and 14% of girls. Equally rated were 'I find the subject easy' and 'I have friends in the class' each chosen by 10% of pupils overall, (and, in each case by 9% of boys and 11% of girls). 'I get on well with the teacher' was also chosen by 10% overall, but here the gender split was 11% of boys and 8% of girls. 'My parents think the subject is important' was last, chosen by 7% overall (7% of boys and 8% of girls). The mean figures placed the reasons in a different order. 'I have friends in the class' was ranked first (5.6), followed by 'I get on well with the teacher' (5.1) and 'my parents think the subject is important' (5.0). Next came 'I find the subject easy' (4.9) and a little way behind this, 'the knowledge will be important later in my life' (4.6) and 'I'll need the knowledge for a particular job' (4.4). 'I'll need the knowledge for work' came next (at 4.3), as did 'I enjoy doing the subject'. 'I am good at the subject' was ranked last (at 4.1).

Q15: Reasons why you find a subject unimportant. Your least important subject is?

This question was looking from the other end of the spectrum, in seeking to find out why subjects were considered unimportant. The ranking for a single, least

important subject showed Latin to be at the top, with 29% of pupils (24% of boys and 36% of girls) placing it first. Next was Religious Education, where 21% overall (22% of boys and 19% of girls) ranked it second. Music was selected next by 16% of pupils (22% of boys and 8% of girls). 7% considered Art next, with 9% of boys and 6% of girls placing it. 4% of pupils placed the following subjects next: Classics (all girls (8%)), Design Technology (1% of boys and 8% of girls), and Geography (all boys (7%)). History was chosen by 2% overall (al girls (6%)). Maths, Personal, Social and Health Education, Chemistry, Physics and Spanish were all chose by 1% of pupils overall. Maths, Personal, Social and Health Education and Spanish were all boys (2%) and Chemistry and Physics were all girls (3%). No other subject was ranked.

Q.16: Reasons why you find a subject unimportant and how much the reasons matter.

The perceptions about why subjects were unimportant showed 'I will not need the knowledge later in life' ranked first, chosen by 59% of pupils (61% of boys and 56% of girls). 'I cannot see the relevance of it' was ranked second, chosen by 52% overall (54% of boys and 50% of girls). 'I find the work boring' was third; 26% of pupils (24% of boys and 28% of girls) chose this. 15% said 'I don't like the teacher' was a reason that mattered most, and here 17% of boys and 11% of girls found this to be the case. The notion that 'the work is too hard' mattered most to 13% overall (13% of boys and 14% of girls). 'My parents don't find the subject important' mattered most to 9% of pupils (11% of boys and 6% of girls) and the same proportion said 'I find the subject stressful' was a most compelling reason (here 9% of boys and 8% of girls agreed). The reason 'other teachers find the subject unimportant' was selected by 5% overall, although by more boys (7%) than girls (3%). The mean figure for reasons mattering followed the same broad order, with 'I will not need the knowledge later in life' at the top (4.3) followed by 'I cannot see the relevance of it' (4.2) and 'I find the work boring' (3.5). 'I have no talent for the subject' came next (3.3), then 'the work is too hard' (2.8) and 'I find the subject stressful' (2.7). 'I don't like the teacher' was place next (2.6), then 'my parents don't find the subject important (2.4) and finally 'other teachers find the subject unimportant (2.0).

Q17: Changes over time –this year. What are your top three favourite subjects this year?

In looking at the possible changes that were made, the top three favourite subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the year gone) the highest ranked subjects were Games, (39%) Art (13%) and English and History (each with 10%). In each case the gender split was: Games, 46% of boys and 6% of girls; Art, 7% of boys and 22% of girls; English; 22% of girls only, and History; 7% of boys and 14% of girls.

Q18: Changes over time –this year. The reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects this year?

74% of pupils said they had changed their top three favourite subjects since last year. Of these, 72% of boys and 78% of girls claimed to have done so. The reasons why they had changed were deduced from an open question, and the results were grouped according to the same criteria as last year. 'The teacher has changed' was cited as reasons by 33% of pupils (made up of 42% of boys and 21% of girls). 30% said 'the subject is more interesting' was a reason (12% of boys and 50% of girls said this), and 20% thought ' I am better' was a good reason (18% of boys and 21% of girls). 'The work has changed' mattered to 11% overall (21% of boys only), that it was 'a split or new subject' was cited as a reason by 2% of pupils (4% of girls only).

Q 19: Changes over time –this year. What are your top three important subjects this year?

In looking at the possible changes that were made, the top three most important subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the year gone) the three highest-ranking subjects were Maths (46% of pupils overall), English (24%), and Biology (5%). Here the gender split was: for Maths, 57% of boys and 33% of girls chose it, for English, 17% of boys and 33% of girls chose it, and for Biology, 1% of boys and 11% of girls chose it.

Q 20: Changes over time –this year. The reasons for changing your top three important subjects this year?

Overall, 34% of pupils said they had changed their top three most important subjects since last year. Of these, 33% of boys and 36% of girls claimed to have

done so. The reasons why they had changed were deduced from an open question, and the results were grouped according to the same criteria as last year. The main reason cited (by 68% of pupils) was 'the subject is more important' (67% of boys and 69% of girls said this). Next was 'the work has changed', chosen by 21% overall (20% of boys and 23% of girls). 4% thought it was because 'I am better (8% of girls only).

Q 21: Changes over time –next year. What are likely to be your top three favourite subjects next year?

In looking ahead to next year and the possible changes that might be made, the top three favourite subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the coming year) the top three ranked subjects were Art, (chosen by 34% of pupils) Games (16%) and English (11%). The gender split in each case was: for Art, 11% of boys and 28% of girls, for Games, 24% of boys and 3% of girls and for English, 22% of girls only.

Q 22: Changes over time –next year. The reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects next year?

Overall, 46% of pupils thought that they might have changed their top three favourite subjects by next year (39% of boys and 56% of girls thought so). The main reason for changing was thought to be because 'the teacher or work has changed', and 45% overall (50% of boys and 40% of girls) thought this. Next, 'the subject has changed' was a reason for 34% of pupils (28% of boys and 40% of girls). 16% didn't know precisely why they might change (17% of boys and 15% of girls thought this). 3% overall thought 'I am better' a reason (comprising 5% of girls only), and 3% overall (comprising 6% of boys only) thought it might be because 'the work has got harder'.

Q 23: Changes over time –next year. What are likely to be your top three important subjects next year?

In looking ahead at the possible changes that might be made, the top three most important subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the coming year) the top three ranked subjects were Maths (chosen by 38% of pupils overall), English (26%) and Art (8%). Here the gender split was: Maths, 46% of boys and 28% of

girls, English, 22% of boys and 31% of girls, and for Art, 2% of boys and 8% of girls.

Q 24: Changes over time –next year. The reasons for changing your top three most important subjects next year?

Overall, 24% thought that they might change their top three important subjects in the coming year (20% of boys and 31% of girls thought this). The reasons given were: 'it is useful for the future' (65% overall (56% of boys and 73% of girls)), 'the subject will change' (10% of pupils (11% of boys and 9% of girls)) and 'the work will get harder' (5% overall (9% of girls only)). 20% of pupils (33% of boys and 9% of girls) couldn't give a reason for possible changes.

Q 25: Anxiety or stress –this year. What has made you most anxious or stressed this year?

This was an open question, and responses were grouped according to their 'best fit' under appropriate headings, as had been the practice in previous years. The highest perceived cause of stress was 'tests and exams' (36% overall cited this as a reason (30% of boys and 36% of girls)). 'Workload/prep was stressful for 33% of pupils (35% of boys and 25% of girls), and a 'specific subject' was stressful to 12% of pupils (11% of boys and 11% of girls). A 'specific teacher' was cause for concern for 7% overall (7% of boys and 6% of girls) and 'social issues' were cited by 11% of pupils (7% of boys and 14% of girls). 'Don't know' was cited by 1% overall (3% of girls only).

Q 26: Anxiety or stress –next year. What do you think will cause you most anxiety or stress next year?

The predicted main cause of anxiety in the coming year was considered by 45% of pupils to be 'tests and exams' (cited by 37% of boys and 44% of girls). The next most pressing was 'workload and prep', a cause of stress to 41% of pupils (39% of boys and 33% of girls). 11% thought a 'specific subject' was possibly going to cause problems (11% of boys and 8% of girls) and 3% overall thought 'social issues', might cause concerns (6% of girls only). 1% (3% of girls only) thought 'a specific teacher' might be stressful.

Q 27: Subjects and GCSE choices. You have made a choice of GCSE subjects. Think about the subjects that you are studying. Think about the subjects that you are not studying.

This question was changed from the previous format because the pupils had now made their option choices for GCSE. The question looked at how they perceived these choices; the fact that they were either studying or not studying a subject was separated and they were asked if they were happy or unhappy to be studying the subject. The Subjects being studies for GCSE were, generally, received well. The compulsory subjects were Maths, English, three sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Physics), Religious Education and French. 73% overall were happy to be doing Maths (78% of boys and 67% of girls reported this). English elicited a 78% positive response; more girls (89%) than boys (70%) thought this. In the sciences, Biology was the best received, 83% of children being positive about studying it (87% of boys and 78% of girls saying so). Chemistry was acceptable to 77% overall (87% of boys and 64% of girls) although, of the sciences, Physics was the least liked; only 66% overall said they were happy to study it (83% of boys and 44% of girls said so). French, as a compulsory subject, was acceptable to 65% of children: 59% of boys and 72% of girls saying this. Religious Education was acceptable to 18% overall; 15% of boys and 22% of girls said they were happy to be studying it. The optional subjects reflected a general satisfaction with the status quo; choices had been made, after all. 20% of pupils said that, although they were not studying Art, they would have liked to (15% of boys and 20% of girls said this). A slightly smaller proportion (17%) said that they were not doing Design Technology as an option, but would have liked to (a balanced number (17% of each) of boys and girls said this). The same proportion (17%) expressed the same view about Games as an option (15% of boys and 19% of girls saying this). A smaller proportion (13% in each case) said that they would have liked to study History or Physical Education as options. More boys (17%) than girls (8%) wanted to study History, and slightly more girls (14%) than boys (13%) said that they would have liked to study Physical Education. 12% wanted to, but had not chosen to study Music; more girls (17%) than boys (9%) said this. 11% of pupils (and more girls (17%) than boys (7%)) said that they would have liked to study Spanish. Overall, boys seemed most happy studying Biology, Chemistry and Physics, and the girls seemed happiest studying English, Biology and French.

The interview data

The interview data was collected from the ten pupils taking part, during the middle part of the Autumn term of their second year in the senior school (Year 10); by now they had made their GCSE option choices, were no longer the junior year group, and were slightly more established as members of the senior school community, where the relationships that they had developed with both their older peers and the teaching staff were more stable. Their perspective of the junior school had also changed somewhat as the gap between their junior and senior school experiences widened. As before, the comments that each interviewee made and the observations that they shared, were gathered together under the broad headings of enjoyment and importance, (where this impacted upon school, subjects and teachers) and influences that affected their perceptions.

Enjoyment

Having now spent some time in the senior school, all these pupils were able to get a better sense of perspective; for some, the opportunity to compare and contrast the enjoyable elements of the junior and senior schools was not missed:

> ...generally I would say it is different...well you see certain things in a different light and teachers aren't necessarily like teachers, they are more kind of people...it is more open, you are more respected, more freedom obviously as I said last year with the whole (senior school) thing...but, I wouldn't say it is any more enjoyable, but it is just like different enjoyment...In (senior school) you work a lot harder, but you still get enjoyment from doing different things...whereas before in (junior school) you would go out and you got enjoyment from playing handball or football in the playground...now you get enjoyment from different sorts of things...(boy D, Year 10)

In terms of what they currently most enjoyed about school in general, friends still played a key part:

> ...it is nice to be back at school so I can see all my friends and stuff...(girl E, Year 10)

and:

> ...being with my friends...(boy C, Year 10)

and:

> ...seeing my friends (boy A, Year 10)

The primacy of friendships was almost a given, but enjoyment of sports and games was also evident:

> ...everyone says 'friends' don't they?...either that and...I also enjoy sports a lot...is never the lessons is it? Although I quite like Drama...(girl C, Year 10)

Particularly appreciated were the private spaces:

> ...being with my friends and things because, I mean, these common rooms...I think that's a really good thing...(girl D, Year 10)

For some, the appeal was felt to be broader:

> ...probably just being there...like, the whole thing...yeah...(boy E, Year 10)

and:

> ...socialising...rowing is pretty good, I enjoy rowing, um... yeah...being in the play was pretty good...general kind of thing like that...(boy D, Year 10)

and in some cases the enjoyment of school was linked to a perception of maturity:

> ...I enjoy it a lot more than I have done before...I think it is just that you get more respect, you get treated like an adult, and you have a lot more responsibility for yourself...you feel that you don't have to rely on anybody else to do something for you...(boy B, Year 10)

What was perceived as least enjoyable about school was perhaps more varied, but there was a sense that the pace had hotted up slightly and time was beginning to become precious:

> ...I still like school...I do...but it's become a lot more about work...I mean...I used to have time at the weekends to just stop, but I don't now because I get four homeworks on a Friday and there's always going to be a test every single week that I have to revise for on the week end...and then have the test...there is a lot of work to do...(girl D, Year 10)

There was a perception that a busy week made the weekends more valuable:

> ...it is alright, I don't think that we have enough time like... we do in the holidays, obviously, but I think that it is quite hard during the week and I don't think we should have a full day on Saturday because that is part of your weekend...(girl B, Year 10)

and, given that Saturday school looked set to stay, ways could perhaps be found to make the burden more bearable:

> ...probably Saturdays...well...I liked it in (junior school) where you had just the morning...that was quite good...but then again I suppose when will we have matches...so...I just think maybe we could, you know, be in home clothes on Saturday...(girl C, Year 10)

The prospect of boredom allowed certain aspects of school life to be regarded as uninspiring:

> ...Chapel's boring...three times a week plus Eucharists ...I just find that so... yeah, Chapel is not great...(boy D, Year 10)

and:

> ...a lot of it is really boring though, some of the lessons are just so boring...(boy C, Year 10)

Certain aspects of the school milieu faced more traditional distain:

> ...the school dinners are rubbish...well lunches...they really are shocking; I mean, I will eat anything...(boy D, Year 10)

School was perceived as much more bearable and enjoyable when friends and good friendships formed part of the equation:

> ...it is a lot easier when you have got your mates around you, if that makes sense...(boy B, Year 10)

The busy schedule during the day meant that social ties were subject to the ebb and flow of lesson times:

> ...I have made new friends and unfortunately, I have lost some friends as well, you know...just people who you don't tend to see as often...you know...if you don't have classes with anybody then you don't see them, you only see them between lessons or after school...(boy B, Year 10)

In terms of what pupils perceived as their most, and least, enjoyed subjects, the choices were more variegated than they had been; option choices had, in theory, meant that the subjects were (apart from the compulsory ones) pared down to those which were preferred, so, on balance, opinion ought to be more favourable than it had been in the past, when all subjects were obligatory. The favourites still contained a good sample of those considered as subjects that provided practicality:

> ...probably sport and DT...(boy A, Year 10)

and:

> ...Drama...(because)...it's practical it's not just doing nothing sitting down it's actually...most of the lessons we are doing something practical...there's a few where we are analysing things...I don't know if that's going to change...(boy E, Year 10)

although a definition of 'work' was attempted:

> ...Drama...we just play games and we don't actually do any proper work and it is fantastic...well we are doing 'proper work' but it is just not how you see it because it is all very physical and there is not a lot of writing so...(boy B, Year 10)

many subjects were liked simply because they were fun:

> ...it is between Art and Drama...Art – I like it because it is really fun and I have just swapped classes and so I have got a lot of bright people there...and Drama because it is really fun...(boy C, Year 10)

and:

> ...I like volleyball because they do that now a lot and that is fun...(girl B, Year 10)

Some liked lessons that were perceived as being useful:

> ...(Latin)...if you do then it makes it a lot easier to learn Spanish, French, Italian, if you wanted to...(boy E, Year 10)

Enjoyment of some subjects that had possibly once been reviled had developed; perhaps because of a new appreciation of the different ways subjects were handled in the senior school:

> ...I quite like RE at the moment...because...in (senior school) you get a lot more of a say and you can argue and it's more sort of sociology as well as religious as well it's not just sort of Buddhism...(girl C, Year 10)

Some subjects were now enjoyed because the perception of the subject had perhaps changed:

> ...I really like History cos I didn't think I would last year, I took it as an option and now it's really interesting...(girl D, Year 10)

or because the content was more stimulating:

> ...I had such an enjoyable History lesson yesterday because it was really...it was good because we were talking about, like, the cross between politics and history... that is the sort of thing that I really love...lessons like English, History and French, that kind of thing are great fun...(boy D, Year 10)

and:

> ...Biology...I like it more than I did last year...we're doing more different sorts of things...it is more about the body and things like that rather than ecology, which I didn't really like...(boy E, Year 10)

Sometimes there was an acknowledged self-improvement to account for the better performance, and consequently higher enjoyment:

> ...Biology...we have got a very funny teacher...we've got (male teacher S) but also because I understand it more and I am doing better in it... and I'm in set one so it's quite hard...(girl C, Year 10)

There were still, in the greater scheme of things, those subjects that were disliked; every pupil had a hierarchy of subjects to some degree, and the ones that were least enjoyed were there for a variety of reasons. Some subjects were relegated because there was a problem with comprehension:

> ...like Latin, I like sometimes and other times I don't...when it just...sometimes you just get muddled up and confuse everything, and other times it is fine...(boy E, Year 10)

Some subjects were relegated because there was no clear perception that the knowledge imparted was going to be of any use at all:

> ...(English is)...too much of the analysis thing, and it's not about the English language and how to use it...it is all about analysing poetry and stuff like that which, when you leave school, are not going to be any use to you at all...(boy E, Year 10)

and:

> ...IT is boring...oh, my God, if there was a snake of how far in the course you are...so I'm like at the arse of the snake...I'm at the snake's ass kind of area...it's not bad but you are not allowed to talk, you are just supposed to sit there and do stuff and, like, it is not even fun because I don't really care about desk top publishing...the work is just so pointless...cos then you type up all this stuff and you're never gonna have...well you might use the skills again...but you are never going to use the stuff...like I had to make a pie chart of, like, expenditure for this parcel company and I was like: ' I don't want to do that'...(girl E, Year 10)

In some subject areas the lack of inspiration caused some to:

> ...hate it...because we are just doing Christianity...at other schools they do different religions as part of their GCSE course, but we are only doing Christianity...and we go so deep into it and it sort of just makes you not believe in anything...(boy C, Year 10)

For some pupils there was simply no affinity with the subject, no matter how important it was perceived as being:

> …Physics…one (reason) is the rubbish teacher, two…I think that you have to be that kind of person…you have to be a Physics kind of guy and I am sure (boy friend A) is gonna say the exact opposite because he is a real scientist, but it just doesn't float my boat…Physics is just so dull…and there is so much Maths in the way; it is just formulas and using formulas, and there is always a right or wrong answer and…I dunno…I mean it is (an) important thing, don't get me wrong, it is very important…I mean…you need it, but it's so dull…(boy D, Year 10)

The link between Physics and Maths caused sometimes a predicament, particularly if one was more talented at one than the other:

> …(Physics)…can be quite boring and if you are bad at Maths then you are likely to be bad at Physics, although I am quite good at Physics, but I am crap at Maths, so I don't really know how it works…(girl B, Year 10)

The degree to which pupils perceived their talent and performance in a subject also had an effect on their enjoyment of it:

> …if I am doing badly in one subject it kind of pushes me away from it…(girl D, Year 10)

The relationship that existed with the teacher also had a prominent role in pupils' enjoyment of subjects. Positive feedback about teachers was less evidenced than negative feedback, and in general, teachers were appreciated for good humour and tolerance:

> …it often depends on the teacher, and if you have got a good teacher you get on with it and it makes life so much easier and you can have a laugh…you know…I have got (male teacher S) for (subject F) and he is also my Housemaster and, you know, a nice person in general to talk to then it makes my (subject F) lessons just seem so much easier because it could be a real drag…(boy B, Year 10)

Often, on the face of it, good teachers were the ones who let pupils get away with things:

> …last year I had (male teacher R) and he was just a genius, he is an absolute legend…he is deaf and blind so you could do anything that you want and it was quite good fun…(boy B, Year 10)

but often the classification 'good' was enough:

> …I quite liked Biology…(with)…(male teacher L)…he is a really good teacher…(boy C, Year 10)

A subject that was not enjoyed was often because the pupil had a less than successful relationship with the teacher. Sometimes, a subject could be written off simply because it was taught by that person:

> …Maths…because I have…(male teacher S)…(girl B, Year 10)

or because there was a perceived mutual dislike:

> …because me and the teacher don't get on, he hates me and I hate him back…it is just one of those things…(boy B, Year 10)

Sometimes the subject might have been liked, but for the teacher:

> …I mean I enjoy the subject, but it is just a bit…now I have got (male teacher W) who is a good teacher, but he doesn't half drag on and it is a bit tiresome…(boy B, Year 10)

or perhaps, at least from an adolescent perspective, every sin imaginable could be heaped at their door:

> …the teachers are really, really bad…they are either really patronising or really, really…like…moody or something…(boy C, Year 10)

Many pupils enjoyed the subjects that they perceived they had a talent for:

> …I like Chemistry…because I am good at it…(girl B, Year 10)

and:

> …English, History, German and French because I am quite good at all of those, and Latin, and Biology…(girl E, Year 10)

One of the reasons for a least enjoyed subject *not* being enjoyed was, conversely, because no talent was shown for it:

> …(Maths, because)…I am really bad at it…(boy B, Year 10)

and:

> …DT…not a subject that I was ever good at…you have to do so much drawing and, like, you can never be finished with that…whereas if you've done an essay…(girl D, Year 10)

Importance

The importance of things, as far as pupils were concerned, depended on a number of different factors. School itself was important, and one of the most significant aspects of school, in the minds of pupils, was getting on with the work:

> ...I always try and do well for my Orders but when you think about it they're not really that important are they...cos they don't really count towards anything except if you get a really bad one you might get dropped a set...I suppose...we've got a bit of course work and that is quite important...and always doing your preps, cos if you overload then that will be really bad for you...(girl C, Year 10)

To many pupils, as well as one of the crucial elements in their enjoyment of school, the place occupied by friendship was deemed a vital part of the importance attached to school:

> ...making friends and stuff and, like, learning stuff...(girl E, Year 10)

and:

> ...friends and...just to have a good time...don't get into so much trouble...(girl C, Year 10)

and friends mattered:

> ...(friends) are quite important because when I leave (senior school) I want to stay in touch with some people...(boy A, Year 10)

Learning subjects was important, because it was a clear reason for attendance, but the less obvious elements, to do with socialising were as valuable:

> ...obviously your education...but then your, sort of, manners and that kind of thing...your whole, kind of, upbringing and the whole, kind of, respect and that whole thing...and then exercise, that is really important...but I reckon that it is just about being there, and the, kind of, getting the whole thing...and, like, the social part of it, and the making friends and the learning life skills really...so not just learning subjects, but learning life skills...(boy D, Year 10)

Because GCSE courses had now been started, the prospect of public examination was now even more important in pupils' minds:

> ...knowing the basic things for your GCSEs as well...just basic things rather than...like, in languages...remembering the grammar...and in Maths...keeping up and remembering those things as well...(girl D, Year 10)

A good deal of importance was attached not only to the GCSE exams that were coming, but attention was now being paid also to the tiers beyond that:

> …things like the subject that you want to do for when you are older…(girl B, Year 10)

Coming to school might not be wholly embraced, but there was no doubting it's usefulness, and consequently it's importance for later on in life:

> …I would (still choose to) come to school because it is useful and you need it…in the world now you need to be well educated or you won't get anywhere…(boy C, Year 10)

Getting through not only GCSE but also A level, and then on to university were now factors that increased the importance of school:

> …getting good marks so you can go to, like, university and stuff…I think that sport is quite important as well cos, (you) might get a sports scholarship…(boy A, Year 10)

Sport was indeed considered a significant factor:

> …sport is hugely important…(teacher) has been telling us about it in Biology…about how it is the most important…we were like: 'yeah yeah yeah'…we have come to realise how hugely important it is, our sport, because we do loads of exercise compared to other people…I mean…that is hugely important because it keeps you healthy…(boy B, Year 10)

The importance of health and fitness, particularly in the minds of boys, had become very much more important:

> …I think that my health is more important now than it ever has been…because we have got to that point where everybody is going on about the over-use of cocaine and things all over the place and dope is being smoked left, right and centre and things…I am just trying to keep myself healthy, do plenty of exercise, and I have lost a lot of weight in the past year and a half…that is really important to me because you see some of the kids who are stupidly fat now and you just think: 'oh that is disgusting', you are never gonna get laid, mate, you are just too fat, you'll crush some poor girl'…so…yeah…I think health and fitness is really important to me now, more than it ever has been…(boy B, Year 10)

It was important, also, not to try too hard to be all things, in this very busy environment; one of the most difficult things was:

> …probably trying to be good at everything…I think that if you try and be good at everything then you stretch yourself too thin…so if you just say: 'I am going to try my hardest here'…and, say, put half as much effort or three quarters there…and often teachers will be like: 'no, no, you can't do that,

> you know'...if you do, do that then at least you are concentrating on what is important and that is just my opinion...(boy B, Year 10)

The perception of subject importance, at this time, was more concentrated because of the onset of GCSE courses. In the minds of most pupils, the core subjects, Maths, English and Science, were still the most important, although it was the case that other subjects had begun to take more prominent positions in the subject hierarchy, boosted by the individual GCSE option choices effected by pupils. Maths, English and Science were still rationalised as being important because of the benefits they would dispose later on in life. The primacy accorded to English, Maths and Science was still sometimes perceived as a given:

> ...that is what people told them...that's what parents' want...so I guess it depends on what parents you have...(girl B, Year 10)

but for the most part, good reasons could be given for the relative importance accorded to these subject areas:

> ...probably the big three... English, Maths, Sciences...still...because they just are, you know...they just are, like...you can't define English for example, there is nothing there that you are actually going to use that much later in life if you are going to be a physician, but you still need it...if you take something like Maths because you need it to add up or something... and you need it to decorate your house...you can only think of reasons like that...like Biology you need to...not confuse your finger with your penis...I don't know...you can always...come up with reasons for stuff...but the most important ones are those three...I know the three are really...the only three that you have to do...(boy D, Year 10)

For most pupils, English was reasoned as being most useful for writing, particularly in pursuit of work:

> ...you need to know how to write letters to get jobs...(boy A, Year 10)

and:

> ...because everyone needs to be...you know, I think that it is quite important because you know, when you write letters...you just use it so much, if you were really bad at it then it would be very embarrassing...(boy C, Year 10)

and:

> ...if you can speak well and write well, you know, put something down easily and efficiently in the right sort of format then it makes it a lot easier to get a job because you can write yourself something like a resume and it can just be...you know, if somebody has just put a lot of slang in it... you

know… in the resume or something…but if you can spell it out properly then it is good…(boy B, Year 10)

although the subject's powers were sometimes perceived as providing a universal succour:

…I think that's the one that can get you the furthest…I ever had to rely on anything I think it would be English…(girl D, Year 10)

Maths, too, was seen as a perennial requirement: the skills were perhaps less nebulous than those required by English, but Maths was omnipotent:

…because it is useful…in life…(boy C, Year 10)

and:

…Maths (is) really just a life skill isn't it…(boy B, Year 10)

or, simply, it was regarded as important because it happened frequently:

…because we do a lot of it…lots of lessons of it...(boy A, Year 10)

and, to some, the subject's usefulness was recognised in spite of reservations:

…I was thinking: 'well, Maths is a really good subject…I should do that because it's going to help me' but I don't like it…(girl D, Year 10)

Of the sciences positively reported, Biology was reasoned as:

…quite important because you're learning about life and things…well parasites is what we are doing…and I think that's quite important…and respiration…so of the three sciences, Biology is probably the one that is most relevant…(girl D, Year 10)

The rationale for subject importance had, at this stage, to factor in the effect of GCSE options:

… the ones that you take as choices seem to be more important …(boy A, Year 10)

and there was also the perception that enjoyed subjects were still those that should be considered as important:

…I always think you should do what you like even if you're bad at it…(girl D, Year 10)

this was especially true now, as current choices were seen to impinge on what might happen later, in the adult world:

> …I think that it is more important to do what you want to do and what you enjoy, because it is important to do something later on that you enjoy…(girl B, Year 10)

There was, by now, a better sense of how and why subjects were important and useful, and their relative values were being reasoned more articulately:

> …if you want to go and be a historian then History would probably be a good option, but it is not at all important for someone who wants to go and teach Chemistry…mean I can see the skills in Physics, so I can see where the people are using formulas and people who are really good at Physics, like (boy friend P)…fantastic physicist and a really good mathematician and all that, and you need a skill to do that…but Geography…anyone can do it, you get any thick person and just give them a load of facts and stuff and get them to write it down…(boy D, Year 10)

The perceived usefulness of subjects was beginning to have an impact on specific career aspirations:

> …Chemistry, Physics, English…because I want to do medicine…well…I *have* to do Chemistry, I don't really know about…(girl B, Year 10)

and:

> …(English)…is important to me because I enjoy it…and if I enjoy something maybe I'll have a career in it…(girl C, Year 10)

Aside from Maths, English and Science, other subjects were now firmly in the spotlight, because they had been chosen as GCSE options, and the choosing, rather than their compulsory inclusion, would have given them more status in defining their usefulness later on:

> …Geography I think you need later, you need to know how to read a map…History is quite important because it is, like, if I become Prime Minister then I will know how to prevent another war…(boy A, Year 10)

Some subjects were perceived as being important in the way they offered support to other subjects and in other, less obvious ways:

> …Drama…because it helps you in lots of other ways, it helps you with your English and it helps with your confidence and everything…(boy C, Year 10)

At the other end of the spectrum, the least important subjects were those where there was seemingly no perception of them having any validity at all; often where pupils had little interest in the subjects, and could see no point in them. One subject that fitted this role was Religious Education:

> …because I have no interest in it and I am not looking to follow that any further…(boy B, Year 10)

and:

> …we've just been learning the Beatitude and the Apostles Creed and I think a lot of it is a bit silly cos you have to learn the whole thing and I mean we have to learn the whole meaning of it and…I just don't like it…I think it's a bit pointless to be honest…(girl D, Year 10)

Other subjects were disliked similarly:

> … Geography is rubbish…it is a Noddy subject…there is no skill…it is just memorising stuff…and they just nick stuff from other peoples' subjects…half of Geography is, like, geology and there is only a tiny percentage of the Geography course that is actually Geography…when you get onto it, it is all population…it is just memorising facts…(boy D, Year 10)

Pupils who perceived that they had little or no talent at a subject were more willing to see them as unimportant:

> …I am glad that I dropped the subjects that I have…like Latin and Music…I sort of dreaded going to Latin lessons because you know you can't really do it…(boy A, Year 10)

and:

> … Physics…because I doubt I'll do Physics A level and…you should do something you really like but I'm not good at Physics and I don't like it so I can't really see any reason why it should be important…(girl D, Year 10)

and:

> …I hate Physics…I don't understand it and it is so boring…(boy C, Year 10)

A subject could also be consigned to obscurity because it showed little promise as a useful data base for later on; there was no link between the skills and knowledge learned now and the imagined future:

> …like Physics – am I really going to need to know how to work out something's density when I'm older?…and in Chemistry I don't think I need to know how to make some kind of explosive…(girl D, Year 10)

and a subject's perceived usefulness, or not, was informed negatively (in the same way as subjects impacted positively) by possible career or job choices:

> …I don't think that I want to be like a designer or something and that is why I am not doing Art…(boy A, Year 10)

and:

> …(Drama)…I don't really see myself being an actor so…I don't see the point of what we are doing because I don't think you are ever going to need it when you are older, you know...(boy A, Year 10)

and:

> …RE…I am not going to go into the Church when I am older...(boy A, Year 10)

There was, after the choosing of GCSE options, a perception amongst pupils that they had lost those subjects that they had always labelled as 'doss lessons'; where the pressure was off and it did not matter greatly how well or badly the work went. Now that they had disappeared, to some, the subjects were greatly missed:

> …it is awful, where has Music gone?…that was awesome…no Art…no DT for me…you don't have any lessons where you can just think: 'ah well, it doesn't matter if you don't do any work'…(girl E, Year 10)

and:

> …there are no real doss lessons (laughter) I mean there is nothing that you can just, like, not work at…it doesn't matter…and you can always say: 'well, I am not doing that for GCSE anyway' (laughter), so…no more DT or Art…(boy D, Year 10)

Now that option choices had been made, and 'doss' lessons had gone, the implications for many were clear:

> …now that I don't have the 'dossing subjects' you do have to put your effort into every subject for your GCSEs…I don't do Spanish anymore, but last year, especially after I had done my subjects in February, I was just…like: 'oh, really, I can have a right laugh now'...I mean, my teacher was a bit weird and so I was having a good laugh about that and did some random things…(boy B, Year 10)

and:

> …last year you could be like: 'oh, I don't really have to work at this because I know I'm not going to do it next year'…but now you don't really have that…(girl B, Year 10)

There were certain subjects that were regarded as obvious candidates for the title 'doss subject', and it was the case that those pupils (other than the pupils who had chosen them as options) often had clear perceptions:

> …(Drama)…everyone says it's really, really fun and you don't have to do any work…(girl D, Year 10)

and one of the reasons for not having adopted certain subjects for GCSE was often explained away as being because they were considered as doss subjects:

> …I am not going to use Music to be a lawyer or a politician…and it's a doss…(boy D, Year 10)

The perception of these subjects as being doss subjects was not confined to outsiders; it was often the case, even from those who had elected to study for GCSEs such subjects as:

> …(DT and Art)…I thought: 'yeah, there you go, all the doss lessons'…(boy A, Year 10)

and:

> …I have got two…I have got Drama and Art…people class them as (a doss), but at the moment we've got loads of Art work…but Drama…she, like, sets us a prep like, once in four…she has set it twice this term and it is a lot more fun…(boy C, Year 10)

and:

> …I think Drama is quite a doss…cos…we barely get set prep and when you do it's about something you've done in the lesson and you've got to remember a bit of it…it's something you've done rather than something they've said…like evaluating what you've done…and it's quite fun…(girl C, Year 10)

Consequently, there was often something of a rearguard action by apologists who felt they had to make the case for these subjects:

> …Art is a fairly hard subject though…but you don't get prep in DT…well you do, but it is like: 'draw a diagram of'…(boy A, Year 10)

and:

> …like, DT…I thought that would be an easy thing but …I mean…you get loads to do, like drawing…(girl D, Year 10)

and:

> …well, DT is very hard work at (senior school)…(boy A, Year 10)

The experience of transition from junior school to senior school was now twelve months old; a year had been spent in the senior school, and, consequently, their perceptions of the junior school were altering, as the pupils grew older. There were obvious differences between the campuses:

> …it is like…(senior school) is more spread out and you have to do a lot more walking…in (junior school) it is all sort of compact and together…(boy C, Year 10)

It seemed to be that not only the scale of buildings was noticeably different:

> …everything seems smaller…like, when we were in Year 8 it was: 'oh, my God, the third formers are so big'…and now we're like: 'no you're not'…(girl E, Year 10)

and:

> … I felt like I was big when I was here…but now…it's kind of small…(girl B, Year 10)

as well as the junior school having more prescriptive regulation:

> …when you go through (junior school) sometimes and you see signs like: 'make sure you change before you go outside'…(laughter) and I find that incredible…(and)…it looks a lot more smaller and a lot more caged in…(girl C, Year 10)

The move to the senior school had brought many changes. The regime, being modelled on traditional boarding school lines, with academic work concentrated in the mornings and sports and activities in the afternoons gave a perception of a more leisurely day, when a superficial comparison was made with the junior school:

> …lessons finish at 2.20 quite often…(it) doesn't seem like you have as much lessons as (junior school)…(boy A, Year 10)

In spite of the seemingly relaxed structure of the working day, there was, by this point, a perception that the general workload was beginning to increase; more was expected of the pupils as they grappled with the GCSE coursework:

> …the first day we had double Biology and she gave us a sheet and we were like: 'whoa'…it was so much harder, but when you learn the stuff it is just like last year basically…I mean…Latin -more is expected of me because we don't have any coursework so all the work is in the exams and we need to learn the stuff...History…I wasn't expecting to be good; it had (female teacher G), which was funny…English is…a bit different; we still get to do stuff like drama and stuff…Maths is pretty much the same, cos were just working though a topic at a time and so…that is okay…but they expect you to be able to work faster now, which you can do, I suppose…(girl E, Year 10)

and, compared to the halcyon days of junior school:

...(work is)...much harder because back then it was kind of strange if a teacher remembered your prep...every night and now you get so much prep...cos in (junior school) you knew they were half hour preps but they took you ten minutes...now they're really giving us half an hour...it's really hard...Maths and French are much longer...I think sometimes the teachers need to realise how much work we actually do have to do...cos we've got so many tests and we get lots of other preps a night as well...you don't have that much free time cos you have to do three active and one non-active or four actives (afternoon sport options) which means staying late at least two nights and that's a lot of time you could have used to do work and stuff...(girl D, Year 10)

For these pupils in general, the experience of being in the senior school was positive, and it had developed somewhat by now, and the novelty, (and to some extent, the anxiety) had dissipated; being new, and under scrutiny, was now a thing of the past:

> ...it is better and you don't feel like everyone is looking at you...(girl B, Year 10)

The relationship that had, for a long time, existed between the pupils in the year group and their older peers, informed their perception of their own place in the school hierarchy:

> ...you think: 'oh, I'll never finish school'...because it seems so far away...but...it's only three years...I just remember...I still think of...you know...the sixth formers now...when they were in Year 8 and I was in Year 4... I always thought: 'wow, they are so big...I'll never be that'...now that I'm in fourth form and I look at them and I think...it's not really changed...it's weird now that the (junior school) lot have come up now...like Year 8...cos you think: 'I thought *we* were third formers'...(now)...you feel like you belong to (senior school) more... cos you... you've stayed a year...(girl C, Year 10)

There was now a chance to rationalise the relative benefits accorded to each particular year in the hierarchy:

> ...it is quite nice because you are not like...say you are at the top of school and everyone relies on you, but when you are at the bottom it is just like...you look up to so many more people, whereas in the fourth form, it is the best year...because you don't have to have, like, all the added things like when you are in sixth form...lower sixth, that's probably ok...and then fifth form it is, like, GCSEs and obviously it is university, sort of thing...you have so much more to deal with, whereas in fourth year you can just, sort of, take it really steadily and, sort of, enjoy it...(boy C, Year 10)

The current year was felt to be a good place to be:

> …fourth year is a good year…it's, sort of, no more pressure…and yet you feel, like, quite important cos you are coming up to GCSEs…(girl C, Year 10)

From the current perspective, the third year was considered to be an easy year:

> …I think that last year was a bit of a doss year, but it is not this year, but we don't have any exams… we do, but they don't count towards anything…(boy A, Year 10)

and to some, the third form experience looked, relatively, less instructive:

> …I've definitely sort of got a bit more concentrating in lessons, cos I think I know I have to…cos third year…now I look back…we don't really need half the stuff we did…so it was pointless…but you don't think that when you go there because you're like: 'oh it's (senior school)'…(girl C, Year 10)

and fourth form was perceived as offering:

> …harder work than last year, doing course work and everything...(boy A, Year 10)

The post-option world might have brought with it a higher workload, but there was an upside:

> …it is so much more relaxed and you don't have to do too much…you get more work, but you, sort of, don't mind doing it because you have, sort of, chosen to do it….like, last year you had to do some subjects that were forced on you and now you have, sort of, got rid of the ones that you don't really like…(boy C, Year 10)

These pupils were now at a point in their education where they had quite a clear, balanced view of the past and the future; they could still remember the recent experiences at junior school, and were placed in the middle of the senior school with older peers who were demonstrably doing what they themselves would be doing very shortly. The experience of GCSE coursework and the prospect of exams were high on the agenda as far as they were concerned; option choices had been made, and pupils were coming to terms with those decisions. For some, the choices were rationalised in a straightforward way, as subjects had been adopted or rejected:

> …I sometimes miss Art…it was that, Music and Drama and I wanted a doss one…but then I thought: 'I've never done Drama' and I did enjoy it cos we had a sample lesson in English…and I'm not that great a drawer…and Music you can do in your spare time…(and)…Spanish and Geography, I just heard good stuff from everyone about them…and I've always enjoyed Geography…I, sort of, eliminated the ones I never wanted to do again…like

> History and Latin…Latin I thought: ' I haven't listened for the last year I probably better get rid of that one'…cos I, sort of, blagged my way through it learning the vocab…I didn't know any grammar…but if you got to GCSE…I don't think I could handle, like, three languages…(girl C, Year 10)

and:

> …I didn't know whether to do Art, or German or Latin, I was going to definitely do History because I like it, and I have got to do German and Latin, but I found Art quite good, but only in this last year…so I thought: 'well, if I only found it good in this last year it might not actually be that good because you only do, like, half a year of Art'…so when it came to it I thought: 'well, I don't like it that much'…(girl E, Year 10)

For some, satisfactory option choices meant:

> …I think that I have chosen safe options…because I really like knowing that I can do them…which is a bit stupid, but…(girl E, Year 10)

and for some, contentment was combined with misgivings:

> …looking back now…I think I should have chosen Drama instead of German.... cos there's a lot of grammar…but I think it's going to be useful in the future…(girl D, Year 10)

Now that the GCSE courses were well and truly under way, the consequence of making those option choices was being realised:

> …I have picked the stupidest subjects…Latin…I can't believe I am doing that…I hate (female teacher E) she gives us so much work…we didn't have to do anything with (female teacher J) and now we have to do work…I hate it…(girl E, Year 10)

For some, there was a belated sense of unease, laced, perhaps with frustration:

> …last year…Spanish seemed really easy…and now I do it I am really bad at it…but I can't really do anything about it…if I hadn't have done Spanish I would have had to do Geography or Music and I hate them…(girl B, Year 10)

Not everyone accepted the consequence of having made what were later thought to be unsatisfactory choices; some had been able to effect changes:

> …I put down to do Spanish first of all…Spanish I found really, really hard and pointless…we were doing things like what to say at a petrol station and so I changed to History...(boy A, Year 10)

and:

> …I got rid of the German…three weeks into the term…it was just really boring…(boy C, Year 10)

It may have been due to dissatisfaction with the choices made, or simply due to an awareness of the curriculum being offered elsewhere, but there was, after GCSE choices had been made, some criticism of the breadth, or lack of it, of the choices on offer:

> …other schools can do IT, graphics and stuff, and business studies and stuff…and I don't see why we are limited…we have got all the resources, and we pay enough to have it, so I don't see why we can't have it…I think that my parents think that because we pay so much we should get a lot more for it, because it is a bit of a rip off really…I think that it could be a lot better…there's things that could improve and there's things that they should listen to us about…it is terrible…(boy C, Year 10)

and:

> …I thought that the option choices were really bad…and I think that we should have some stuff…like sociology…that you can choose because that would be easy…(girl B, Year 10)

That some subjects that were chosen for GCSE meant that other subjects were discarded; sometimes the desire to follow a subject that was enjoyed was not enough on it's own:

> …things like Classics…I enjoyed it, but not enough to take it…(boy C, Year 10)

and sometimes liking a subject was overshadowed by other considerations:

> …I wanted to do Art and Drama and German…but I got really good marks in my History…and my test was good…so I thought I'd give it a go…(girl D, Year 10)

Some aspects of the compulsory element of the GCSE choices, namely, Maths, English and the sciences, did not suffer the approbation of the pupils in the same way that French and Religious Education did. These were considered as less essential subjects, and their inclusion was, by and large, criticised. French was perhaps the least disliked, because there was some acceptance that a modern foreign language, in some form, was useful:

> …you could make a language optional rather than having to do French…something like that …(boy E, Year 10)

and:

> …a good friend of mine…is really good at German, but not that good at French, and they'd far rather…if you just had a choice…either, not to do

any language, or just to do a language of your choice, rather than having to do French, and then have an extra language on top…I think it's great for people like me, or anyone who is linguistically talented, and is good at French, but if you are far better at German or something like that, then that is a bit harsh…(boy D, Year 10)

and:

…you have to learn another language but I'd prefer to do Spanish, because Spanish is such a broadly spoken language…and I know you've got your option to do Spanish…but I think it's silly why we're doing French because it's not really very widely spoken…(girl D, Year 10)

although, there was, in some quarters, a recognition that it was perhaps prudent to gain something from an experience that had been there since Year 6:

…I like French…I like it …we have learnt a language for so long that there is no point in throwing it away now…(boy C, Year 10)

The subject that attracted most displeasure was Religious Education, even though it had been accepted that, because it was in the curriculum, and because a GCSE would result, then it was probably best to get the most out of the situation. Additionally, some pupils were minded to rationalise the subject as being part of the *raison d'être* of this particular establishment:

…it is all a bit contentious…I'm….I'm kind of…seeing the light…in terms of…that I can understand why we do have to do it now…Church school and all that…I think that in a school like this you have to do RE…in a school where you go to Chapel three times a week and do Eucharist once in however many weeks, I can see why RE is compulsory…it is a main part of our culture and society, learning about different religions, I mean…if you don't know…I mean the whole crux is…in a way…terrorism is everything to do with religion and misconceptions of Islam and stuff…I mean…I still don't want to do it (laughter) but I can understand why we do it…when you get down to it... it is really pretty easy…(boy D, Year 10)

The reaction to compulsory Religious Education was based on the fact that it had no real place in the scheme of things; it was rejected as not being useful for anything specific, and it was not recognised as being a life skill:

…but RE…I can't really see the ideas behind it or why you have to do it…when it's all about Christianity as well…it's a bit pointless…(boy E, Year 10)

To some:

> …it is terrible; I don't think that they should force that on us…(boy C, Year 10)

The recognition that the religious leanings of the school establishment were somehow part of the rationale did little to quash the perception of unfairness:

> …I know we are a Church of England School…and that is probably their excuse…but, like, RE…compulsory in third form would be fine, but when you get to GCSE and they force it upon you…I just think that is totally wrong…it's annoying…it's so boring…(boy C, Year 10)

indeed, as with all matters where religion is concerned, personal beliefs had a large part to play:

> …I don't think it's really fair because…I mean…I am sure there are people in the school who aren't Christians, so why should we have to learn about the Christian religion?…I'm barely a Christian…I don't go to Church…I really don't think it's important to me though, because it's learning about…the way they live and…the things that they live by…and if we're not Christians, why do we nee to know it?…(girl D, Year 10)

and:

> … not everybody…like…believes in God and stuff…and so I don't think it should be compulsory…(girl B, Year 10)

The option choices though, having now been made, there were the GCSE coursework and examinations to consider; these being the next major events in the immediate future. Coursework itself, of course, had already begun in earnest. Pupils had engaged with it in some subjects for the past year and what had been achieved was seen as a positive experience:

> …(French)…is not challenging at all at GCSE because we have just written a piece of coursework and it was, like, so easy to do it…so that it isn't a problem…(boy C, Year 10)

GCSEs as a concept were by now less frightening than they had been even perhaps a year ago:

> …I know that we still have to do this at our age…(boy D, Year 10)

although, time spent in the senior school provided some view of the future beyond GCSEs, so that it was perhaps now easier to get them in perspective by keeping the them in context:

> …like a big dark cloud and they're looming…and everyone is saying: 'you have to be ready for your GCSEs'…and: 'you have to know all

> this'…and…it's just quite scary…when you think about it everyone says they're not that important…I mean... it's your A levels that everyone looks at…they used to be quite scary because…when you're in like (Year 7) you think your SATs were the scariest thing you've ever done but then you get end of year exams which are even worse…but (at) the end of the day they are only exams and I think, kind of, if you try (your) hardest…and revise and stuff…it should be fine…(girl D, Year 10)

The prospect of getting tested and getting marks, via coursework and exams, was now a reality that was perhaps perceived as being less stressful:

> … now that the course options have been chosen…(they don't)…really worry me, but even so, you actually have to think about them…(boy E, Year 10)

To those involved in subjects with coursework, there was a perception that the incremental accumulation of marks was a useful part of the experience:

> …they seem a lot closer, but I seem less worried about them…like last year everyone was: 'God, GCSEs…GCSEs'…but now you are just doing the work, you actually think: 'oh, this is going towards GCSE'…(girl E, Year 10)

and the feelings of anxiety were perhaps focused on those areas where coursework was not going to act as a palliative:

> …I am not that worried because I know that I am quite good…I am, like…not rubbish at anything…I would say, and so…like…I am not really worried…but I am worried about, like, a lot of vocab to learn for the Latin and stuff…and so I won't remember it all…I usually just make stuff up but most of it I get right…so I'll probably have to actually, like, try still…cos I don't have coursework in quite a few of the subjects…(girl E, Year 10)

and:

> …I am worried about having to revise for them all, but that is the only thing…(boy C, Year 10)

GCSE grades had always been an area where pupils' hopes and aspirations were high. This was perhaps fuelled by the natural competition that existed, and the fact that, as a selective school, the educational process was known to produce success; each summer, there was, after all, the proof, evidenced by the publication of the current crop of GCSE results. In some instances, the expectations were very high, and an A star was seen as the norm, meaning lower grades than this would make some pupils feel uneasy:

> …(I would feel)…ok if I got an A…but not a B or a C probably…I'd be a bit…sort of…embarrassed…(girl C, Year 10)

and this high expectation meant that the grade perceived as a 'bad' GCSE was not that low:

> …I'm not like one of those people: 'oh, I'm not going to have a B'
> …probably (I wouldn't like) a C…(girl C, Year 10)

and, if sibling rivalry was taken into account, acceptability could mean settling for more than:

> …a D…I'm just concerned with doing better than my brother did...which I don't think will be hard cos he got all Ds…I mean…I'll try and get as many as possible, but I know I won't get all A stars...I can't cos I'm in lower tier Maths...but…I think I'll be able to get at least one…(girl D, Year 10)

Grade acceptability did depend on the subject too; a subject seen as borderline had less weight than one perceived as important:

> …what I would not want to get is a C…if I got a C in RE I wouldn't be particularly bothered because it is not important to me or my parents, but in anything else I would be very disappointed…(boy C, Year 10)

Life after GCSE was beginning to impinge upon the consciousness of these pupils by now. They had seen their older peers going through the motions, so the reality of GCSE was clear, as was the reality of lower and upper sixth. At this stage, A levels were, to some, simply too much to think about:

> … I don't give it a thought…I just sort of like focusing on my GCSEs and making sure that I do well enough in them…(boy C, Year 10)

but for some there was recognition of the inevitable passage of time, and a perception that a lack of preparation could cause anxiety:

> …I didn't think that I would think about it until I got into the fifth form, but you suddenly realise: 'I have not got that long left in school'…it is only, like, another three or four years…it is not that long in the grand scheme of things, and I am going to try and go to university and things, but people are asking me: 'do you know what you are going to do at A Level now?'…I haven't a clue, everyone else seems to know, and so I get a bit worried…you ask people and they say: 'I know what I want to do'…(boy B, Year 10)

There was too, a perception that, despite the advantages that being a member bestowed, sixth form did not permit any let up in work rate:

> …I'd love to be in sixth form, but then you've just finished your GCSEs and then you go straight into your AS's…it used to just be all on A level but then there was more pressure…(girl C, Year 10)

There was a perception too that the prospect of yet more choices was going to be, for some at least, difficult. In some cases, the GCSE choices seem to have already influenced possible A level choices; current choices were also prospects:

> …I've considered continuing…and they're all, like, quite equally important for when it comes to what I am going to do later…cos it is not that long away really…these years have gone really fast…cos I remember, like, choosing the options and stuff and now we're like doing them…(girl E, Year 10)

There was also a perception now of a link between A level choices and a career path:

> …that is going to be hard…to make my decision…because I, sort of, have to have a career in mind…or something that I would like to do, so that…you know…that I don't find out after A levels that I want to do this, but I don't have the things to do it…because that would really, really get to me…(boy C, Year 10)

As had happened with choices made in the GCSE curriculum, there was some criticism of the A level system:

> …I do think about what sort of things I would like to do and I think I would probably like to do more than I can…there's too many things that I would like to do…it is the choice which will be the hardest…(boy E, Year 10)

Some pupils were already seemingly confident over their choices:

> …I am not worried, I am massively ahead…I have already decided what I am doing for AS level, but I don't know what I am doing for A Level…I am looking forward to it; I am looking forward to just doing the ones that I like…every subject will be my subject…(boy D, Year 10)

and:

> …I am going to do Chemistry, Physics and French I think, I don't want to do four though…three is enough…(girl B, Year 10)

As well as being clear about the positive subject choices, there was also some clarity over which subjects would not be taken further:

> …I don't think that I will carry on with History…because it is so hard…it is loads of work…and I don't think that you need to go into it in that much depth for A levels…(boy A, Year 10)

and:

> …I definitely don't want to do Maths…and it's …it's so hard…boring…I definitely wont do Maths or Physics…RE as well…I wont do that…but I don't really know about everything else…(girl D, Year 10)

The future also held in prospect the possibility of university placement. For most of these pupils this was almost a given; they saw it as an inevitable final link in the educational chain, although, rather like GCSE and A levels, for some it seemed to be coming at them rather too quickly:

> …before…it was something in the way distant future when you are sort of grown up…a big person…but now you, sort of, think it is only a few years away…(boy B, Year 10)

For others there was, as yet no clear choice about where to go or what it entailed, although the link with older peers or siblings was having an effect:

> …I can't even imagine going to university…I sometimes go: 'oh I'd quite like to go to Newcastle'…cos I hear all good things about them...but I don't actually imagine myself choosing one yet…(girl C, Year 10)

so the peer grapevine provided a valuable insight in to what was in prospect:

> …you hear quite a lot about it because all of sixth form are talking about having their interviews now…so I mean…lots of places seem quite good, but it just depends on what I choose to do really, like some places will be better for some things than others…(girl E, Year 10)

Some pupils, though, were very clear about what they would like to happen, and why:

> …I think I'd quite like to go to Oxford or Cambridge…but more for the rowing I think…rather than the academic things…(boy E, Year 10)

The world of work beckoned after university; some pupils were still unsure about what they would like to do:

> …possibly still a pilot…but then psychology…and…sort of…science and research things look interesting…I'd like to know more about that…(boy E, Year 10)

and some were still as sure as they had been years ago:

> …I'd like to be a politician, I would like to be…(a) Cabinet…Prime Minister…but...I dunno…failing that a lawyer or a barrister, that kind of thing…(boy D, Year 10)

For many, their experiences in senior school, and the adaptations and changes that they had been through had served to broaden their horizons somewhat:

> ...we did a presentation on ambitions in English...and I said I wanted to be a drummer...kind of...be in a band...I don't know at the moment...cos I used to want to be...so many different things...like, teacher, doctor...but they're all like boring to me now...I think I want to do something different...I want to do, you know, like Michael Palin, who goes round the world and gets like loads of money for it...I'd love to do that...I understand the jobs a bit more now...cos I know that, like, law is...quite boring...it's all paperwork as well...(girl C, Year 10)

For others the ambitions were focused but options were kept open:

> ...I think about acting and I think that would be good...I have always liked Drama, it has always been a big part of what I do during the year, you know...now that I have got the option to do a GCSE and A Level, it is becoming an option to me for a career path if I want to do it...I enjoy it, but I have some ability in it, and so it wouldn't be a waste of time going after it...the best thing that I think I can do is keep my options open as late as possible and then choose what I want to do...(boy B, Year 10)

To some pupils, the key factor offered by a job was that it should provide some enjoyment:

> ...I have quite a lot of ideas...I might like to be a journalist, cos it's quite fun, quite gossipy...or maybe a physio...a sports physio person...or sports management...that is quite good...I would rather do a fun job that doesn't take ages in college, and then, like, not have a big chance of actually getting a job...like...I would like to be...a fashion editor...person...for Vogue or something ...it sounds fun...like Hello Magazine or something amusing...(girl E, Year 10)

and interest:

> ...I would like to earn enough to have a nice easy life, but I wouldn't want to be, like, overly rich, because I think that becomes so much pressure when you get overly rich, because you have to work twice as hard...I would like a career that would always keep me interested, that I wouldn't get bored with...(boy C, Year 10)

For others, becoming well off was an important factor; a good job must be:

> ...something to get lots of money...(boy A, Year 10)

and

> ...I had to think about the things I could get lots of money in...guaranteed lots of money...so I thought yeah (medicine) will pay lots of money...I have come to the conclusion that is where all the money is, because there are more and more people having plastic surgery done and I would be really good at it...(girl B, Year 10)

The factors that were perceived as causing stress or anxiety were, at this stage in the pupils' school lives, less prevalent than had been the case in previous years. Now that the new school had become familiar, there were no longer huge fears about fitting in or finding a way around the campus. Getting used to the new school regime seemed to have taken it's toll though; long hours during the school day:

> ...at the moment we have play rehearsals as well, which take up loads of time...and most nights, from rowing, I get back at six o'clock...(boy E, Year 10)

or the length of the school week was having an effect on the stamina:

> ...I do get tired especially if I...I don't know...like...if you do stuff on a weeknight or whatever, and then I get really, really tired, unless it is Friday night...and then there is only Saturday...(girl B, Year 10)

For others, the focus of their anxiety was social; they were more worried about interaction with their peers:

> ...(the things) I am more worried about are just more friend kind of things...stuff like: 'I wonder if he'll be able to come round then'...kind of stuff...I dunno...it just seems so petty and rubbish, but it's what you think about all the time...(boy D, Year 10)

perhaps because they felt very much more relaxed about the aspects of GCSEs that plagued others:

> ...I am not at all as worried about any exams or anything...like GCSEs...everyone keeps saying that they are really not that hard...there's just this in-bred 'non-worry' about them...I do think that people aren't really going to mind...once we've got our university degree or whatever...what GCSEs we've got in English literature...or what we got in History or whatever...they are not really going to care...(boy D, Year 10)

Although GCSEs, as a school experience, were becoming part of the furniture and the pressure was, to some, less pronounced:

> ...in coursework I don't freak out...like some people really freak out about it...but we have done two drama pieces in English...and the first one, everyone was like freaking out...and the second one, people freaked out...but I did alright in them and so I felt okay...(boy C, Year 10)

than it had been when anxieties were fuelled by concerns that were misunderstood or unknown, for some pupils the greatest source of worry was still something to do with GCSE; either the coursework,

> ...too much of it...I hate it...I feel so pressurised by it...like every spare minute I have, I am always checking it...I don't like that...you feel you are under pressure...I've just finished English coursework...I didn't think it was very good...(girl D, Year 10)

or the exams; there was perceived to be an undercurrent of pressure to reach the standard set by previous year groups. It was the case that there was a tension between encouragement felt because the system had been seen to deliver, and worry and anxiety over being the one who cannot fulfil expectations when the bar has been set so high. On balance, some pupils did feel the institution's record had a positive effect and they felt:

> ...encouraged by that...but at the same time it, kind of, makes me feel that I've got to work...cos it's got to be something I'm doing right...and keep it up...(girl D, Year 10)

and for some the tension was felt in both directions:

> ...at the same time, it is like we could probably do that (achieve high grades), but on the other hand it is like, what if we don't?...we don't want to be the ones getting the bottom...we have a very large majority of clever people, and middle people, a lot of the bottom people at the bottom of the pile so hopefully it'll be alright...(boy C, Year 10)

Influences

The influences that were brought to bear upon pupils during the year past were as varied as they had been before. Influences were there in the shape of the people in the institution; the teachers and the peer group (both peers of a similar age, and older peers) and the people at home, in the shape of the family (parents and brothers and sisters, especially older brothers and sisters who attended, or had attended the school). The institution itself could be said to have provided some sort of influence over the pupils; it was certainly regarded as an entity in it's own right, and one that was responsible for instigating systems of management and control. The principle influence from the institution came in the shape of the teachers; for better or worse, they had a significant effect on the perceptions of pupils at this time and pupils seemed willing to acknowledge that teachers did have an effect:

> ...now I realise that your teachers are like some of the most important bits of your education...if you don't get a teacher who you get along with particularly or...no...not who you don't get along with...but who doesn't

> teach very well for you, or that kind of thing…I think that it can have a dramatic effect…(boy D, Year 10)

and there was some comparison between the two schools, and a clear perception that a difference existed between junior and senior teachers:

> …they are a lot different to teachers in (junior school), I don't know why, but they just are…there are some teachers in (junior school) I can see being teachers in (senior school)…but I can't see any teachers in (senior school) being teachers in (junior school)…(boy D, Year 10)

A good deal of the effect that teachers had was due to comparisons made with other teachers; there had to be, after all some yardstick by which effect could be measured; often this was achieved by comparing the activity of current teachers with those that were encountered at the junior school:

> …(with) (female teacher J)…I understood stuff more…well, I still understand stuff…I probably understand it faster….but with (female teacher J) we recapped quite a lot, and she asked us to do a lot of grammar stuff, like she asked us to find all these verbs…(girl E, Year 10)

and by comparing the activities of teachers in the current year, with teachers in the previous year:

> …I really like (male teacher N), he is really cool…I like (female teacher J) and (female teacher E)…I would rather have (male teacher A) for Classics because he is fun and his hair is so perfect, it is weird!…for Biology I like (female teacher M) better than (male teacher L) this year…I mean I like (male teacher L)…but I like (female teacher M) better…(girl E, Year 10)

There was a perception now that teachers tended to treat pupils as mature beings and this treatment was often compared with that experienced in junior school:

> …I've actually got quite close to them over the year…so, if you keep quite a few of your set ones…and they don't sort of treat you like…like, maybe in Year 4 to Year 8 they treated the Year 4s a bit more babyish than the Year 8s but they don't really do that in (senior school)…it's like…the same amount of attention in all the years…(girl C, Year 10)

and:

> …they are all right…well…more, sort of, human than they seemed to be when you were younger…if you don't hand your prep in you just don't get the mark…it is not like having to go to detention…you seem to be more treated as an adult…(boy A, Year 10)

Perhaps as a result there seemed to be a changed perception of teachers; they were seen more as individuals rather than part of the institution:

> …it shows that teachers actually have lives and they don't live at the school…they actually have interests…a lot of them, say, watch you play rugby and stuff…(boy A, Year 10)

One effect of option choices was the concomitant increase in contact time with teachers taking the GCSE subjects and this obviously helped to forge the closer relationship:

> …as you get into the fourth form you have less subjects to take and so you get to know particular teachers better and in that…you sort of find that …you come close to them in a sort of mental sort of way…where you have a kind of joke between yourself like a friend rather than a teacher and so it makes learning so much easier…(boy B, Year 10)

Teachers were responsible for fostering positive attitudes in pupils, over their perceived abilities:

> …I can write an essay and I didn't think I could, but my History teacher seems to think I can, so that's good enough…(girl D, Year 10)

and were also responsible for delivering positive messages about GCSE:

> …they say: 'oh you (pupils in) set one will get an A star'…like that…(girl C, Year 10)

and it was the case, where teachers were held in particularly high esteem, there was a perception that their influence was perhaps broader:

> …teachers who I especially get on with, they always are a big influence because they speak to you about your future and you are like: 'right, yeah'…(boy B, Year 10)

Teachers did also have negative influences on pupils' perceptions in a number of ways. They were perceived as being responsible, to some degree, for the affinity that pupils expressed for their subjects:

> …I think it changes how much you like the subject…I think that is why I didn't really like German…(boy E, Year 10)

and:

> …if you don't like the teacher then you're not going to enjoy the lesson…(girl C, Year 10)

and:

> …I like different subjects more because of the people that I have and the teachers that teach…(girl E, Year 10)

There was a perception that a difference existed between the characteristics of the teacher as a person, and their teaching style:

> ...because if they are really boring...well (male teacher M) is quite boring, but I think that he is quite a good teacher, even though loads of people say he is not...but I do think that it does depend on the teacher...I guess it is like personal preference of how you prefer people to teach...(girl B, Year 10)

Again, there was a comparison of styles between those that were perceived as the good teachers and those that were perceived as not so good:

> ...(subject F)...I don't like as much because (male teacher W) is crap...he is crap, and (male teacher R) is so funny and good and I haven't got a clue what (male teacher W) is talking about and I don't ask him because he is so boring, I can't listen to it again... last year (subject F) wasn't that bad because it was quite fun, but now it is like....it's so boring, it is unbelievable!...(girl E, Year 10)

Being boring was perhaps one of the cardinal sins committed by teachers:

> ...(female teacher H), she is a boring old cow!...(and)...I have got ...(male teacher E) again and I hate him so much...so boring...(boy C, Year 10)

When pupils did form poor opinions of teachers as personalities; the dislike was often due to a perceived injustice:

> ...I hate (subject G) now, I used to really like it in the first year...then ...she gave me a 5C because I didn't hand in one of my preps...I forgot one prep so she gave me a 5C...although I am better at (subject G) than some in my class...(girl E, Year 10)

and:

> ...like, (subject H)...I completely detested because of...(female teacher T)...when we were all sort of discussing what we wanted to do she was really horrible about it and said: 'when I read your name out, say whether you are doing (subject H)or not'...me and (girl friend L) said that we weren't doing it and then every lesson she just sort of scowled at us and (it was) like: 'why are you here?'...it was just, like, crap really...(boy C, Year 10)

or, it was due to some perceived inability:

> ...(subject J)...we have (female teacher R) and she is rubbish...I want (male teacher D), cos we had him last year and he was really good...(girl B, Year 10)

or, simply, due to what was seen as a lack of proper engagement with the pupils:

> ...it is not that bad, it is just not as fun...she doesn't even know my name...and there are only five girls!...so it's not that hard...(girl E, Year 10)

Although, as individuals, teachers were seen as an important influence:

> ...but...you don't always take into account what they say...I mean, you would think that family would have better influences...(girl B, Year 10)

the family unit was perhaps the biggest influence of all, and especially in those cases where the pupil had older siblings that were, or had been, through the same school. Parents were a strong influence on their children, and, for the most part, pupils perceived the influence as being positive, as well being in their own best interests. Sometimes the influences were quite overt, and pupils were left in no doubt as to what was perhaps required of them, and sometimes the influence was subtler, and impacted on pupils ideas and principles at an early stage in the thinking process. There was an acceptance of the role played by parents:

> ... I mean...your mum and dad are still, kind of, one of the main things in your life...and no matter how boulshy you get as a teenager, and no matter how annoying they get, they are still one of the main things...(boy D, Year 10)

To what degree these pupils experienced parental influence over something as significant as GCSE subject choices was quite varied; there was, in the minds of some, a perception that they enjoyed the presumption of independence over their choices:

> ...they always say to me: 'don't become a historian or an archaeologist'...but they don't really mean it...but if they expressed a really strong interest in me not to do something then I wouldn't...but I don't think that they would do...and I don't think that they would want to influence my decisions for what I want to do with my life...I think they would want to let me do it myself...(boy D, Year 10)

and there was also a perception that bilateral independence over choice was a reality:

> ...if I ask then what they think they tell me but they leave it up to me...(boy E, Year 10)

and:

> ...I sort of...I ask mum if she thinks they would be good choices...and she just said: 'if you think they're what you want to do'...(girl C, Year 10)

for some, though, the independence was a guarded affair; caveats were in place should something go too terribly awry:

> …my parents are quite laid back…they want me to do what I feel happy with, but they don't want me to do something stupid…so they are looking after me, but at the same time letting me have my freedom and so that is nice…(boy B, Year 10)

For some pupils, there was some discussion, with perhaps a more subtle influence cast over their choices:

> …I asked (mum) if she thought I should do Drama and Art as two of (my choices) and she just asked me: 'well do you like them?'…I said: 'yeah'…but then she asked me if I was good at them and I kind of…I'd done really well in History and my Geography teacher completely persuaded my mum and she said: 'well, I really think you should do this because your teacher is saying you should'…but she did let me decide in the end, which is the best thing…(girl D, Year 10)

Some influence on attitudes towards subjects was, perhaps derived from positive messages about parental experience of subjects:

> …my dad was like: 'oh, why don't you do Geography, cos I did Geography'…and I quite like Geography…and so I did Geography…(girl E, Year 10)

and:

> …dad really wanted me to do History…I wasn't going to do it at first, but then I decided to…he did it and he finds it quite interesting…(and mum)…did Geography and helps me do that, and DT as well, she helps me with that as well…(boy A, Year 10)

There were parental expectations too, over GCSE results, which, although not always voiced specifically, left little doubt:

> …I know I am expected to be in the middle of…(cousin and brother)…(girl B, Year 10)

Not all the parental influences were wholly positive, though. Perceived parental attitudes towards subjects were negative as well as positive:

> …my mum goes 'oh, I don't remember what I did for my A level Geography'…so I don't think it's that important…(girl C, Year 10)

and the serious business of GCSE could, in the right circumstances, be seen to have been missed entirely:

> …my dad didn't know about them…I don't think he knew what options were…I mean, he asked me about two weeks ago: 'so, what options are you going to do for GCSE?'…I said: 'dad, I chose those, like, last year'…(girl D, Year 10)

For those pupils that were engaged in the GCSE subject bidding process with their parents, the outcome was not always agreeable:

> …they weren't very happy when I said that I wanted to do Drama and Art, they were like: 'those are two 'doss' subjects'…I think that they would have let me, but they were just kind of like: 'hmmm'…but I didn't really want to do Drama anyway cos I'm not very good at it…but that's not the point…they told me to do what I wanted to do, but then when I said that I wanted to do Art and Drama they were like (makes a face)…yeah, they influenced me…they always seem to put up a really good argument…they were just like: 'that wont be very helpful'…I don't know…they were just saying: 'what will you get out of Drama?'…and all this kind of stuff…and so I thought about it and I was like: 'hmmm'…now I am doing Spanish which I am rubbish at…(girl B, Year 10)

There were powerful wider influences at work in some families, and the influences were sometimes felt and resented:

> …my grandma…she is a cow…she is…she is evil….she is one of those people that thinks she is…like…amazing…and then if you say, like…like if you want to do something because you really like it she is like: 'well that is crap, you won't get any money, nuh, nuh, nuh' and she is like: 'don't do that, don't do that'…(girl B, Year 10)

In some cases there was not the total acquiescence that was perhaps expected, and a degree of resistance was offered:

> …it depends on why they didn't want me to do it…if they didn't want me to do it because, like, they thought that I would fail…I would probably still do it…I wouldn't do it to hack them off…I would do it to prove that I could do it…(and) pretty much…they knew I was good at the stuff I wanted to do…(girl E, Year 10)

The natural antipathy that teenagers feel to parental advice might have been a contributory factor:

> …my parents are like: 'mmm better get this, this and this'…and I am just like: 'I don't want to do it'…because they didn't do anything particularly good in their lives and so I don't see why I should do what they want me to do…I should do what I want to do, what I enjoy…they are not unreasonable, they are just like…I don't know, it is weird…they are just like, all sort of, stupid…I wanted to do Drama, but my parents wouldn't let me and they wouldn't let me take Drama because they said that it wasn't very good…and they wanted me to take German…German was really boring and so I just sort of swapped without, sort of, telling them really…I made up an excuse and said it was really hard…they can't really say anything now…they, sort of, made me choose German because they said it was more useful, but I wanted to do what I wanted to do…and I got my way in the end…(boy C, Year 10)

although the general sense was that parental influence was, indeed, a positive benefit, there was evidence that the path to enlightenment was not always smooth:

> …I try not to become a stereotypical teenager thing…I am really trying hard, but they do…oh they just…they just seem to start arguments about nothing and they always seem to say: 'oh you need to try harder in this and you need to…' sometimes it is my fault, and sometimes I will accept that, but it's annoying sometimes when it is really not your fault and your mum has just had a bad day, and you can tell she has had a bad day, and then she gets stressed at the slightest thing…then she goes to dad and says: 'oh, he is in a bad mood'…and I am like: 'what!'…that is unfair…(boy D, Year 10)

and:

> …we have very huge arguments…well not all the time…sometimes dad just laughs…well, if it is dad that is telling me off I try not to because he would, like, kill me or something…but if it is mum…then she thinks that she is really hard and she will shout and be all evil...there are lots of things that I can say back, so it's ok…unless dad intervenes as well and then it is two on one and then I just shut up…(girl B, Year 10)

Apart from parents, the largest familial influence on these pupils was provided by their siblings, and to a degree, the siblings of friends. This was particularly the case where siblings were older and were passing, or (to a lesser extent) had passed, through the same school. It was not always perceived as being a positive influence to have had an older sibling through the school, especially one that had had a good reputation; it meant that there were often expectations to live up to:

> …I think my brothers influenced (teachers) about what they think of me…(boy E, Year 10)

and the subtle influence was still felt when GCSE option choices were mooted:

> …when people talk to me they say: 'oh, your brother is doing this…what do you want to do?'…(girl D, Year 10)

Older siblings had a very useful insight into the forthcoming world of GCSE, and their opinions and views were sought and listened to on a wide variety of issues relating to option choices:

> …(my sister) said Geography was good because it was full of course work...it was like a blessing in GCSE, cos it's, like, free marks…but…she also enjoyed Spanish because she liked the teacher as well…she thought I'd like the teacher…um she hasn't had the same Geography teacher as me and she didn't do Drama…but…(my step-brother) did it…and he…he used to come back with stories of it, and I used to find that quite interesting…(girl C, Year 10)

Although, decisions and choices made by same-age relatives was not always perceived as being a positive influence:

> ...I thought my cousin was crazy because she decided to do extra Maths...(girl D, Year 10)

For those with recent older siblings who were fellow scholars, there was the useful prospect of help with difficult subjects:

> ...I always talk to (my brother)...we used to hate each other, but now we are really good friends...I dunno...he tells me all Chemistry things and so that is very helpful...but I help him out with French because I think he is rubbish at French...(girl B, Year 10)

For some pupils, good old sibling rivalry provided a good impetus for performance at GCSE:

> ...if I actually do some work...I mean, if my brother can get five Bs and 5 Cs then anyone can...(girl E, Year 10)

Older siblings, by virtue of the fact that they were moving through different stages themselves, provided a very useful insight into what was in prospect later on; for instance:

> ...the nearest future I am thinking of is probably, like, going into lower sixth because now my brother is in it...it's is really weird, cos he's only two years older than me...(girl E, Year 10)

Pupils seemed to air a sense of disbelief that older siblings were actually coming to the end of a process and moving on:

> ...my sister is (choosing university)...so that's kind of like...made me think of it...I can't believe my sister has finished school in, like, a year...it's weird...(girl C, Year 10)

For those with older peers, perceptions of university were coloured by their experiences, making the prospect seem far less daunting:

> ...I want to go to...Manchester...I think...it's kind of a funny thing though, because my brothers going to university, and all my cousins are in university now, and it's the ones that they really like and everything...we're quite similar...I talk to my brother...he's just changed university...he went to Newcastle and I really liked that as well, and now he's in Cardiff but...I also think that influences my decision a lot as well...(girl D, Year 10)

As well as the role of siblings, there was the role played by the peer group to consider. It was acknowledged that friends played a very important role in the lives

of pupils as they moved through school. Influences were, like those of family, both overt and subtle. Older peers were, like siblings, useful in passing on knowledge and experience of the way things worked at school. GCSE, being a significant event provided much food for thought and, by and large, the present incumbents were hearing what they considered to be positive feedback from their older peer group:

> …everybody's saying: 'oh, they're so easy'…(girl C, Year 10)

and:

> …everyone says that when you do your GCSEs it seems really hard, but after you have done them you think: 'well, actually, they weren't that hard at all'…so I suppose if I can just get through them…(girl E, Year 10)

and:

> …(GCSEs)…don't scare me that much because I can remember being really scared, but apparently they are easy, that is what I have been told…they (older peers) are all like: 'third and fourth form and all that bit's easy'…and then they're like: 'it is when you get into sixth form that the work starts getting hard'…they have, like, millions of sit outs (non-contact time)…fine!…(girl B, Year 10)

Pupils expended a good deal of effort trying to comprehend where they stood in the organisation; each year seemed to have it's proper place in the scheme of things, and an understanding of that place was also provided by older peers:

> …everybody says…that the work gets harder as you go further up…and that third form was a doss…they make it (senior years) sound more important though because it is nearer the top…(girl B, Year 10)

including advice and opinion which influenced pupils perceptions of their teachers:

> …previous people that have had (teachers) tell you stuff…like their opinions of them…like…give you the first opinion of them and it takes a while to get rid of the first opinion of them…cos I heard that (male teacher P) was not very good…that he was quite boring…but I am quite enjoying him…I think he's quite good, but it took me a while to get, like, used to him…(girl C, Year 10)

For most of these pupils, their immediate peers (that is, the other pupils in their year group) were a most significant influence. They had always expressed the view that friendship was a key component of life at school:

> …I always thought my friends were, like, important and that hasn't changed…(girl B, Year 10)

There was recognition that friends did have some influence over decisions at school, although how boys and girls reacted to one another was perceived as being very different:

> …girls are more bitchy whereas boys just hate each other…so in some ways it is good, but sometimes it is bad because at the same time you think 'oh they have just been talking about me', like ten minutes before…(girl E, Year 10)

Most were sensible of the influence of friends and peers:

> …they do…(influence)…because…like, they do it without you really realising…but yeah, I guess…cos if they are your friends you care about what they think…(girl B, Year 10)

and some were quick to acknowledge it but at the same time assert their independence from it:

> …we always say: 'oh, we want to be, like, a singer', or something…but they have their different views on life than me, most of them, so…which is good to hear what they want to do…but it's not, like, what I want to do…it doesn't really help me…(girl C, Year 10)

and:

> … I am not a person that gets influenced really easily…(I listen)… and then I think, well…you know…what I want…not what they want…it is like, if someone tries to get you to do something, it is, well: 'why bother? I am doing it, not you, so don't try and make me do anything that I don't want to do…why are you doing this? I don't understand'…(boy C, Year 10)

The friendship groups that had been long established had been fractured since arrival at senior school, but new groups had been formed, and different friendships were made:

> …I have made friends with more new people…not necessarily new people to (senior school)…but new people who I wasn't friends with before, but I have lost friends as well…(boy D, Year 10)

Overarching the social bonds that existed in the group was an acknowledgement that adolescence was a period of change and that, whether they liked it or not, each now saw their relationships with others in a different way:

> …I think that it is more to do with the person and then you grow up as other people grow up and then you…like…change…I don't know, it is just that (some peers) have become extremely arrogant and cocky…(boy D, Year 10)

and pupils were cognisant of the knowledge that change was inevitable and had to be faced. The move to a new school had introduced these pupils to a small number of pupils from the outside; to become part of an established group would have been quite difficult, but the social mores of the group allowed fairly successful integration on the whole:

> … it is not like: 'oh, you are new, I am not going to talk to you'…it is quite good…(boy A, Year 10)

There was some influence over the perceived hierarchy of pupils at this stage; it may have been due to the addition of outsiders to the mix, or it might have been simply that the maturation process had wrought changes:

> …I have got new people in my classes and…you, sort of, talk to people more…and then you get a lot bigger friendships with them…a lot of the people that used to be clever last year have sort of evened out a bit, so, like, I am moved up into the middle…and so you meet, sort of, new people…I think that the clever people who were really clever have got cleverer…and have sort of moved up…and it has, sort of, pushed the other people who were cleverish…down…and they have, sort of, lost it a little bit…(boy C, Year 10)

For individuals, the changes in circumstances brought about by moving to senior school and engaging with wider groups had given a perception of a shift in the pecking order:

> ….it's different, cos in (junior school) I was quite good at everything but now…there are new people and they're better…(girl E, Year 10)

The influence of the peer group was still in evidence where performance in lessons was concerned; there were circumstances where the perception was that competition was the order of the day:

> …it's quite pressurising…especially in French…where I'm not as good as the rest of them…(girl C, Year 10)

or, conversely, a perception that the pressure was off:

> …(Chemistry)…is all right, but not many people in our class really like it, so it means that you don't have to try particularly hard to do well…(boy C, Year 10)

How pupils behaved in classes was acknowledged as being influenced by the peer group; some subjects possessed a dynamic where social interaction was part of the appeal, so friends were important:

> …because…if you are in a class like DT…you don't sit and do it in silence, you talk…(boy A, Year 10)

whilst other subjects reflected a more formal dynamic where social interaction could prove disastrous:

> …I think that it is where you sit in the class, because if you sit at the front, then you have to pay attention, which makes it interesting…whereas, if you sit at the back, in the crowd…you can just talk and stuff, and you don't really do anything…and so you don't listen and you don't find it interesting…(girl B, Year 10)

Friends and peers were sometimes a big influence when it came to GCSE option choices. There was an acknowledgement that choosing subjects simply because friends were choosing them was a rather poor rationale:

> …I think people generally try and stick with their friends as much as they can…but…I don't do that…well, a lot of my friends did Drama and Art, but I really didn't want to do those things...I mean…in the end I decided to do Geography and History, and it, kind of, turns out that there are other people that I know who do it as well…but people do generally stick with their friends…(girl D, Year 10)

Pupils were warned about this, and, although it was understood to be the case, friendships still provided sufficient influence over decisions to some degree:

> …last year all the teachers were, like: 'don't do a subject because your friends are doing it'…you have got to take that into consideration because if say, you chose a subject and none of your friends were doing it, and you were literally with the, like, people that you would never talk to… you wouldn't enjoy it as much as when you were with some of your friends…but it is not, like: 'don't dictate your options because of your friends'…but…you know…I took it into consideration so that I wouldn't be stranded with some, like, strange people or something like that…and I am doing everything that I want to do…(boy C, Year 10)

Even those who claimed to disregard the influence seemed to feel it subtly:

> …I asked (my friends) what they were doing…because I was interested and because some people were good at the same stuff as me…like, I thought some people would do stuff, but they didn't…so they didn't really influence me…like, a lot of people said: 'why are you doing that'…and: 'why are you doing that'… and: 'don't do that as an option'...like…I mean…when it came to Art, (girl friend J) thought that it would be best if I didn't do it because she said: 'no, you are better at German and so you should do that'…well she

didn't say that I couldn't...she didn't say: 'don't do it'...she was just like: 'oh I think you would probably be better at German '...and I was like: 'you're probably right'...so it was advice more than influence...(girl E, Year 10)

Part of the social cohesiveness felt by pupils meant that there were discrete groups of pupils that were attracted for various reasons:

...some people are like...a bit strange and...other people who have big groups of friends might see it as, kind of, geeky...(girl B, Year 10)

As there had been in the past, there was a divide along sporting and non-sporting lines, where pupils perceived:

...a sport group -the rugby group, and a music group...(boy E, Year 10)

There was also a sense that these divides were mutually exclusive; it was not thought that musicians, for instance were naturally found in the rugby squad. Girls and boys did have slightly different perceptions of what a social clique might be; girls saw themselves a less concerned with status and more with social inclusion:

...it's the boys really...they're worried about their social status and they want to be the most popular boy in the year...girls are generally all right with their group; they'd rather be with their friends...(girl D, Year 10)

and they were becoming less enamoured of sports and games and more interested in other aspects of school; to them, cliques:

...affect the boys more...because the girls aren't that bothered about sport any more...well some of them aren't...and...they're more bothered about boys...and therefore, it's, like, that kind of group...and...in the boys though there's...(a) music group...there's (the) rugby group...(girl C, Year 10)

For both boys and girls, the perception was now that social groups were largely divided by the House system:

...it is a bit more House-based now...sort of, like, (House T) people and (House G) people...it is not, sort of, like: 'yeah, we are the rugby team and we don't like you because you are a rugby retard'...(boy A, Year 10)

which meant that the different groups were now recognised as being House brands; there emerged a view of the types of pupil that were attracted to or belonged to each House:

...they have sort of gone into their little groups and you can sort of tell by the Houses...like...(House S) is like the complete rejects House...it is, like, a mixture of really stupid people and really, really clever people...like, merged...it is really weird... then, like...(House G) has got clever and sporty

people in and (House Q) is, sort of, like, the second…(House G) is, like, the top House and then it is, like, (House Q), (House T), then (House S) and (House C) are at the bottom…(House C) is such a crap House, it is so disgusting inside and the people that are in it are just really boring…it was never like that before our year came in…because, if you look at the third formers, their, sort of, hierarchy is different…(House G) is near the bottom because it has got less retards in it now, so it is sort of..., each year everything sort of sorts itself out…sort of, (House S) and (House C) where the geeky people…like…(House C) isn't as much, but (House S) has got some weird people…and the music clique has sort of disbanded a bit…as music is for GCSE, some people have done it, but also the serious people do it, also there is the other people that have merged that do like music but don't take it as seriously…so that is a really like mixed group…(boy C, Year 10)

and:

> … there's a group of the sort of athletic boys…and they all stick together…and they're all in (House G)…and there's, kind of, the musical boys, and they're all the smart ones…and then there's, kind of, the girls who like people in the years above us and don't talk to anyone else…and there's, kind of, my group, who just stick in (House C),and (House S)…they're all, like, best friends…they all come over to (House C) and spend hours there…(girl D, Year 10)

and there were examples of pupils who were perceived as having been put in the wrong place, because they simply did not fit the profile:

> …it seems that the people that don't fit into a certain group have all just been shoved in (House C)...it just seems odd, and it is not as though they are distinctly unpopular or bad, because, I mean, (boy friend S) is a really nice bloke, and everyone likes him…so it is strange because he doesn't seem to fit into a specific group…(boy D, Year 10)

The boys seemed to have a slightly different view of the girls and their social groupings:

> …this is going to sound really mean, but you always get the really ugly girls hanging out with all the other really ugly girls…(boy B, Year 10)

although, to some, there were elements of the sports divisions apparent, even in the girls groups:

> …with the girls it is like…rowers…hockey players…(boy C, Year 10)

The girls' views of their own factions seemed to be more defined by the sociability associated with groups:

> …there are some girls like (girl friend S), (girl friend J) and (girl friend K), they are all quite cliquey...because in (junior school) they were all…not shy,

> I wouldn't say anyone was shy, but they were all, kinda like... you know...when they all had to play hockey, none of that group were that good at hockey...so they used to hang out together to do practices, and so they were quite good friends...(girl E, Year 10)

and the boys' views of their own social structures seemed to put a lot of emphasis on what might be regarded as elitism:

> ...the guys tend to stick within the rugby teams and squads...people are either good at rugby and people aren't...people are more intelligent and some people aren't...so it is nice for someone like me who is, sort of, in the rugby squad, but is also in some good sets...and so I see a lot of people...even socially you tend to stick within teams and things...(boy B, Year 10)

There was a perception among girls that cliques were more of a male preserve, and they believed that:

> ...boys have groups more than girls...like...you have got ...(boy friend C)...his group...they are, kinda like...most of them are in (House G), but they all just hang out, and they all play rugby together and stuff like that...(girl E, Year 10)

To the boys, the divide among the Houses was still predominantly split by sport, and the perception was:

> ...you have got your (House G) crew which is like the rugby people...and then there is, like, (House Q) and...it is often, in a way, sport that separates them...for example, there is the rugby people, and then there are people who watch them play football...people like that...and there are people who do rowing...and there is a bit of a music thing as well...(and)...there is a bit of a nerdy clique (laughter), but it seems that there are far more groups than there were in (junior school)...like before...in (junior school) there was, like, the rugby people...the middle people...and the nerds...whereas in (senior school) there's just tons of really complicated little groups...it's like a massive Venn diagram, and everyone fits into different groups...the girls are, kind of, separate...but obviously they mix far more than we did in (junior school)...but...they have separate groups by themselves, and sometimes those groups will mix with different groups...there will be certain groups of girls that often mix with groups of boys and vice versa...(boy D, Year 10)

Although these social groups were quite benign in the main, and were accepted as being a rather quirky part of school life, there were perhaps some side effects that were less than positive:

> ...one of my friends...she has a boy...well she goes to school with him...and he won't talk to her in public but he'll text her and he's very, very

> kind to her…but, in front of his friends, he won't be nice to her at all…which is kind of…it's a bit silly…(girl D, Year 10)

The pre-eminence of rugby, as a sport, for instance was perceived as a given and not wishing to engage in the sport could be perceived as socially emasculating, for the image of boys:

> …because they're allowed to *not* do rugby…it's, kind of, not helping them…(girl C, Year 10)

The hierarchical position of sport in the minds of some pupils will have, perhaps, led them to label those they perceived as less able accordingly:

> …like…the people in the bottom sets…they don't do much sport and they just tend to stick with the same people…(boy B, Year 10)

Another group had by now, joined the social groups, and that was one driven by alcohol; as these pupils matured, the drinking culture had begun to play something of a greater role in their social consciousness:

> …there's a group of people who reckon they are very cool…and everyone else reckons they are just total prats…and they think that everyone else reckons they are cool, but it's…I think what's significant is that the beer culture has taken over the entire thing at our age as well…I think it is a bit early for it though…I mean, we are still…what…four years under the drinking age…I think that is just a sad reflection on society that you have to drink alcohol to be cool…(boy D, Year 10)

For some pupils, there was still an acceptance of some familial control over drinking as a social activity:

> …that (drinking culture) is coming through…I think that people want to do it because they can do it…whereas I am just not too bothered…and I only ever drink if I am with my family at a party or something, and even then I try not to have too much…I would just have two beers with my dad…just as a family thing…but I never drink over the top all week without an adult, just in case something gets out of hand…(boy B, Year 10)

For others, at this age, there was an acceptance that they were still immature, but had an awareness of the changes going on around them:

> …I don't go out…but I'm still friends with the people that do…but maybe it's more, sort of, separation of who's matured more…I don't know whether they've matured…it's just they sort of…go more into getting older…if you know what I mean…and the others are not really…(girl C, Year 10)

and a recognition of emerging differences between pupils of the same age:

> …there are a few people who are like…'oh, yeah, I must go clubbing' but if they want to do that…(boy A, Year 10)

To some, the situation had upset the status quo rather too much, and it was also clear where much of the blame lay:

> …it is so annoying, it's like 'oh yaah, I drank, like, fifteen beers...I got totally wasted'…I'm like: 'oh shut up'… oh God, everyone reckons they are proper hard as well, and it is so annoying...it's like: 'yeah, let's drink beer and get totally wasted'…rugby people do that quite a bit…(boy D, Year 10)

The pupils had experienced a good deal of social change during their time in senior school; the vertical division of the House system had meant that the social groups that they were used to had been disrupted somewhat. Setting was another cause of disruption, especially since the option choices had been made; there were now fewer opportunities to meet with familiar faces from the past, and new friendships had been forged from the pool of acquaintances

> …everyone's, kind of, dividing…it's quite funny, cos as a year we used to all be in the same, kind of, classes…and, like, you wouldn't get through a day without seeing almost everybody…but now it's, kind of…you can go the whole year and not speak to someone, which is really strange…cos there are that many people in different sets you're never with the same person in everything…(girl D, Year 10)

and:

> …I suppose I've got less, sort of, close friends cos…you're in different sets all the time…(girl C, Year 10)

To most pupils the setting issue did not cause them undue alarm; they accepted that setting existed to allow different pupils to work at different rates; only in Maths was there some anxiety because of the effect on tiering for the exam:

> …Maths sets were quite a big issue last year because if you didn't get into set four, anyone lower than set four…whoever this year is in set five and set six can't get an A star or an A in Maths because you are intermediate…so that was the only one that I was worried about…but French I didn't mind, I got moved down, so I am not bothered…(boy C, Year 10)

Whatever the position they occupied, pupils were always able to draw some comfort from what they perceived as a relative position compared to others; they were eternally optimistic:

> …I know I'm not, say, bottom of the year – if I was bottom of the year I'd be like: 'huuhhh'…cos, I mean, I'm in a lower set for Maths now, I was in upper two before…I'm in a middle set for Science, cos there are six and I'm in

> three...I'm in the top set for French, so...if I was like, to move down a set for French, for instance, or in Maths...it's good to know where you are in the year, like...say you were set six, you would probably have an incentive to work harder...maybe... but at the same time, if you're gonna do like an easier paper for GCSE...it might help you...(girl E, Year 10)

The perception of what might be seen as elitism in the higher sets was encouraging or debilitating, depending on how one's self-esteem stood up to the task:

> ...I am in set one for English so everyone's got to be brilliant...(girl D, Year 10)

Competition among the peer group did alter pupils' perceptions about their places in the set hierarchy; to adjust, comparisons were made, not only with current peers, but also with situations in the past:

> ...German...I am doing a lot worse this year than I did last year...I don't know if it is my set, or last year was just much easier...it's the same teacher, but there's a lot more people in my set, and last year I was in a set where no one bothered with the subject so it's, kind of, different this year...(girl D, Year 10)

and:

> ...I used to be really clever...I used to be, like, the best in my class...and now I have got (boy friend P), (boy friend S), (boy friend W), (boy friend A) and (boy friend J) and they are all like: 'oh...oh...'(puts hand up)...I feel like I am now on the bottom of the pile...second bottom of the pile...(boy friend T) is at the bottom...(girl E, Year 10)

Rationalisation was attempted, even where grades were perceived as low:

> ...my set is not too good at the other sciences...but when it comes to Biology everyone is really good, and so we are very close (in grades)...that's why you get a 5...(boy C, Year 10)

For those in lower sets, there was also some self-justification for successfully adapting to a different place in the hierarchy; and a perception that the pressure was off:

> ...(Maths)...it's more...relaxed in a way...I'm in set two now...I was in set one in (junior school) and I was near the bottom...and now I am, kind of, like, almost the top of...like, in the top group...so it's easier...(girl C, Year 10)

and:

> ...I have moved down a set for Maths...I just got moved down this week...it is quite good because I was, like, the worst in Maths, in my class, by a long way...so I don't have to like feel really stupid any more...I feel really clever, because they (others in the set) haven't started the second book yet...(girl E, Year 10)

Moving sets could have been responsible for a perception of some improvement in talent or ability:

> ...I've been put in higher sets for things...last year, I was put in a lower class, and I thought I was really stupid...and I've gone up in Maths as well, which is really encouraging...and I'm in set three for Science which is a bit strange, cos I'm really bad at Science...(girl D, Year 10)

These pupils did sometimes have a clear idea about those things that motivated or de-motivated them at school. There was an understanding that doing well was expected, from the school and from home, so rationalising how success might be achieved, or why it was not to be so, was a natural corollary of that. There seemed to be a close link between talent or ability and success; pupils were motivated more if they perceived that they had a degree of talent in a subject:

> ...if you are good at something...you, like, stay interested...so that it stays in...if you see what I mean...but I guess you are only good at something if you are interested in it...(girl B, Year 10)

and:

> ...I much prefer History...everyone's saying it's a lot of essays...but we're given a week to do a two page essay in, which is plenty of time...whereas (in) Art they have to draw a really pretty picture for prep...I can't do that...(girl D, Year 10)

Conversely, they were not motivated to succeed at subjects where they perceived they showed a lack of talent:

> ...if you are bad at something, then it is boring and rubbish, because you know you are bad at it and everyone else is better...so you are, kind of, like: 'hmmm...' and you just switch off...(girl B, Year 10)

Enjoyment, or liking a subject was another motivating factor; pupils attraction to subjects often depended on:

> ...whether I enjoy it... boy E, Year 10)

and:

> ... I can try hard in English because I quite like it...I try hard in History because I like it ...(girl E, Year 10)

For some there was a degree of motivation felt because of the compulsion to do well:

> ...I try hard at rowing and stuff because you have to...it is just...as soon as I start doing it, I can do a lot more...like...run for a lot longer and things like that...I try to try hard in Latin because I feel, like, I have to try hard...(girl E, Year 10)

Competition with and between peers was also a strong motivator:

> ...I like beating (girl friend J)...sometimes it is nice to win stuff and do well...and it is nice to come in the top few...and if people like, say, like (boy friend S) annoys the hell out of me...he annoys me so much...and it is nice beating him...like...I am pleased if my friends do really well and stuff, but it's nice to come first...like, in Latin, I used to come first really easily...now if I want to do well I have to work really hard...(girl E, Year 10)

and:

> ...I want to do better than other people and I want to do my best, so if I am miles behind people I will work harder...it is the same in sport as I want to...like...we had a trial for (local club)...some people weren't that bothered, but I wanted to get in...because it shows that I am better than them (laughter)...(boy A, Year 10)

The ostensibly heavy workload was both a positive and a negative influence; for some, the perception of schoolwork as requiring zealous industry motivated them:

> ...I think I work quite hard, but I hate being behind, and I'm going on holiday next week...so I'm missing ten days of school...so I'm going to have a lot to catch up on...(girl D, Year 10)

To others, the perception of a burdensome workload had the opposite effect:

> ...I don't want to be a vet because it is too much like work...(boy C, Year 10)

The setting of pupils provided some grounds for motivation; being in a higher set proved to be a good motivator:

> ...now in sciences I try a lot harder because I'm in a higher set...(girl D, Year 10)

The perceived value of the subject was something that affected pupils' motivation:

> ...I used to try hard at, like, Maths and Science and English...but now I just try hard at the ones that I am going to need...if that makes sense...(girl B, Year 10)

that, and the perception of one's talent would motivate one to try hard if:

> ...it is actually useful...and you can do it...if you can't do it to save your life then you know you just, sort of, give up on it...(boy A, Year 10)

indeed, the enjoyment of, and talent for, a subject were significant motivators during GCSE options, which were influenced by:

> ...what I liked, and what I thought I was good at...(boy C, Year 10)

Pupils were also motivated by the comfort that they perceived in a subject:

> ...some things like Drama and stuff...where you are actually friends with the teacher, and it is more, sort of, 'muck about' whilst learning...it is so much more comfortable, and that makes it easier to get to grips with things...(boy B, Year 10)

How they perceived others in comparison to themselves was also an influence that motivated; the performance of their peers in other schools served to strengthen what might be seen as a sense of self-confidence:

> ...in English we have been looking at some videos of other schools...during particular bits of the GCSEs...and you realise how smart you are compared with everybody else...I mean...we have to do this drama thing in English, and we were watching videos of the other people...who were so bad at it...I mean, it was really quite appalling...and even the worst of us in (senior school) can do so much better...and so you, sort of, think: 'well, compared to the rest of the country, we are not going to do too badly'...(boy B, Year 10)

Chapter 8

Fourth Year Data Analysis

What happened

As happened in the first, second and third years, this data was collected on two separate occasions. The first data point was July and August 2006, and the data was collected via questionnaire. The second data point was at the beginning of the following academic year, and data was collected by interview.

In order to maintain the sample size, the questionnaire data was collected only from the original group (who had passed through junior school and had been involved on the first three years' research). The format of the questionnaire was the same as the previous year, covering the same topics and in the same order. A rider was attached to the questionnaire to the effect that this was the last one in the series and thanks were again given for the efforts that the pupils had made over the last four years. The interviews were conducted during the months of October and November 2006. The same gender-balanced sample of five boys and five girls was used as in the previous two years. Again, the interview structure was the same format as before and the questions were conducted in the same way.

How the data was collected

The data collection, via the questionnaire, took place at the end of the summer term, after the school exams. It was not possible, on this occasion, to collect the data from the group during school time; the timetabling for both the pupils and the staff, on two different sites, meant that there was insufficient time to marshal classes together in the computer facilities. It was decided to conduct the questionnaire, as far as possible, via e-mail. Letters were distributed to all the members of the group, inviting them to apply to a Hotmail account, asking for a questionnaire, which could be downloaded, completed, and returned via the Internet. The immediate uptake was around 40% and the system worked very satisfactorily; questionnaires in the form of Excel worksheets were mailed to the respondents who simply completed them and returned them. A very small proportion of the pupils did not have the Excel programme or were unable to successfully download the questionnaire, and these pupils were sent paper copies instead. After a week, reminders were sent out, via e-mail, to those who had

responded and been sent a questionnaire, but who had not yet returned it. Mail was also sent to those who had been very proactive in returning their questionnaires promptly, seeking their help in spreading the word to those of their peer group who had not yet asked for a questionnaire. Within a week the response rate was at 60%. Out of a possible eighty-four pupils who were available to participate in the sample, seventy-four pupils took part. The gender split was forty-one boys and thirty-three girls.

The subsequent interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in the design office in the Art and Design building. Due to their not being on the same site as the researcher, the pupils' appointments for interview were made via e-mail and SMS, these being the pupils' preferred methods of communication. This year, pupils participating in the research were in the throes of GCSE coursework, therefore arrangements were made to interview them at a time that fitted in with their individual study timetables. Three opted for interviews during the day, two opted for a Saturday afternoon, and the remaining five opted for a time at the end of the school day. Interviews took between thirty and forty minutes.

Analysis of results

The questionnaire data

The fourth and final year's results from the questionnaire are shown in Appendix C. The tabulated results show the overall responses for both boys and girls together. Results are also shown as a percentage of those responding (seventy-four). Mean scores are also shown, where appropriate, base on scoring Likert-type items. Where there are gender differences, these are referred to in the text, as well as in Chapter 9, which looks at longitudinal analysis of the data.

Q1: What do you want to be? What sort of work do you think that you would like to do when you leave school?

This was an open question, and, using the same format as last year, results were grouped together into the same categories as before. This year, the range of occupations cited by girls was much broader, but still not as wide as the choices declared by boys. The largest group this year (18% of pupils) declared an interest in a career in art and design; this was predominantly girls (27% of the population)

rather than boys (10% of the population) Similarly, the 7% of pupils who chose careers in either media and journalism, or medicine and veterinary practice were also predominantly girls (12% of the population) rather than boys (2% of the population). The next choice (of 6% of pupils) was shared equally by three occupation groups: sport and outdoor pursuits, finance, and armed forces and government service. Each of these choices was boy weighted (10% of the population) rather than girl weighted (3% of the population). The 6% who opted for a career in science and engineering were all boys (12% of the population). Law was a career choice of 6% of pupils, but more girls (9%) than boys (2%) chose it. The 4% who saw themselves pursuing a career involving architecture, surveying and property and land matters, were only boys (7% of the population), as were those(1% of pupils) electing a career in agriculture (2% of boys). Neither boys nor girls elected a career in education and research, or in civil flying. In gender terms, the three most attractive careers for girls were firstly, art and design, secondly, medicine and veterinary practice or media and journalism, and thirdly, the law. For boys, the top three careers were firstly, science and engineering, secondly, art and design or finance or sports and outdoor pursuits, and thirdly, architecture and surveying including property and land matters.

Q.2: Your own areas of interest outside school. What do you get up to away from school?

Looking at what pupils spent most of their time doing away from school, the highest proportion (38%) of pupils said that ' being with friends' was a preferred activity, and more so for girls (58% of the population) than for boys (22% of the population). 'Outdoor activities' was the second (36% of pupils) preferred activity, and here more by boys (51% of the population) than girls (18% of the population). The Internet as an activity was the third choice, indulged in by 12% of pupils overall, (7% of boys and 18% of girls). The fourth highest choice was the 'other' category, chosen by 15% of pupils, where boys slightly predominated (7% of the population to the girls' 6%). This mainly comprised musical activities, (particularly for the boys) such as playing the guitar and drumming. Girls also cited musical activities, but not as frequently as shopping. Other given choices were less appealing, the best being 'watching TV', which was selected by 4% of pupils (9% of girls, only). 'Computer games' was cited by 3% of pupils, and all boys (5% of the

population), as were 'homework', (made up of 2% of boys and 3% of girls) and 'painting and drawing' (6% of girls, only). No-one indulged heavily in 'construction and modelling', as a pastime. The mean scores had 'being with friends' (4.1) placed top, followed by 'other' (4.0), then 'outdoor activity' (3.8). 'Internet' came next (3.5), then 'watching TV' (3.2) and 'homework' (3.0). Ranked lowest were 'computer games' (2.1), 'painting and drawing' (1.9) and 'construction and modelling' (1.3).

Q.3: Your parents' or carers' occupations. What sort of work do they do?

Relevant information is described in Chapter five, which deals with the first year's data.

Q.4: Your enjoyment of school in general. How much do you like school?

The element of school most enjoyed by pupils was 'friendships', cited by 68% of respondents. The gender split was heavily weighted towards the girls (94% of the population) rather than the boys (46% of the population). The swing was the other way for the second choice; 'sports' was chosen by 31% overall, and here the breakdown was 49% of boys and 9% of girls choosing it. The third choice fell to 'breaks and socialising' picked by 27% of pupils overall, and this was more popular with the girls (36% of the population) than the boys (20% of the population). There was quite a gap before the next choice: 'outings and trips' which scored as a favourite with 8% of pupils (5% of boys and 12% of girls). 'Clubs and activities' was chosen by 5% overall (with 7% of boys and 3% of girls choosing it). Educational aspects came at the bottom, and were only cited by girls, with 'lessons' being enjoyed most of all by 3% of pupils (6% of girls), and 'teachers' being most enjoyed by 1% of pupils (3% of girls). 'Homework' scored zero as a keenly indulged activity. The mean data ranked 'friendships' first (4.6), followed by 'breaks/socialising' (4.1), 'sports' (3.9), 'clubs/activities' (3.5), 'outings/trips' (3.4), 'lessons' (3.1), 'teachers' (2.9) and finally 'homework' (1.8).

Q.5: The importance of school in general. How important do you think school is?

Pupils cited the most important aspect of school as 'doing your best' which was chosen by 50% of pupils overall, although by more (64% of the population)

girls than boys (39% of the population). Next came 'friendships', chosen by 35% of pupils. Here the gender breakdown was again female biased, with 45% of girls and 27% of boys choosing it. 'Learning skills' as an aspect was most important to 30% overall (39% of girls and 22% of boys picking it). 'Lessons' was picked by 23% overall as most important, (30% of girls and 17% of boys). 'Socialising' was chosen by 9% overall (5% of boys and 15% of girls). 'Liking the teacher' came bottom, being picked by 1% of pupils as a most important aspect of school (3% of girls, only). The mean figures ranked 'doing your best' (4.4) top, followed by 'friendships' (4.3), 'learning skills' (4.2), 'lessons' (4.1), 'socialising' (3.7), and finally 'liking teachers' (2.5).

Q6: Your talent and ability. How talented are you?

Those subjects that pupils saw themselves as most talented at were headed by Games, picked by 24% of pupils (comprising 41% of boys and 9% of girls). Second choice was Physical Education, chosen by 17% overall, again, much more so by boys (32%) than girls (3%). English was chosen by 16% overall, but with a heavy female bias, (30% of girls and 7% of boys). Maths was also selected by 16% of pupils (male-biased, being chosen by 24% of boys and 9% of girls). 11% thought that they were most talented at History; slightly more girls (15%) than boys (10%) thought this. Drama and French were picked by 10% of pupils, each with an identical gender split: 15% of girls and 10% of boys choosing each. 9% of pupils overall thought that they were most talented at Geography, Religious Education, Biology and Chemistry in equal measure, and in the case of Geography, Religious Education and Chemistry, the split was the same; 12% of boys and 6% of girls choosing each. In Biology, the split was more marked; a choice of 15% of boys and 3% of girls. Art was thought of as a talent area for 7% of pupils overall, but for more (12%) girls than boys (7%). To 6% of pupils, Information Technology was seen as a subject at which they were most talented, and in almost equal measure: 7% of boys and 6% of girls. Design Technology, Music and Spanish were chosen by 5% of pupils; Design Technology and Spanish marginally more by girls (6% of the population) than boys (5% of the population) and Music more by boys (7%) than girls (3%). Latin was selected by 4% overall, and all boys (7%). The 2% of pupils who cited a talent in Physics were also boys (5%), as were the 1% being most talented at German and Personal, Social and

Health Education (2% of the boys population). The mean calculation for talent showed Games in front (3.7) closely followed by Physical Education (3.5), but the core compulsory subjects were ranked thus: English (3.6), Biology (3.5), Maths (3.3), Chemistry (3.3), French (3.2), Religious Education (3.1), and Physics (3.1).

Q 7: Your enjoyment of subjects. How much do you enjoy your work?

When considering the subjects that they enjoyed most, 45% of pupils chose Games (comprising 66% of boys and 18% of girls) followed by Physical Education, which was most enjoyed by 24% overall (39% of boys and 6% of girls). The third most enjoyed subject was Drama (19% overall) and this was mostly girls (30% of the population) rather than boys (10% of the population). Design Technology was chosen by 18% of pupils (27% of boys and 6% of girls), as was Biology (17% of boys and 18% of girls). English came next (selected by 16% of pupils), this time heavily female weighted (27% of girls and 7% of boys). Art was most enjoyed by 15% of pupils, but by many more (30%) girls than boys (2%). The 9% who cited Chemistry were more balanced (10% of boys and 9% of girls). History and Maths were each enjoyed most by 8% of pupils; History was female weighted as a choice (12% of girls picking it, and 5% of boys) and Maths was male weighted (10% of boys picking this, and 6% of girls). French, Geography and Music were cited by 7% of pupils overall; both French and Geography were female weighted (9% of girls choosing it and 6% of boys), but Music was slightly male weighted (7% of boys choosing it and 6% of girls). Spanish was most enjoyed by 4% of pupils (5% of boys and 3% of girls). 3% of pupils each cited classics, Personal, Social and Health Education, Religious Education and Physics as most enjoyable; Classics and Religious Education were slightly female biased (3% of girls choosing it, and 2% of boys), Physics was cited only by girls (6%) and Personal, Social and Health Education only by boys (5%). Only 1% cited German, Information Technology and Latin as most enjoyable, and these were all boys (2%). Mean figures for enjoyment placed Games (4.2) at the top, then Physical Education, Design Technology and English (3.6), Biology (3.5), Chemistry (3.2), Maths (3.1), French (3.0), Physics (2.8) and Religious Education (2.7).

Q 8. The importance of subjects. How important do you think school subjects are?

The place for most important subject went to Maths, selected by 59% of pupils overall (slightly male-weighted, being chosen by 61% of boys and 58% of girls). Next came English (chosen by 54% overall, made up from 46% of boys and 64% of girls) and a science (Biology) was ranked third (chosen by 32% overall, weighted towards the girls (45%) rather than the boys (22%). Chemistry followed (chosen by 30% overall; 24% of boys and 36% of girls). The science link was then broken briefly by Games, chosen by (23% of pupils overall) 20% of boys and 27% of girls. Physics, though, was placed next: chosen by 22% of pupils overall (17% of boys and 27% of girls). Personal, Social and Health Education was ranked 7th (picked by 19% of pupils), with 12% of boys and 27% of girls choosing it. Information Technology was next, chosen by 16% of pupils, (20% of boys and 12% of girls). History and Physical Education came next (chosen by 11% of pupils overall), and both equally weighted towards boys (picked by 12% of the population) rather than girls (9% of the population). Of the 8% who chose French, more were girls (12%) than boys (5%), but of the 7% who chose German, a slightly greater proportion were boys (7%) than girls (6%). Music and Spanish were a most important choice to 4% of pupils overall, but Music was male weighted (5% of boys to the girls 3%), and Spanish was a choice of girls only (9% of the population). Drama, Design Technology and Religious Education were each most important to 3% of pupils overall, and the gender split was identical: 3% of girls and 2% of boys chose them. Art and Geography were placed last, being important choices for 1% of the pupils, and these all girls (3% of the population). The mean figures for a subject's importance showed the rankings of core and compulsory subjects to be: English and Maths (4.5), Biology (4.1), Chemistry (3.9), Physics (3.8), French (3.4), and Religious Education (2.3).

Q 9: Reasons why you enjoy subjects. Your favourite subject is?

The single, specific, favourite subject choice had selections made for each, with the exception of German, Latin, Information Technology, Physical Education, Personal, Social and Health Education, Physics and Spanish, which were chosen by no one. English was in first place, as the favourite of 15% of pupils overall, and of many more girls (30%) than boys (2%). Next came Art, (21%), again favoured by more girls (21%) than boys (5%). Design Technology was the third favourite, selected by 11% overall, but by more boys (17%) than girls (3%). Maths (9%) was

a favourite of more boys (15%) than girls (3%). History and Biology were both favoured by 8% of pupils (and both by more girls (9%) than boys (7%)). Drama and Games appealed most to 5% of pupils; Drama more to girls (9% to 2%), and Games only to boys (10%). The 4% who chose Geography and Music were boys (7%) and the 3% who chose Classics and Chemistry were mixed; all boys (5%) chose Classics and all girls (6%) chose Chemistry. French was chosen by 1% (all boys (2%)), as was Religious Education, but these were girls only (3%).

Q 10: Reasons why you enjoy subjects and how much the reasons matter.

Following the identification of a specific favourite, this question explored the reasons why it was thought to be so. Of the reasons that mattered most, 'the way it is taught is interesting' was key, being chosen by 35% overall, but more girls (48%) than boys (24%). Next came 'the person teaching it is interesting', chosen by 34% overall (again, by more (39%) girls than boys (29%). 'I have a talent for it' was chosen by 23% of pupils (22% of boys and 24% of girls thought this), and 'it is fun' by slightly less (22%), and here by more girls (30%) than boys (15%). 'The atmosphere is good' appealed to 16% overall (12% of boys and 21% of girls) and 12% chose 'it is practical/activity based' as a prime reason; more were boys (15%) than girls (9%). Overall 9% each chose 'there are more things to do' and 'it is easy' as principal reasons and in each case more boys than girls thought so (10% to 9% for 'there are more things to do', and 12% to 6% for 'it is easy'. The mean calculation for the importance of these reasons showed a different order of events. 'The way it is taught is interesting' came out top (4.1) followed by 'it is fun' (4.0). Ranked next were: ' I have a talent for it', 'the atmosphere is good' and 'the person teaching it is interesting' (each with 3.9). Next came 'there are more things to do' and 'it is practical/activity based' (each with 3.3), and finally 'it is easy' (2.9).

Q.11: Reasons why you find a subject unenjoyable. Your least favourite subject is?

A single, specific, least enjoyed subject yielded 16 selections. The least enjoyed was Religious Education, chosen by 24% of pupils overall (37% of boys and 9% of girls). Maths was least liked by 12% of pupils (21% of girls and 5% of boys). Physics was the next least enjoyed subject, chosen by 11% of pupils, but by more girls (22%) than boys (2%). Chemistry was chosen by 10% of pupils,

again by more girls (13%) than boys (7%). French was most disliked by 9% overall, and by three times as many girls (15%) as boys (5%). Of the 7% who disliked English, all were boys (12%). A more even split was evident for Information Technology; the 5% who disliked it was made up of 5% of boys and 6% of girls. 5% also disliked Biology most, but more girls (7%) than boys (2%) said this. History was a boy weighted dislike; the 4% overall was made up of 5% of boys and 3% of girls. Geography and German were both disliked by only 1% of pupils, and in both cases only boys (2%).

Q.12 Reasons why you find a subject unenjoyable and how much the reasons matter.

Reasons why these particular subjects were singled out as least enjoyed yielded 'the way it is taught is not good' as being most compelling to 36% of pupils overall. The gender split showed that more girls (45%) than boys (29%) thought this. 'It is boring' was a most compelling reason for 32% of pupils overall. Here slightly more girls (33%) than boys (32%) thought this. 'I don't get on with the teacher' was selected by 24% overall and more girls (30%) than boys (20%) chose this. 'The work is repetitive' was picked by 16% overall. Slightly more boys (20%) than girls (12%) chose this. 11% chose 'the work is too hard' but more were girls (12%) than boys (10%). 11% also chose ' I have no talent for it', selected by fewer boys (7%) than girls (15%). 'There is too much work' was also picked by 11% overall; slightly more boys (15%) than girls (6%) chose this. 'I feel stressed' followed, again with 11% overall choosing it; the gender split was female weighted, with 15% of girls and 7% of boys choosing this reason .The mean figures for this question put the order of responses slightly differently. 'It is boring' came first (4.0), followed by 'the way it is taught is not good' (3.7), the work is repetitive' (3.4) and 'I have no talent for it' (3.2). Next came 'the work is too hard', 'there is too much work' and 'I don't get on with the teacher' (each with 3.0). Ranked last was 'I feel stressed' (2.8).

Q13: Reasons why you find a subject important. Your most important subject is?

In order to determine some of the reasons for a subject's perceived importance, a single, most important subject was chosen. Maths and English were ranked far

ahead of the other subjects; in first place came Maths, chosen by 32% of the population and picked by 39% of boys and 24% of girls. English (31% overall), was chosen by 22% of boys and 42% of girls. In third position (7%) was Biology, chosen by 5% of boys and 9% of girls. Chemistry was placed next, chosen by 5% of pupils, and by more girls (9%) than boys (2%). Drama, Design Technology and Religious Education were each considered most important to 3% of pupils; Drama and Religious Education were girl weighted (3% compared to 2% of boys), whereas Design Technology was all boys (5%). Picked by only 1% of pupils were Art, Classics, Games, History, Information Technology, Music, and Physics; Art and Physics were picked only by girls (3%), the others by only boys (2%). The remaining subjects did not score at all.

Q.14: Reasons why you find a subject important and how much the reasons matter.

Why the most important subject should be considered so was considered via a selection of reasons. The one that mattered most of all to the highest number of pupils was 'the knowledge will be important later in my life'; 55% chose this, with slightly more girls (58%) than boys (56%). 49% thought 'I'll need the knowledge for work' was most important, and this was most important to 51% of boys and 45% of girls. Next was 'I'll need the knowledge for a particular job'; most important to 35% of pupils (44% of boys and 24% of girls). 'I enjoy doing the subject' as a reason was most important to 18% of pupils overall but was very female weighted, being chosen by 7% of boys and 30% of girls. 'I am good at the subject' was chosen by 12% of pupils; still female weighted, being selected by 5% of boys and 21% of girls. Equally ranked (each being chosen by 7% of pupils overall) were 'I find the subject easy' and 'I get on well with the teacher'; in both cases female weighted: 'I find the subject easy' being chosen by 12% of girls and 2% of boys, and 'I get on well with the teacher' being chosen by 9% of girls and 5% of boys. 'I have friends in the class' was ranked next (5% overall, comprising 7% of boys and 3% of girls), and 'my parents think the subject is important' was last, chosen by 3% overall (all boys (5%)). The mean figures showed 'I have friends in the class' ranked first (5.8), followed by 'my parents think the subject is important' (5.4), 'I find the subject easy' (4.6), 'the knowledge will be important later in my life' and 'I get on well with the teacher' (each with 4.5). 'I'll need the knowledge for work' and

'I'll need the knowledge for a particular job' (each with 4.4) ranked next, followed by 'I am good at the subject' and 'I enjoy doing the subject' (each with 4.3).

Q15: Reasons why you find a subject unimportant. Your least important subject is?

This question was looking from the other end of the spectrum, in seeking to find out why subjects were considered unimportant. The ranking for a single, least important subject showed Religious Education to be by far the most unimportant, with 47% of pupils (56% of boys and 36% of girls) placing it first. Equal next were Information Technology and Latin, regarded as least important by 7% overall (and each by 5% of boys and 9% of girls). Art and Classics were next (5% overall) and here by more girls (9%) than boys (2%) in each case. Of the 4% who picked French, more were boys (5%) than girls (3%). English, Personal, Social and Health Education and Physics were each selected by 3% of pupils; English and Personal, Social and Health Education by boys only (5%), and Physics by girls only (6%). 1% each selected Geography, Maths, Physical Education and Chemistry (only girls (3%)) , and German (only boys (2%)). No other subject was ranked.

Q.16: Reasons why you find a subject unimportant and how much the reasons matter.

A series of reasons as to why a subject was perceived as being least important was compared. 'I cannot see the relevance of it' was ranked first, chosen by 39% of pupils (41% of boys and 36% of girls). 'I will not need the knowledge later in life' ranked second, chosen by 36% overall (41% of boys and 30% of girls). 'I find the work boring' was third; 27% of pupils (27% of boys and 27% of girls) chose this. 'I have no talent for the subject' came next; 14% of pupils thought this was the most important reason for not finding the subject important, and of these most (17%) were boys rather than girls (9%). 7% of pupils cited 'I don't like the teacher' as a reason that mattered most, and here 7% of boys and 6% of girls found this to be the case. 'My parents don't find the subject important' mattered most as a reason to 5% of pupils (7% of boys and 3% of girls) and the same proportion said 'other teachers find the subject unimportant' (but in this case 5% of boys and 6% of girls). 'I find the subject stressful' mattered to 4% of pupils;

more to girls (6%) than boys (2%). Of the 3% who cited 'the work is too hard' as a poignant reason, a higher proportion were girls (3%) than boys (2%). The mean figure ranked 'I will not need the knowledge later in life' and 'I cannot see the relevance of it' (each with 4.0),at the top followed by 'I find the work boring' (3.6), 'I have no talent for the subject' (2.6) and 'the work is too hard' (2.3). 'I find the subject stressful', 'my parents don't find the subject important' and 'I don't like the teacher' came next (each with 2.2), and finally 'other teachers find the subject unimportant (2.0).

Q17: Changes over time –this year. What are your top three favourite subjects this year?

In looking at the possible changes that were made, the top three favourite subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the year gone) the three highest ranked subjects were English (chosen by 18% of pupils overall, but many more girls (36%) than boys (2%), then Design Technology (chosen by 15% of pupils, but many more boys (24%) than girls (3%). Third ranked were Art and Maths, each chosen by 11% of pupils. Art was female weighted (15% of girls as opposed to 7% of boys) whereas Maths was male weighted (17% of boys and 3% of girls).

Q18: Changes over time –this year. The reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects this year?

73% of pupils said they had changed their top three favourite subjects since last year. Of these, the gender split was equal, with 73% of each claiming to have done so. The reasons why they had changed were deduced from an open question, and the results were grouped according to the same criteria as last year. 'The teacher has changed' was cited as a reason by 32% of pupils (made up of 35% of boys and 29% of girls). 20% said 'the work has changed' (22% of boys and 19% of girls said this) and 19% thought 'I am better' was a good reason (18% of boys and 19% of girls). 'The subject is more interesting' as a reason, mattered to 18% overall (18% of boys and 19% of girls), that it was 'a split or new subject' was cited as a reason by 7% of pupils (17% of girls only).

Q 19: Changes over time –this year. What are your top three important subjects this year?

In looking at the possible changes that were made since last year, the top three most important subjects were sought. As a first choice, the three highest-ranking subjects were Maths (chosen by 36% of the population), English (29%), and Biology (10%). Here the gender split was: for Maths, 37% of boys and 36% of girls chose it, for English, 27% of boys and 30% of girls chose it, and for Biology, 7% of boys and 14% of girls chose it.

Q 20: Changes over time –this year. The reasons for changing your top three important subjects this year?

Overall, 39% of pupils said they had changed their top three most important subjects since last year. Of these, 44% of boys and 33% of girls claimed to have done so. The reasons why they had changed were deduced from an open question, and the results were grouped according to the same criteria as last year. The main reason cited (by 81% of pupils) was 'the subject is more important' (86% of boys and 73% of girls said this). Next was, 'I am better' chosen by 7% overall (18% of girls only). 5% thought it was because 'the work has changed' (3% of boys and 9% of girls). Other reasons, undefined, were put forward by 5% of pupils (boys only (8%)).

Q 21: Changes over time –next year. What are likely to be your top three favourite subjects next year?

In looking ahead to next year and the possible changes that might be made, the top three favourite subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the coming year) the top three ranked subjects were English (16%), Design Technology (15%) and Art (14%). The gender split in each case was: for English 2% of boys and 33% of girls, for Design Technology, 27% of boys only, and for Art 10% of boys and 18% of girls.

Q 22: Changes over time –next year. The reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects next year?

Overall, 14% of pupils thought that they might have changed their top three favourite subjects by next year (6% of boys and 8% of girls thought so). The main reason (chosen by 50% of respondents) for changing was thought to be because 'the work has got harder' (33% of boys and 63% of girls thought this). The next

most noteworthy reason cited was 'the subject has changed'; a reason for 29% of pupils overall (33% of boys and 25% of girls). Next came: 'the teacher or work has changed', as a reason, and this for 14% overall (17% of boys and 13% of girls). Next, 7% of pupils didn't know precisely why they might change (17% of boys only thought this).

Q 23: Changes over time –next year. What are likely to be your top three important subjects next year?

In looking ahead at the possible changes that might be made, the top three most important subjects were sought. As a first choice (in the coming year) the top three ranked subjects were Maths (36%), English (30%) and Biology (9%). Here the gender split was: Maths, 39% of boys and 33% of girls, English, 22% of boys and 39% of girls, and for Biology, 10% of boys and 8% of girls.

Q 24: Changes over time –next year. The reasons for changing your top three most important subjects next year?

Overall, 20% thought that they might change their top three important subjects in the coming year (17% of boys and 24% of girls thought this). The reasons given were: 'it is useful for the future' (33% overall (57% of boys and 13% of girls)), 'the subject will change' (33% of pupils (43% of boys and 25% of girls)) and 'the work will get harder' (33% overall (63% of girls only)).

Q 25: Anxiety or stress –this year. What has made you most anxious or stressed this year?

This was an open question, and responses were grouped according to their 'best fit' under appropriate headings, as had been the practice in previous years. The highest perceived cause of stress was 'workload/prep', which was so for 54% of pupils (54% of boys and 54% of girls), 'tests and exams' was ranked second, (24% overall cited this as a reason (27% of boys and 20% of girls) and a 'specific subject' was stressful to 6% of pupils (7% of boys and 4% of girls). A 'specific teacher' was cause for concern for 4% overall (9% of girls only). 'Don't know' was cited by 3% overall (5% of boys only).

Q 26: Anxiety or stress –next year. What do you think will cause you most anxiety or stress next year?

The main cause of anxiety in the coming year was considered by 69% of pupils to be 'tests and exams' (66% of boys and 73% of girls). The second ranking was occupied by 'workload and prep', a cause of stress to 19% of pupils (20% of boys and 19% of girls). 7% thought a 'specific teacher' was likely to be the cause of problems (10% of boys and 3% of girls) and 3% overall thought a 'specific subject' might cause concerns (5% of boys and 1% of girls).

Q 27: Subjects and GCSE choices. You have made a choice of GCSE subjects. Think about the subjects that you are studying. Think about the subjects that you are not studying.

As happened last year, this question was changed to reflect the fact that the pupils had now made their option choices for GCSE. The question looked at how they perceived these choices; the fact that they were either studying or not studying a subject was separated and they were asked if they were happy or unhappy to be studying the subject. The Subjects being studies for GCSE were, generally, still received well. Of the compulsory subjects (Maths, English, three sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Physics), Religious Education and French), the biggest proportion (89% overall) were happiest to be doing Biology (88% of boys and 91% of girls). Overall, 85% were happy to be studying English with slightly more girls (91%) than boys (80%) saying this. 78% were happy to be studying Maths (80% of boys and 76% of girls). Chemistry was next, and was acceptable to 76% overall (80% of boys and 70% of girls). French was acceptable to 66% of children: 66% of boys and 67% of girls saying this. Although Physics was the least liked of the sciences 61% overall said they were happy to study it (comprising 73% of boys and 45% of girls). Religious Education was acceptable to 41% overall; 37% of boys and 45% of girls said they were happy to be studying it. The optional subjects were hard to measure in quite the same way because not all the questions were answered fully by all the pupils; a subject that was optional did not always elicit a response, although some pupils did venture an opinion on a subject even though they were not studying it still. In considering their perceptions of the subjects that were being studied, particularly the core, compulsory subjects, 54% thought that they would rather not be studying

Religious Education, and 56% of boys and 52% of girls thought this. Physics was next, with 32% saying that they would have liked not to do it (32% of boys and 22% of girls saying so). 30% overall were reluctant French scholars and of these 29% of boys and 30% of girls said as much. Another science, Biology was ranked next, with 20% saying they would have liked not to do it (15% of boys and 27% of girls saying so). 18% would have rather not studied Maths (15% of boys and 21% of girls). English was a reluctance for 11% of pupils, more for boys (15%) than girls (6%) and the remaining science, Chemistry, was undertaken unenthusiastically by 7% overall (7% of boys and 6% of girls). In considering subjects that they were not currently studying, but would have liked to have studied, the rankings were headed by those subjects perceived as being most practical; Design Technology was the most missed, with 20% of pupils saying that they would have liked to have done it (22% of boys and 18% of girls). Art, Games and Physical Education were each missed by 18% of pupils, Music by 15% and Drama by 12%. The gender breakdown in these subjects was such that Art was most missed by girls (24%) rather than boys (12%), Games was more missed by boys (22%) than girls (12%), as was Physical Education (24% of boys against 9% of girls). Music was also boy weighted (17% of boys and 12% of girls saying that they would liked to have done it), but Drama was girl weighed (21% of girls missing it, as opposed to only 5% of boys).

The interview data

This data set, the final part of the research programme, was collected when the pupils were in the first term of Year 11. By this point they were at a point that, by their reckoning, was somewhere in the middle of the school; neither at the bottom, as new recruits, nor at the top, as sixth formers. To some this was an especially stressful time, with GCSE exams only a matter of months away, and large amounts of coursework to be completed. The pupils' views of the importance of, and enjoyment derived from, their activities at school continued to develop, as did their views on the school itself and the rationale for having to do the things that they did. There seemed to be a shift in the views of some, from the more halcyon days of third and fourth form, caused, no doubt, by the rigours of coursework and the deadlines imposed and all overshadowed by the inevitability of GCSE itself.

The final interviews ranged over the same topics as they had done on previous occasions. Pupils' perceptions of their enjoyment of, and the importance of, what they were engaged upon were examined, as were the changes that had occurred, and the influences that had coloured these perceptions over the year.

Enjoyment

The enjoyment of school itself was represented by a remarkably consistent view, centring on the company of friends and peers:

> …at school I'd say…being with friends is good…yeah, probably friends…hanging around with your friends, being in the common room… that sort of thing…(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> …friends…definitely…it's something to do isn't it? I mean, I do like being on holiday though, I think when you get older you like being on holiday more…you'd rather be on holiday…(girl B, Year 11)

and:

> …being at school's quite nice…I quite like staying in the afternoon…after school and stuff…to be with my friends, which is quite good…(girl D, Year 11)

The relationship between teacher and pupil was, for some, now perceived as becoming less formal:

> …just people…and just like…the end of last year and the beginning of this year…some people…like the staff…a few of the members of staff anyway…aren't staff any more…they're more like…just…people that you happen to share forty minutes with each day…who you talk to…it's a lot more relaxed…(boy B, Year 11)

To some extent, the extra-curricular activity offered, principally in the form of sport, provided an impetus for school attendance:

> …being around your friends…either that, or sport…(boy A, Year 11)

and:

> …rowing…(boy E, Year 11)

The enjoyment of subjects offered a more diverse set of views, and enjoyment of subjects was due to a number of reasons; some of the most impassioned views

were expressed about subjects that were clearly perceived as better because of the teachers:

> …History…I love the new History man…(girl E, Year 11)

and:

> …English, cos I've got (male teacher B)…he's so funny, he makes the lesson fun…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

> …well…I get on with the teachers in them really well…yeah, they're good fun and they're not, like, really old, like: 'oh, I'm going to hit you with a cane' …sort of thing…they're like, you seem to just get on with them and they say: 'right, this is what were going to do for the lesson, lets just have a chat about it and see what we can sort out'…and we get to work in groups a lot, so that's always nice…and you know, you get to have a real joke and mess around with them, but you still get the work done…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …the subject is really good cos he makes the subject really interesting as well…and, em…it's a kind of…you get…like, if you get something right it's like: 'oh, it's really good and I'll be able to remember it now' and things he says you remember as well, which is helpful as well, cos it's his tone of voice when he says things…(girl D, Year 11)

or because they were considered practical:

> …it is definitely the practical ones, like Science, Maths, Geography, cos I like doing things…(boy E, Year 11)

and:

> …I like the…activeness that we do in English…we are always either reading stuff out, or acting stuff…not just writing stuff down…(girl C, Year 11)

or just easy:

> …Geography…cos it is quite easy…(boy A, Year 11)

and:

> …I like English…it's quite easy…(girl E, Year 11)

or for which a talent was shown:

> … I enjoy doing it...I think you only enjoy things that you are good at…(girl B, Year 11)

and:

> …I probably say the same each year…English, History…er…French, I guess…it's the ones I'm good at…you enjoy subjects that you're good at…(boy D, Year 11)

Despite having made the GCSE choices, and thus having lost what was perceived as a 'doss' subject, there was evidence of 'doss-surrogacy', where subjects were accorded 'doss' status, or were viewed as less onerous than others:

> …French isn't a bad subject and it's quite easy, and I think it's quite interesting as well…it's a good break as well cos you can kind of, relax a little bit in French…(girl D, Year 11)

Sometimes the subject was thought of in this way because there was a perception that it required very little effort:

> …probably…Physics, actually…because…Physics…set one, we're all, like, pretty smart, and you've got people like (boy friend P) in my set, and (boy friend S)…they're all really smart…(boy B, Year 11)

If a subject, perceived as a 'doss' subject, was perceived as being more demanding than perhaps it had the right to be, then this caused consternation:

> …Music is a doss…Music is mint…I love doing Music…(and)…PE, cos it's vaguely a doss and you just play football and whatever…but not as much because it's like…sometimes you do hard-core circuits and runs…and it's like: 'whoa, slow down, this is PE'…you know…(boy D, Year 11)

The doss-rating of a subject had an effect on its perceived status:

> …Art…(nearly did not get chosen)… cos it is a doss subject…(girl B, Year 11)

and:

> …Physics is really dossy…well it's not cos I can't do it…but it is, cos you don't do anything…so…don't know if that counts…(girl E, Year 11)

Practitioners in what were often perceived as universally easier subjects were often keen to defend the subjects against criticism:

> …everyone thinks Drama is a doss but it's the hardest subject I have ever done…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …people who thought choosing Art would be easy are really… figuring out it's not…there's like, loads of work…all the time...(girl D, Year 11)

or themselves became more aware of the workload:

> …so I think Art's quite difficult…like, when I chose it I thought it was going to be easy but you have to do a lot of work for it…it's a lot more work than I thought it would be…(girl B, Year 11)

A lack of enjoyment of a subject, on the other hand, was often due to it being perceived as hard:

> …Maths…it is hard work, and I have to keep going back through my books to see how to do stuff…probably cos I'm not concentrating…(boy A, Year 11)

and:

> …Spanish…it's so hard…so mind-boggling…you're trying to understand Spanish, from (male teacher D), who's Scottish…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

> …Physics I don't understand what he goes on about, so…you kind of lose interest, so…(girl C, Year 11)

Or because the activity has not met the pupils expectations adequately:

> …it's probably like…having to write stuff…it's just like…things like…at the moment in English I really enjoy English…but we're doing media coursework…and you look around and you realise that everybody's making all these detailed notes on the film you're watching and you think: 'God, no, I'm just watching a film, I don't want to be making notes'…(boy B, Year 11)

A subject might also be seen as unenjoyable because it was perceived as boring.

For girls in particular, this seemed to be so with Physics:

> …Physics is just…I can't do it…it is so boring…(girl D, Year 11)

and:

> …Physics…(the teacher) is the most boring man in the world…although in some ways it is enjoyable, cos you don't have to do any work…so it balances out quite well…(girl E, Year 11)

Sometimes it was not clear where the fault lay:

> …Physics…I just had double Physics and you just want to sleep right through it…(the teacher)…is a bit boring…but maybe it is just Physics…I mean, you don't like to think that the teacher is quite a boring person, I

> mean, I have always found that Physics was really uninteresting to me, so maybe it is just is the subject I don't like...(girl D, Year 11)

For some boys, the least enjoyable subject had been English:

> ...I don't find it interesting... there's probably nothing definite about it, it's just...(boy E, Year 11)

and:

> ...actually, English is just repetitive and boring...like, when you study a book, it just ruins the book, and you don't want to look at it again...(boy A, Year 11)

The perception of a lack of enjoyment in science was not confined to the girls:

> ...Physics is a really boring subject because of...I think...I mean...when you see programmes on TV, and there are like interesting bits in science, like how stuff works and why, and it could be made into a lot, lot more interesting subject...and any subject has the potential to be boring, if the teachers aren't enthused by it ...I think that is the trouble with Physics at the moment...(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> ... I do try hard, reasonably, at most things, barring Science; I don't pay much attention, because...they bore me to bits...absolutely bore me to bits...therefore I can't be bothered to try...that's one thing I would have dropped if you can...(boy C, Year 11)

Even those subjects once seen as most enjoyable were regarded as suspect once the expectations were not being met:

> ... now DT is really hard...GCSE DT, I think, is absolutely solid...cos you've got...like...we've been doing...from last summer until now we've not gone in to the workshop we've just been, like designing...and that is so boring...(boy B, Year 11)

Importance

For these pupils, the importance of school was seen in a variety of ways, although, not surprisingly, at this stage in their school careers, it centred on the passing of exams:

> ...your work, I guess...working towards GCSEs cos GCSEs are like now, and that's pretty important...well, very important ...a grounding for life...(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> …well…GCSEs at the end of this year, and that's kind of the thing…but because we're sort of more used to course work and stuff than last year and exams do seem still quite a long way away…you know, it doesn't seem so bad…(boy B, Year 11)

There was a sense too that the exams could not come soon enough, after the prolonged build up of coursework and practice papers:

> …I just want them over, really…(boy E, Year 11)

but there was also a perception that school, as an institution, provided something broader and less tangible:

> … it's more about…just getting by…just getting on with people, not getting in anybody's way…doing what needs to be done really…I suppose that's what's most important…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …I think it's slightly less results than getting ready for life… cos when you're younger you sort of think: 'school work and everything'…but I don't think it is all about work…(boy A, Year 11)

and:

> …an education…and experiencing… what you are going to have to do for the rest of your life, cos you're going to have to work, aren't you, you're going to have to…battle, and you are going to have to do everything, so…it kind of prepares you like that…(girl A, Year 11)

A good deal of importance was now also accorded to the next step on the road, after GCSEs:

> …making your option choices…it is happening at the end of this term, I think it is just after the mocks next term, but we have to start thinking about it this term…(boy E, Year 11)

The social aspects of school were not only perceived as being significant in terms of the pupils enjoyment of school, but were also considered central to their perceptions of the importance of school:

> …if something's rubbish with you, or like, life, or whatever, then having your friends is good cos you can, like talk about it…(girl B, Year 11)

and:

> …socialisation…only thing that is reasonably enjoyable to do…(boy C, Year 11)

Friendships and the social aspects of school were, for some, only a part of the overall picture:

> …I think a lot of it is keeping up a social life, cos me and my friends made up this kind of thing: 'work hard, play hard', which is quite, like, clichéd, but, I mean, I do make time at the weekends, like on Saturday nights I go out… instead of doing all my work and stuff, because I think like, when you are sitting doing work all the time, you kind of, become really insular and you become stressed more about it and you just have to forget it sometimes, it is just an exam…(girl D, Year 11)

The importance of subjects was now perceived in ways that went, sometimes, beyond the hitherto sacred zenith that was the GCSE; importance was now accorded to:

> …probably the subjects that I think I might carry on...which I haven't a clue about yet…(boy A, Year 11)

There was further evidence that in the minds of these pupils, the usual suspects, English, Maths and Science, were not, unquestioningly, the most important:

> …well, they are, but it all depends on what you want to do for AS and stuff…but then again, that's sort of determined by how well you do in GCSE, so if you think of everything as important, then the ones you do best in…then you can choose from what you do best in…(girl B, Year 11)

and:

> …I mean, I am going to try to do well in those (core subjects)…I want to do AS in most of the other ones…(girl D, Year 11)

A subject could be perceived as important for almost diametrically opposing reasons:

> …well, in terms of, like, cos I want to pass stuff…like Maths is quite important, because I am only OK at that…um…I want to do well in History, because I am quite good at it…and English…(and)… I want to do them for A level as well...AS level…(girl E, Year 11)

The GCSE core subjects of English, Maths and the Sciences, maintained their importance in the minds of many pupils, in some cases, apparently, in spite of themselves:

> …sadly, English is quite important…Maths still…and Sciences…cos that's considered quite a big GCSE…(boy A, Year 11)

and;

> …well, we are going to have the big three...English Maths, Science…still…yeah…I'd say so…I'd say so…even though they're boring…yeah…even though…I don't like them, I still know that people…should know how to do them…(boy D, Year 11)

For some, there was a shift in emphasis, from the core subjects to the more peripheral subjects, which were now perceived as more important because of the particular value that they had for the individual pupil:

> …a subject like Drama…if you'd asked me about Drama a couple of years ago I'd have probably said it's not important…but now…because it's a career option, it's actually very important…it's all about looking to your future…(boy B, Year 11)

The simple fact that subjects were enjoyable made them important to those taking part:

> …Drama is a priority…because I like it…(boy C, Year 11)

and:

> …there's no point in doing something that you don't like or that's no use…you've got to get the balance right…(boy E, Year 11)

and:

> …obviously, the subjects that are important to you are the ones that you enjoy, so…but…I wouldn't really put Drama up in importance, probably, even though I enjoy it loads…I'm not going to…I can't see myself doing a career in Drama…except, maybe film producing, but we don't do anything on that side of Drama, so I would put…English at the top…and then…and then Maths, cos I like Maths…and then RE, cos I like RE as well…(girl C, Year 11)

There was, for some, a rank order of importance, as far as subjects were concerned. The degree to which a subject was liked or enjoyed would affect its ranking:

> …I think it's because, if you enjoy it, it will go further up because you enjoy it then you are happy in that subject, but if you don't like it, it will fall to the bottom…(girl A, Year 11)

Sometimes the collective importance (because of a desire to gain the GCSE grades) overwhelmed the value of any single subject:

> …I don't think I have one…no, I don't have one…cos…I don't know, I just want to do well in all of them…so they are all important…which probably isn't a good reason…(girl B, Year 11)

A lack of importance, on the other hand, was accorded to those subjects perceived as irrelevant:

> …some of it is a waste of time…like…learning stuff that you don't need … the rest of your life…it's such a waste of your time…it's like…History in…(junior school) or in (senior school)…when am I ever going to need to recall…some revolution, or some King's death, or something…that is a waste of your time…(boy C, Year 11)

A sense of a subject's irrelevance could now be perceived even in the core subjects:

> …I think there's more to life than sciences…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

> …Maths used to be: 'oh, Maths is so important because you need Maths for everything…' but once you pass GCSE…unless yore doing like …engineering or physics or something…then Maths just doesn't seem as important any more…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …you don't necessarily need Maths for a career…or Science for a career…when you are growing up people are always: 'you need Maths and Science, you know, to get good jobs'…well there's other good jobs you can get…or go into different careers that don't need them at all…(boy C, Year 11)

or where the effort expended in studying them was not rewarded.

> …PE, cos you do it for fitness and fun and everything but you don't get any certificate or anything…(boy A, Year 11)

As with the GCSE choices in third form, some subjects were now deemed as unimportant because they were not going to be taken through to the next phase, As and A level. Even after having made GCSE option choices:

> …never, ever have to look in an atlas or anything like that again…or German…eeugh!…what else was there…Classics…Latin…that was another good one to drop…a fair number were pointless subjects, unless you wanted to work in …something which involves Classics or Latin…then there's no point in you doing it…and I can't believe they make you do it…(boy C, Year 11)

There was, for some, a palpable sense of relief at the prospect of dropping more subjects after GCSE:

> …in French, for instance, I'm set two, which is ,like, pretty good, we're sort of, you know, like, average…and, er…you know, doing the work and I'm thinking: 'yeah, alright', so I'm getting, like, just about average marks, and putting in about average effort, because I know that…hopefully I'll get my A at GCSE and I need never speak another word of French again if I don't want to…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …not Maths…God, no…Maths and Science…I am going to drop it…like it's hot…(girl E, Year 11)

Influences

The pupils' perceptions of subjects had obviously changed over the year, and some in more surprising ways than others. Religious Education for example, once widely reviled, was now seen as more pertinent; not only because it afforded a GCSE pass:

> …at least you're getting a GCSE out of it…so there is actually a point…but I can't see myself carrying it on…past GCSE…(boy A, Year 11)

and:

> …I mean I don't find RE important, like, I think that's a completely useless subject, but it is important because I need to do well in it, do you know what I mean…(girl B, Year 11)

but because the material being taught and learned was now perceived as more relevant:

> …now we're doing like, abortion , and what Christian views are on that, and we get to watch a video of somebody having an abortion and it's actually quite horrendous…it's more like Christian perspectives which is…when you say Christian perspectives you actually mean just generally moral perspectives...(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …RE …I don't like the philosophy…though the ethics section of it is not bad…like, we're doing abortion at the moment and that's really interesting, but things like that Apostles Creed and…no…there's just no need for it…(boy C, Year 11)

The perceived importance of this subject, although generally lower than most other subjects, was still acknowledged as being misplaced:

> …interestingly…due to the events that have been happening in the world at the moment…I'd say that it should go far further up than it is…but not because we should need to know the name of the safe in the vicar's church or whatever…we need to understand, I think, about other people's religions especially Islam at the moment…that's in the news…and I think…children do actually need to learn about that cos that is going to be a problem…I mean it is a problem now, but I think it is going to get worse…but again, this may also be slightly biased, but I am actually getting better…at RE as it's getting more into the Christian perspectives and philosophy and arguing sides and stuff…(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> …I think some of the, sort of, moral discussions things in RE are good but the…religion thing is not as interesting, so it's sort of more, I dunno, the broader things that I like about it…I like, psychology, the way people think…(boy E, Year 11)

and:

> …it's not just strict religions, like learning about different people's religions, instead it's based on Christianity, but it's exploring peoples thoughts on issues like…abortion…(girl C, Year 11)

and:

> …I didn't used to like RE, but…I really like it now because we've stopped doing religion and we've started doing ethics, and like, tying it in, and I really enjoy doing that, and we, like, have…not really class debates, but…it's kind of, open discussion about it all and everything, and I really think that's really interesting and I do like that now…(girl D, Year 11)

In terms of how their perceptions had changed over time, there was, for some of the pupils, more clarity about schoolwork generally:

> …when you are younger you don't really know what you are…well you know what you are good at but you don't really have as clear ideas…and whereas now…I am pretty good at Maths and sciences, but compared to say my abilities in the arts, say in like History and languages, that sort of thing, I am far better at that side of things…(boy D, Year 11)

Because the GCSE course was now well under way, there was a good deal of thought expressed about the GCSE curriculum, especially:

> …the mocks in January…but I have the whole Christmas to revise, so I'm not really stressing…and in half term I'm going to do my Science revision, so…because I'm really bad at Science…so maybe if I can get that out the

> way then maybe I'll be able to do a lot more work…next term, in the half term, and be better at it…I feel that I've got loads of time in front of me to just sit and work, so I don't worry about anything really…(girl D, Year 11)

and:

> …I'd rather do worse on the mocks, then there's less pressure…although, I do want to do all right…but…as long as I got, like Bs and Cs in the mocks, then that would be fine…or a few Ds…(girl E, Year 11)

For some, the perception was of a task to be undertaken, a known quantity:

> …we'll get through it , cos, at then end of the day it's GCSE, it's not too hard, we're set one, we should get through it…(boy D, Year 11)

School as an institution was also subject to a shift in perception. As it became more remote, perceptions of the junior school had changed; for some, in the midst of coursework and preparation for exams, it was viewed fondly:

> …it's a bit weird…I look back at it and wish I was still there sometimes…it's just…there was no pressure there really…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …I just can't believe you were that small…I mean, you know you were that small, but, you know…I was thinking…God, I was…out there in the little playground playing hand ball…I was the one ringing the bell…I was the one on the tennis courts being told off because you didn't have your trainers on…you just can't believe it really…(girl A, Year 11)

For some, the lower school was now viewed differently; hindsight had provided an altered perspective on what should, or might have been:

> …it looks quite young…but it still brings back good memories…but I wouldn't want to come back again, cos I have obviously grown up a bit…but it looks fun…they all just run around…and you just think: 'oh, I wish I'd known how little work I had then'…well… not how little, but how it gets more…(girl C, Year 11)

and:

> …where I am now, I wish I had used (junior school) more in a way…in the sense that… I wish I'd done less work …which sounds weird but I wish I'd used (junior school) for what it was…cos now you see that all the work you did in (junior school) doesn't matter that much…it's a good base…it's a really good foundation…but (junior school) is just sort of a…yeah it's a good foundation, a good base…and the work there isn't actually as important…certainly not as the work in (senior school)…(boy D, Year 11)

There was a sense that one was moving onward and upward in an unstoppable journey:

> ...I was thinking just today, like when I was in (junior school) and little, and thinking: 'God, (senior school) is so far away and so scary'...and I'm in, like, fifth form now...and ...it's kind of like...now you really have to work, and school stops being... just that thing you have to do...it starts becoming, sort of , this is your life now, so...if you don't do this, then you're not going to get what you want in life...so it is a bit more serious...(girl D, Year 11)

Being in what was felt to be a more senior part of the upper school was not all positive. The early experience of fifth form, for some, felt overloaded with work:

> ...fourth form was a bit of a doss year, I reckon...this year is gonna be quite a bit harder...it's like , the quantity of work...first week, I had three preps in the first day...didn't think that was on...(boy A, Year 11)

The effect of the start of the year 'pep-talk' from home was quickly moderated by reassurances from the 'old lags':

> ...I've had the whole: '(you have to) work hard for this term'...lecture...kind of thing...but it seems to be like more hard working...and everyone seems to be doing a lot more work...but all the fifth formers from, like, last year said it wears off after about three weeks and goes back to normal...(boy A, Year 11)

The sheer amount of work had, for some, caused the enjoyment to dissipate:

> ...you've either got coursework, or something important or really dull to do...for the lessons...we've done all the fun stuff now...it's just all the complicated last minute stuff...(boy C, Year 11)

For some, the high workload was perceived as entirely acceptable, as being something for which the individual was perhaps responsible and which could be enjoyed rather than endured:

> ...I'm enjoying it... there's a lot of work...but that's partly because of my decisions to...do... lots of stuff because I do all the music and all the rowing and all of that...and I've also got GCSEs coming up...vaguely...soon...(boy D, Year 11)

For others, the perception that they were engaged in a regime with high workload and high stress was attributable entirely to the teachers:

> ...I don't think the teachers actually realise...how much pressure...they're actually putting on...I mean I've got, like...eight pieces of coursework going on...but the deadlines are, like, in a couple of months...so they just keep on

giving and giving and giving them out, until…you reach breaking point…(girl A, Year 11)

To others, there seemed to be a perception of the work as simply relentless:

…it's good…this year's not as good as the other years…because its been crammed with, like work…well, I thought it wasn't as bad as everyone was saying to begin with, but then I caught up with everyone, with the work…and…um…it's just more tiring…they put an extra lesson in as well, which is annoying…it would be all right if they just gave us course work, but they give us prep on top of it…so….and it's quite a lot of prep, it's not just, like, a little time…I suppose they have to, but I don't think they have to give us so much…and, it's just, also, like…cos I do lots of other activities, so it's, like, all that on top of it…(girl C, Year 11)

There was a sense that difficulties could be overcome by dint of hard work:

…there's lots and lots of course work…it's the last term rush…to get everything done…it's not really bothering me…it's just that…you'd…have to work a lot…I work on the weekends at home…and kind of relax in the week…which, sort of doesn't exist…but…don't do anything on Sunday… Just work …in the morning and the afternoon …you do have to just sit and work…you can't…if a TV show comes on you have to just run away…you can't…I have to lock myself away in my room and just do it…I don't like leaving it till the last minute, cos I get worried about things…(girl D, Year 11)

Even the areas once considered as the most enjoyable elements of school could be perceived as less than attractive if they became arduous:

…Thursday is the worst, cos I've got volleyball after school…and rowing in the morning…and PE…it's like…sports all day long…(girl E, Year 11)

One of the side-effects of reaching the GCSE stage of schooling was perhaps a perception that the curriculum felt, for some, too restricted:

…we've got a really crap list to choose from, so they were like, the subjects that I had to choose…I was like: 'ok, you have to choose them and they're really crap; which ones are least crap?'...(girl B, Year 11)

and:

…I think RE should be an option…I also think PE should be a GCSE option…and cooking…(girl E, Year 11)

and:

...there could be a bit more… like, (local sixth form college) had…design options, and you could do textiles and stuff… photography…I though that would be quite interesting but…yeah...and we are never really told what

business studies is all about, so if you pick it, it is kind of like a lucky guess…(girl C, Year 11)

and:

…I would do Home Economics, I think that's good, I mean, every other school does it, a lot of my friends do it…but (senior school) doesn't…I mean, they do PE for GCSE, but we don't…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

…I really think it is a big hole in the school curriculum, that they don't offer triple sciences, as even an option…and to be honest…actually…the school is a very, very good school overall…on the whole its got…you've got…good teachers…very good facilities, blah,blah,blah…but…with options and stuff, I don't think it does very well…(boy D, Year 11)

The apparent dissatisfaction with the curriculum was not confined to GCSE, but attention was now turned to AS and A level:

…I'm stuck with what I want to do…I would like to do Art and Drama, but there is nothing else…which I want to do…like last year I thought I would do Art, Drama, Politics and English, but English is…way not interesting enough…quite boring for A level…too much reading as well…(boy C, Year 11)

and:

…like the (aptitude tests)…they came up with A levels and As levels that are recommended…it came up with, sort of, architecture and engineering…like, even IT they don't do for GCSE…(boy E, Year 11)

However, for the most part, the general experience of being at this point in the school hierarchy was perceived as positive,

…cos we're, like, the top end of the middle school…you know, third, fourth and fifth…we're just…we feel like we're a bit more superior…and we're nearly sixth form…and because the lower sixth –we're quite good friends with them…they're only a year above, and they're sixth form, we feel more…grown up, almost…it's a bit weird…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

…you are now…sort of…in the middle…it's a lot different…you're not, sort of , the sixth form, cos they can do what they like, and just read and things, but you're not just coming into it…you're sort of in between…(it is) probably better…cos, you know where you are…but you don't have as much pressure to do things…(boy E, Year 11)

and;

> …still feels like I've got a long way to be in, whereas people go: 'oh, you've only got three years'…but it still feels quite a lot…umm…it feels like I've been in (senior school) for ages…cos I don't feel like I've had a big jump from (junior school) to (senior school) now…I don't really remember the big change…whereas all my friends still do, but I think it all just blended into one because my friend group didn't change and I don't think I changed that much…(girl C, Year 11)

and:

> …it's quite good…it's all right…it's better than being in fourth form…I love fifth form…when I get to sixth form I'll think that will be the best...but…work goes up, so…fourth form was quite good…I quite like fifth form, cos there's not too much work pressure, but you're not a baby…at the same time…you can still be bunched in with the younger ones rather than…no…you know, you're nearly sixteen…so…(girl E, Year 11)

and could be described as ambivalent, at worst.

> …it's...good…but I think when we went up to third form everyone was thinking: 'oh, yeah, this is great, it is so much, sort of different to Olave's' but sort of, you get used to it, and you don't think it's so special...cos the days are quite a lot longer and they sort of blend into each other…and even the week-end…you don't sort of get one…(boy A, Year 11)

Influences that were brought to bear on the pupils as they moved through the year were wide ranging, from parents and siblings, to peer groups and teachers, all overshadowed by the weight of the GCSE curriculum and the impending examinations. For some, the peer group proved a mixed blessing, providing evidence of the effects of peer appraisal:

> …I think part of the problem with going from (junior school) to (senior school) is…everyone gets profiled…and it's still the same as in (junior school) as to who is popular and people still have the same judgements about you and they don't change…(girl D, Year 11)

The perception of hierarchy established within some groupings was still a problem that seemed, to some, fairly insurmountable, particularly in sports, where competition for places in teams was fierce:

> …well…I'm in the thirds, which is not competitive…it's quite funny…but it seems like, once you're in the seconds and thirds, you don't get chosen…you don't get, like…you're in it forever…the others don't really get looked at cos they have a special practice…so…(girl C, Year 11)

There was evidence that, in the minds of some, if not in the collective consciousness of the whole group, there was still, a clear and unambiguous set of discrete groups operating:

> …I think the groups are still very clear cut…like, you know, there's 'jocks'…people like (boy friend R), (boy friend C) and (boy friend J)… that group…but I'm quite weird cos I get on with, like, loads…with them as well…I get on with everyone…but I know loads of people don't like them, and they don't like 'nerds' and…'gamers' –go on line and: 'how are ya'…thing…there are still set groups…lots of people mix, but lots of people don't…like…I can't imagine…ever…someone like (boy friend H) going to a party and hanging around with jocks…(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> …I suppose when we all first went into (House G) there were the sporty people and the clever people...and now it's sort of …we are all together…and I think it's less between the Houses as well…it doesn't really matter what you're in any more…(boy A, Year 11)

Up to this point, within the peer group, clever pupils had always been labelled as 'boffs', but this had now been superseded by the notion of 'keenos', who were defined as:

> …like when you are really keen –put your hand up all the time…(girl friend F) is like that in Latin; God, one day she's going to knock me out with that hand…actually I'm like that in History, now that I think about it…oh, my God…(girl E, Year 11)

There was also now a greater perception that these clever pupils had tremendous value:

> …as there's more, sort of, work…I think people are more accepting of the more clever pupils…so that they can help you a bit…(boy A, Year 11)

To some pupils, elements of peer behaviour required strong resistance, and a clearer perception was forming in the minds of some about the different approaches to schoolwork being adopted by boys and girls.

> …there are people who mess about, but still do well…like…I find it really annoying because people just sit there and it is usually the people who are quite clever…but you would think it would be stupid people that would do that, but it's not necessarily…it's people that are… quite clever, so they can do that, cos they don't necessarily have to listen…(it is) clever boys, stupid girls…well not stupid, that sounds really mean, but you know like…stupid people think that's funny and that comes from like, the girls, and the clever guys that can get away with doing no work, do it…and the stupid girls do no work…(girl B, Year 11)

and:

> …everyone…if they don't work hard, then…I mean, some people are just really, really good at it…and if they're not, then they're not working hard because they don't want to…(girl D, Year 11)

Despite the understanding that being in sets was a useful and necessary part of the structure of school, there was still an element of competition:

> …I'm in set two for Maths, and set one and two are doing higher GCSE…and…err…set two and one are, kind of, almost at the same stage…we're, like, both doing the same kind of tests and stuff, which is quite good, and it makes them feel like they are not quite as good as they think they are…(girl C, Year 11)

For most of these pupils, families were an important influence, and, it has to be said, one that was perceived of as being for the better. This was particularly evident during the choosing of subjects, where there were subtle degrees of persuasion:

> … I talk about it with my parents about what I'd like to do but they don't really push me in to anything…(boy E, Year 11)

and:

> … I was choosing between Latin and Art, and they said they thought that one would be better…but I think I was going to choose it anyway, so…(girl E, Year 11)

and:

> …my mum…she didn't like, force me to do anything I don't want to, but of I said to her: 'should I do Drama AS?'…she'd say: 'well, you didn't do Drama GCSE, do you really think you'd enjoy it and be, like, good at it?'…sort of thing, and, yeah, make you really think about it, and not just kind of, spur of the moment: 'I'll do this'…kind of thing…(girl D, Year 11)

When the fundamental choices about what was to come after GCSE were a discussion point, there was some evidence that, even if they were unspoken, familial influences were perhaps deeply rooted:

> …cos I don't actually have to do sixth form, would I actually want to?…and then…well my mum said it would be a good idea…and also I didn't know what I would do if I didn't do sixth form…(girl C, Year 11)

and:

…I think it is weird…like my dad's a professor of archaeology and my mum's a History teacher and you say: 'hmm, I wonder why he's doing History'…but I think...it's just…it's quite weird actually, cos I was thinking about A level choices, and mum said: 'what do you think you might do for AS?'…and I said: 'possibly English, French, History and Politics'…and my mum did English French and History…and she said that after I'd said it with, like, no input at all…and I think…obviously…family genes are gonna come through...but there is also…I would probably be lying if I said that there was no influence from my parents…in the fact that when I was younger I'd have been trawled around history sites across the world and Europe and stuff and I've…travelled to archaeological sites and done this and…gone to conferences with my dad…and stuff …and that's always going to be there…but I don't…so subliminally maybe…but I don't feel at all openly pressured or…influenced by them in any way…(boy D, Year 11)

The influences were perceived as less than subtle in some cases:

…my dad was: 'right we're going to talk about A levels'…and I was: 'right, I've decided what I'm going to do'…and he was like: 'oh'...I told him and he was like:' well, don't rush into things'…cos my dad…he just…he doesn't mean to, and he knows it's, like, my choice and stuff, but…I'm like: 'dad, stop trying to affect my choice'…and he's: 'I'm not…but'…you know…'you may want to consider this..' so that's it really, I've decided just to say: 'none of your business'…almost…you know…it's my future…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

…my mum was trying to blackmail me…she sort of: 'if you don't go to sixth form you'll have to get a job and I'll make you pay board'…and stuff like that, and I was like: 'oh'…she was such a witch…(boy C, Year 11)

The perception was, sometimes, that there was no room for manoeuvre, so discussion was avoided:

…I don't talk to my mum about work…cos she'll…we have…differences of opinions…mum and I clash heads a lot…(girl A, Year 11)

The perception was always there, in the minds of some pupils, that one of the biggest influences came ultimately back to money:

…there is pressure because they really want me to do well…and if I did badly, that would be bad…they say, you know, they're not going to be happy if I do badly…and dad always brings up the money issue, like: 'I pay so much for your school fees, blah, blah, blah'…and that kind of…there's kind of like, guilt, as well…(and) it really pisses me off, because it's like: 'well, you chose to spend that much money…I didn't ask to go to a private school'…so I think it's quite bad to bring that back round on me…mum will say that as well, that it's really unfair to bring money in…and if he starts saying how much he's spent I don't want to know, it's like: 'go away…'…(girl B, Year 11)

and:

> …I think there is still…(pressure) in the way…that they've got the excuse that they are paying so you've got to toe the line…(boy A, Year 11)

Sometimes the pressure on the pupil was quite understated, but was still evidently strong enough to be felt:

> …like, if my dad knows I've got a test coming up, he'll be, like: 'oh, I just wanted to check with you…' sort of…a bit of pressure…and then my dad wants me to do well in my rowing, cos he rows…so…a bit of pressure there…(girl E, Year 11)

Money was sometimes perceived as a useful (if not always successful) parental device to exert leverage, aside from the argument about the payment of fees and a return on an investment:

> …this is so ridiculous…my dad…behaves like quite a lot of parents I know…like my dad's saying: 'right, you can have a certain amount of money for an A star'…bribery, right: 'a certain amount of money for an A…but…if you get a B…I'm deducting the same amount of money you would get for an A star'…so, if I got five A stars and five Bs, I'd be sort of …zero…which I think is really unfair, cos there's nothing wrong with a B, you know, a B is like 'ok'…(boy B, Year 11)

For these pupils, at this stage in their GCSE course, family influence, in the form of older siblings, provided a useful insight into what was about to occur, even at a stage once removed:

> …(boy friend R) has got a whole load of notes that are, like, all A star quality…and you can, sort of see their mistakes, I reckon…it must be good having an older sibling who's not quite as clever…cos, then you go up and…(younger sister) is very lucky…(boy A, Year 11)

For some, the past actions of siblings added something to the sense of security felt about the imminent examinations:

> …I think that I feel more secure, because my sister said that they are a lot easier than you think…(girl C, Year 11)

The perception of pressure caused by the fact that an older sibling had done particularly well, had obviously some effect in the minds of pupils:

> …there's not that much pressure on me…I probably put it on myself more…because of (brother)…and him doing well…(girl B, Year 11)

Conversely, for some pupils, there was a sense that, if a sibling had done less well than expected, then the pressure was now focussed on them to do well:

> …there has been the influence of my brother not doing that great at AS level…at GCSE he got five Bs and five Cs, and at AS he got an A in History, which we were really surprised that he got…and he got two Ds and a U…so it's like: 'well, I don't want to get that'…and there's, like, pressure, cos I'm meant to be the clever one…well, not clever, I'm just cleverer…well in some ways I'm stupider and some ways I'm cleverer…(girl E, Year 11)

Although, a situation where this occurred did also provide a sense of reassurance for some:

> …all my friends are saying, their brothers and sisters, they just want to beat their brothers and sisters…and, my friend, her sister got ten A stars…and my brother got all Cs and Ds, so I'm…I think I'll do all right…(girl D, Year 11)

The perceived success, or indeed, shortcomings of an older sibling were also instrumental in developing attitudes to work:

> …(brother) got a C, and I was annoyed at him…cos he didn't work…it just shows…if you don't work, you come out with his grades…(girl A, Year 11)

Observing a sibling in action could also be:

> …frustrating…but…cos I know I'm not going to do worse than (brother)…I'm not going to go away for a week and say I'm going to stay at a younger brothers, and go to Headingley every day and do an hour of work every night and then go on the computer, or watch TV or something like that…I'd be working every day…(girl A, Year 11)

As well as setting an example, older siblings did act as a source of support in times of need:

> …she (sister) worried, like, loads, so I just put myself in perspective I think: 'I can't be that…worried…' cos, she got too worked up about it…it's nice, cos I say: 'oh, it's really hard this term'…I don't say it, like, moaningly, but…(sister) says: 'yeah, fifth year first term is the hardest term you'll ever have'…so…it's quite nice to know you're not the only one who thinks like that…(girl C, Year 11)

as well as providing, sound, good quality advice:

> …she did say she liked some subjects, so I guess I chose some of them cos of her…or, just, she helped when she said: 'oh, it's a good course'…I don't know…no-one told me really what to choose or anything…I liked the idea of Drama, and the fact that my friend did it probably helped me choose it a bit more…because…it was between Music and Drama…and all the

> theatre visits…my step-brother said, were quite good, so…he probably influenced that bit…(girl C, Year 11)

Teachers, in all their various forms, also proved to be a strong influence on pupil perceptions, and in extremes too.

> …each teacher is different to be honest…because some teachers…you've got to that stage where…like…it's a lot more mature…and it's not like they are the big bad teacher or whatever and stuff…and you know them quite well…and you talk to them on a much more relaxed level and that sort of thing…like…in the arts subjects it is a more relaxed atmosphere…whereas in…some subjects it is more strict…like they'll teach you: 'this is what you do and this is how you do it'…I think your teachers are the most important thing, cos you can have a brilliant teacher in a quite boring subject and they will make it come alive, but you can have an awful teacher in even quite a good subject and it will destroy it for you…(boy D, Year 11)

Specific subjects were considered bearable or otherwise, depending largely on the perceptions that pupils had of the teacher:

> …well I liked it in third form when we had (male teacher R), cos he was really funny…but (male teacher W) is crap…but I don't think anyone really likes him…I don't know…(girl E, Year 11)

and:

> …it's cos of the teachers though…you've got (female teacher W)…or (male teacher R)…; (female teacher W), she's lovely, but it is: 'we'll work; we're working'…and (male teacher R)…his class is very: 'oh, have a good time, blah, blah'…but the thing is, they won't get the grades…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

> …I just had double Physics and you just want to sleep right through it… (the teacher)…he's a bit boring…but maybe it is just Physics…I mean, you don't like to think that the teacher is quite a boring person, I mean, I have always found that Physics was really uninteresting to me, so maybe it is just is the subject I don't like…(girl D, Year 11)

Contrasts were often drawn between the extremes of teaching style and personality:

> …I enjoy a lot of lessons, like (subject A)…I really like…it's brilliant…(male teacher C), he's really fun…cos you go into lessons with some teachers, you're ready to go to sleep…(girl D, Year 11)

and:

> …I think the way they teach is important because if they're gonna bore you then you're just gonna put your head down...and sleep...yeah…never go to sleep in (subject A) now, cos he cracks too many jokes...(boy A, Year 11)

How and why teaching succeeded or failed, was perceived in different ways:

> …they have to be talking to you rather than just letting the book talk to you…you have to stand up and interact with your class, it makes it much better…(girl C, Year 11)

For some it would be linked specifically with knowledge and understanding of the subject being taught:

> …I think I am very much affected by the teacher I have…like for (subject D)…(male teacher M) knows, like, absolutely everything about it…you can ask him anything about (subject D), and he knows it…and that really comes through when he's teaching…cos he knows so much about it…cos you just pick things up, and he explains things much better, and stuff like that…whereas, our (subject E) teacher…the thing I hate is, like, they have to look in books and stuff before they put something up on the board…and you'll ask them a question and they won't know…and they'll have to look it up…and that really annoys me, cos it's like: 'you're supposed to know'…(girl B, Year 11)

For some pupils, there was a perception that teachers either worked with and for the pupil, or against them:

> …there's the teachers who…don't care about deadlines…that just want you to do the work…and have a good time…and not…be stressed out…and then there's the teachers where they don't care about what you've got going on…out of school, or what you've got going on at home…if you don't hand in that work…that's it…they don't care…so there's two…there's the relaxed ones, the ones that are ok with you going to them and saying: 'I couldn't do it, can I have an extension?'…and the other ones that are saying: 'no, it's supposed to be in for that day'…(girl A, Year 11)

The perception of a subject was, in some cases, shaped entirely by the teacher, and a chronological trail could be followed:

> …you have to spend so much time with them, so…if you don't get on with them it's a bit of a pain…I remember…in Year 6, I had (subject X) with (male teacher S), and…how I couldn't get that right… then in Year 7 I had (subject X) with (male teacher B) and it was much more laid back, but we still got the work done, and now I'm doing (subject X) GCSE…which I probably wouldn't have done before…so things like that…(female teacher S)…well, I probably didn't do (subject y) because of her… which was a bit of a shame, cos I did quite enjoy (subject Y)…(boy B, Year 11)

For some pupils, the most positive influences were provided by the teacher who could engender real enthusiasm for a subject:

> …we're doing quite a bit of practical, but, again, I get on with (male teacher N), he…you know…we just do the work, but it's always a bit interesting and we tend to go off syllabus quite a lot…cos we're top set…we've got like, um, we get over the important stuff really quickly so we can do some more interesting things…like, um, Biology we know loads of A level stuff, but…we don't need it…but it helps a bit…like I've got (male teacher P) for Biology, and we go off topic loads, and…we do have a bit of a mess around, but, you know…it's always what we should be doing, and then we…like, go off topic a bit and we talk about…you know, stuff that we may not need to know, but it's a bit more interesting…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …I just love (subject F), it's one of my favourite subjects…and we've got…an absolute mint new teacher this year…(male teacher T)…he's great, he's such a good teacher…he's really funny, I really like him…(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> …I mean, (male teacher C) has come up to (senior school)…and there was a low intake to (subject F)…and they've had to sort out another room cos everyone else wanted to do it now cos he's made it…he's made it fun…he's made it with quizzes and everything, and the results have come out great, because he's made it fun, and you don't realise you're learning when you're in…and people just come out and go…it should go out to all teachers, if you make it fun you will get the results…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

> …if you have a good teacher they make you want to choose a subject, but then, you've got to remember that you don't have the teacher the year after…we were choosing a Drama teacher for next year…she was taking us for a class…we're sort of, her…dummies, or whatever…I prefer our one now, but she's going on maternity leave…(girl C, Year 11)

but, unfortunately the negative experiences provided an equally powerful influence over pupils' perceptions:

> …any subject has the potential to be boring, if the teachers aren't enthused by it…I think that is the trouble with Physics at the moment…(boy D, Year 11)

the teacher could be perceived as draconian:

> …in Maths…well…I've got this arse-hole of a teacher…I don't get on with him at all…but anyway…he just…it's like: 'right, this is what we do'…and he

> will…he won't even teach you, like, the very boundaries of what you need to know, he'll keep within this core…of about…'you need to know this; you do need to know this, but we won't go into that because that's for really smart people'…and, it's just, like: 'cheers'…cos…he's…the man's a genius…he knows everything you could possibly know about Physics and Maths…he's more qualified to teach Physics…um…and you can tell he's just so smart…but, my God, he can't teach…which is quite a shame…(boy B, Year 11)

or inept;

> …we have (male teacher Z)…and…he cannot control the class at all…and we just…at one point we actually had a tennis ball, and we started throwing it at him…well…I didn't, personally, but the class did…which was quite funny…(boy B, Year 11)

The responsibility for a failure to engage with the pupils was laid firmly at the door of the teacher, and it appeared to be especially frustrating if the teacher was perceived to be a clever person:

> …I mean (the teacher is) a genius…I mean, I know he went to Cambridge or Oxford or whatever, and he's really, really good a Physics, but he can't teach…it's just…no-one …in the class except for (boy friend P) who is really good at Physics and Maths and that sort of thing…really understands it…(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> …he's just terrible…I mean, he's obviously a clever guy, because he went to…Cambridge, or Oxford, or wherever he went…but he just can't…I don't know…his methods are just really bad…and like, in coursework and stuff he'll just sit there, and, obviously you're not supposed to help too much, but a bit of guidance is always helpful and he'll just sit there and tell you to get on with it…(girl B, Year 11)

Even for those who had considered a subject for further study, the spectre of a particular teacher affected perceptions to such an extent that the choice would not be considered:

> …everyone's told me not to do (subject) because…(male teacher V) is not great, so…I don't know what to do…I mean, you could get a different teacher, but he still teaches you a bit…he's always there…(girl C, Year 11)

The school itself, as an institution, provided some strong influences, particularly when seen as an entity, which had set up and run the GCSE course that the pupils were engaged upon. Within the context of the GCSE framework, what was

perceived as an acceptable or an unacceptable grade was a dilemma that many grappled with:

> …I wouldn't be happy with a C…I mean…I wouldn't really be happy with a B, but I'd be: 'all right, a B…I'll live with that'…a C, I'll probably be: 'oh, God, I got a C'…but like, A and A star…yeah I could live with that…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …I wouldn't like to get…any Cs...if I could get a set of Bs…or As and Bs I would be very happy…but it depends where I'd got a C…if I got a C in something like, RE, then I'd think: 'well, brilliant'…you know: 'I'm not bothered'…(boy C, Year 11)

and:

> …a D or a C…I refuse to get them…I refuse to get them…I will send them back…I will work myself into the ground, and I will not get a C…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

> …C…D…I think that E would be quite bad…(girl E, Year 11)

The low status accorded to a C grade was something that could be rationalised by some:

> …it's average…C is like the UK average, or something, for each GCSE…and if we got C, it means we are average…nobody wants to be average, everybody wants to be better than average…and, you know, we pay all this money…to go... to a good school, and we try really hard, and if we got a C, it would be like: 'that was a waste of time'…yeah…you want to be the best…really…probably sounds really arrogant…(boy B, Year 11)

There appeared to be something of a polarisation in perception about the onset of the GCSE exams themselves. On the one hand there was a good deal of reassurance and comfort taken from the fact that the school had a good track record of high passes in subjects. On the other hand, there was a real sense of unease about being the one who appeared on the lists with a low mark:

> …I mean, all the teachers are always going on about how smart we are, which is a bit disconcerting really…they are saying we are in the top whatever percentage in the country...which makes you feel a bit more relaxed, so you're like: 'oh well, fair enough'…but then you'll also think: 'well, what if I don't?'…(boy B, Year 11)

It was the balance between these two extremes that was hard to get right, and the imminence of the GCSE exams was perceived as more worrying than reassuring to some.

> …everyone is saying like: 'they're only twenty working weeks away'…or something…but…yeah...I still feel like…quite young…cos when you're in, like, (junior school) you think GCSEs are miles away, but now they're getting quite close…it's quite scary…(boy A, Year 11)

To many pupils though, there was little sense of real anxiety, rather a blithe optimism:

> …I'm not bothered by them…but I do realise that…if I do work hard I will get the grades that I should…it's that simple…it's just…GCSEs are a set of hoops that you have to jump through…if you jump through the right hoops then it's quite straightforward…I think the trouble with the GCSEs at the moment is that they…more examine exam technique rather than actual subject...and they sort of have set patterns and it's not really the subject that you are testing…(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> …most of the teachers are quite good, just sort of like…in a few subjects we are going beyond what we need to do so…especially French, Maths…we are, sort of, beyond it really…Latin as well…the Latin that we have been doing up to now has been harder than the GCSE course, so we do those and they just look really easy…and it's quite reassuring…(boy E, Year 11)

and:

> …I think I am…quite calm about them now…you know…they're not worrying any more…cos, you sort of, learn half of it…and especially last year when we did practice papers…and you sort of tried them and you think…'oh, look…if I'd have got this mark then I would have got this sort of mark…grade…whatever'…it made me relax a bit…not, you know…not so worried that I'd fail them all…I think the worst thing about GCSEs is failing, you know, doing all that work and thinking you'd failed them all…that would be horrible…(boy C, Year 11)

and:

> …when you sit and think about it, you have so much time to revise, and so much of it you know, and it's just…like my friend was saying: 'we're the above average part of the country, and therefore we can do this, it's not difficult'…because, in, like, in History and stuff, he says: 'you are my A star set, and you will get A stars'…and, you know: 'you will achieve that'…and it's…not…I don't think it's pressurising because, I think, most of the subjects that say it, they know that you genuinely can do it…in Maths she keeps saying:' I need you to all get your Bs'…and stuff, so it's not really

saying: 'you will get it'…it's sort of saying: 'you can get it'…I don't think many of them say: 'you're gonna get an A star'…because it means you don't work…but it's a kind of thing…I think I will work because I don't like to think I'm going to do badly in stuff…I think it's quite important for me to do well…umm…I really think I will work…and I'm going to try really hard…I mean…however much they drilled it into me, I'd still…want to work a lot as well…and I'd still kind of test myself against what they said as well…(girl D, Year 11)

There was a growing perception in the minds of some, about the differences between the motivations of various pupils; there was a distinction to be drawn already, between those for whom it mattered and those for whom it didn't:

> …I think for the really rich…this sounds really bad…for the really rich kids who are stupid…like…academically challenged…I think for the really rich kids like that then I think they don't really…give a shit…cos they don't really need to, I guess, but everyone else wants to do well…(girl B, Year 11)

In thinking ahead to what they saw happening to themselves in the future, the thoughts, of some, extended little further than GCSE exams:

> …as much to think that I've got to work hard to get the grades that I need to have a good job but not as in: 'I need to get this to have this job'…sort of, more general…(boy A, Year 11)

To some, the next main point of focus was not GCSE, so much as sixth form:

> …I don't know what I'm gonna wear yet…I'll just let mum decide, she knows best…just tell me what to wear every day…(boy A, Year 11)

and:

> …everyone says that fifth form is the best year…but I think…I think lower sixth will be the best year…cos I get to wear a suit…and I will get to be doing subjects that I've chosen…that I want to do…and I won't have to do the…the RE, and the French, and the Sciences…cos I always thought they looked really grown up and I wouldn't be able to cope with A levels, sort of thing, but…I look at the year above…and I remember when they were in fifth form as well…and now they don't look that much different and they look just the same age as us…and we all get on, so…I feel like I can do it…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

> …in January, I know I have to pick AS…and I'm thinking about next Christmas, and how I have to be revising for my modules and then I am really thinking about it…and then I'm being asked about university as well now…and, um…that's really difficult…my mum keeps saying to me: 'do you want to go to the careers department and look at universities?…and you're

like: 'I've got three more years…' it's scary to think about it now…(girl D, Year 11)

Thoughts about the world beyond school were, for some, still rather vague, although there were growing perceptions that university was now almost a reality:

…I went on a hockey course to Durham to see, like...you saw, like, the university…I definitely want to go to university and stuff… (boy A, Year 11)

and:

…sort of university…and after that is quite vague…rather than anything specific…so…I have pretty much decided that…A levels and university will be, sort of, Science or Maths…and that's something that I would like to do afterwards, but then, if I don't, I would still do the Science/Maths thing…(boy E, Year 11)

and:

…university…either London, cos I went down…it's definitely a (me) place…or…Manchester…or…I don't know, a big city…I wouldn't go to…nowhere around here…I want to move away…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

…I want to do, maybe English or History…and I'm thinking…one of the universities in London, cos I'd quite like to go in London…I don't want to be local, cos that's too close to home, and my parents would still let me live with them…and like, my brother's friends, some of them live with their parents and they're…twenty four, five now and they still live with their parents cos they never…kind of… got the independence and got away…so they don't know how…(girl D, Year 11)

University was not universally acknowledged as being an automatic next step:

…I'd like to do an apprenticeship…I don't want to go to university…(boy C, Year 11)

The prospects for employment and the range of possible career paths available were now perceived in many different ways and with as much variety as before. The school's careers department profiling exercise had opened up possibilities that had, in some cases, not been hitherto considered:

…it said I was going to be a barrister…teacher…lecturer…social worker…actor…it gave me like 'broadcaster' and I'm still not really sure what that is, like, TV broadcaster…that seemed quite interesting, it just said: 'working with people' and I thought: 'yeah, well, I'd always wanted to work with people', so its picked up on that, but I think they just got that from our little tick boxes…but I've never thought of teacher, and everyone I've

told has said: 'oh, yeah, you'd make quite a good teacher'...but then my best friend said that I don't explain things very well...(girl C, Year 11)

The perception of the world of work was not, for some, a glamorous one, but more realistic:

...getting a job...it's not far away...(it is) scary actually...cos then you have to work for a living, which could be worse than school...if you find something that you don't want to do...or you're in a position where you don't actually like what you are doing, but you can't get out of it...that would be horrible...I won't be able to do that...I have to do something which I like, otherwise...I'd die...(boy C, Year 11)

Making money was not, for everyone, a primary career aim:

...as long as I can live comfortably...so long as I'm not, like, poor...just want to do a normal job and be a normal person...(boy C, Year 11)

The notion of what sort of career was suitable was still subject to change. For some, these changes were perhaps influenced by superficial perceptions:

...I want to be in advertising...or PR...(because) I don't know...it's something that I would enjoy doing...like, I could...I can see myself doing it, and I'd get to know lots of people...it's more about that, I want to be a kind of –this sounds so sad- I just want to be a kind of person that knows loads of people...I'm good with people...usually...(girl B, Year 11)

Some pupils were still as unsure about what lay ahead as they had always been:

...get rich...don't really know...but the future...I don't really know...like some people think they know what they want to do for a job, and I think, no, I don't think I do...I think...just try and keep my options open...(boy A, Year 11)

For some pupils though, the early thoughts about a particular career had now become more focussed:

...I was saying that I wanted to be a barrister since I was about eight...(but) ...it wavers a bit in the sense that I'm going to be a politician... also...yeah...a lawyer then a politician...how popular...(boy D, Year 11)

and:

...I sort of see when I leave school as a big, like...I sort of have one aim, and that is to be a drummer....cos I like...the wind band stuff, and I thought I might like drumming for musicals...ever since I've seen 'The Lion King'...those bongo players...they were like, so good to listen to...I'd also like to be in a band...but...I think it's quite hard to get your band quite big...cos...I've got a band at the moment, but...we're never all practicing at

> the same time…and it's…and some people have quit, now, so…and we don't really like the same kind of music, so it's not the best band to be in, so…I just wanted to be in a band I suppose…(girl C, Year 11)

and:

> …journalism, I think…I remember wanting to do marine biology…but like, now…I think, I'm kind of focusing more on, I really did want to do journalism and I think I could be quite good at it…and it really interests me as well…(girl D, Year 11)

and;

> …I think…whatever I want to do, I want to be, like, a sports journalist, or like a sports psychologist…or like, a sports something else…(girl E, Year 11)

In pursuit of their specific career aims, some pupils now had a clear perception that everything could be brought successfully to fruition by engaging in careful strategic planning:

> …I'd like to be an actor, first and foremost, but because that's unsure, you know, you can be without work for a long time, er…I'd like to go to Loughborough and get a medical degree, so I can go, be a doctor, and study drama somewhere else…they do a drama course at Loughborough, which means I can act, but if that doesn't work out, I can do medicine…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …I've been thinking about doing French at university though…not particularly because…of any reason apart from that it will be quite easy to get into a good university to do French because no one is doing French now…because state schools can drop it, and they have done…so there's far less applicants doing French, far less people doing it…far less good people doing it… I'd rather…to be honest…do History or Law…although I do enjoy French, I really do like it…it's not as if I would chose to do Physics, I would never do that…or Maths, or even English…(History is) very, very hard to get into it…it's a lot more competitive and you have to be really, really good…you have to be exceedingly good, and it's just, like…if you get a degree from Oxford or Cambridge, it's the fact that you've got a degree from there that matters…I mean…I might even switch courses once I am already there; I might say: 'French isn't working out, can I do Law?'…just casually…but …er…I really do…I think that's the first major…I've got it all planned out…ten A stars at GCSE…that's what I want first…and then keep it up with the rowing and the music, cos that'll look good on the CV…hopefully I should have grade 8 piano and viola by then…a couple of singing grades…that'll all add up…four As at AS…three As at A level…all that coming together…go to Oxbridge…and once you're at Oxbridge…er, it'll all…it'll all come into place and everything…because Oxbridge is just, like…I just have to…the first step is getting to Oxbridge…(boy D, Year 11)

At this stage in their lives, the pupils in the research group were reaching the end of the compulsory part of their education. Post-sixteen, education becomes optional, and consideration can be given to other available opportunities. Inside this independent institution, perceptions were varied about the next step, and it was evident that, even among those considered fans of the system, discussions had taken place about alternative sixth form options:

> …my cousin…she's at a college, and I was thinking it would be nice to do different courses and stuff and she always seemed to really enjoy it…and with things like…(local alternative independent school)…it would just be a change of environment…(girl D, Year 11)

Most were keen to stay where they were, even though they had looked at other places, and some were less keen to remain, but had bowed to familial pressure:

> …my best friend…she's going to (local sixth form college)...that's what I wanted to do as well…or I was going to go to (local alternative independent school)…but I changed my mind about that as well…well…half…I changed my mind…I wasn't sure if I did want to leave or I didn't want to leave, and my parents were like: 'no, no, it'd be better if you stayed there'…and I wasn't sure about (local alternative independent school), because it's more expensive…(boy C, Year 11)

and:

> …I don't think our sixth form here is better…maybe…actually, saying that…like, levels of discipline and stuff are better, so that can kind of help it means you can do better cos quite a lot less is tolerated…so I think that could make it a bit better…but I do think other sixth form places are just as good…like …(local alternative state school)…sixth form is supposed to be really good…I don't know if people in sixth form here necessarily actually want to do sixth form…it's more like they have to…cos of family, and their family has the money or whatever…so you have to do well…(girl B, Year 11)

and:

> …I suppose if you went somewhere else it would feel different, but here it just feels like school…the fact that you wear suits separates it a bit but you'd still feel like…I reckon you'd feel more grown up if you went to an outside place, and it sort of prepares you a little bit more for university, or somewhere, wherever you are going to go…(girl C, Year 11)

and:

> …I said to my mum: 'can I go and look round (local sixth form college), and look round (local alternative independent school), and things'…and she just

said to me: 'why, you are a (research school) girl, and I like you being a (research school) girl'…she's promised to buy me lots of nice suits…to kind of…pay me back…it's the kind of thing you think about when you're at home and when you're looking at these schools and when you're walking round them, but then you realise, I've got, like, friends here, and I can do my courses here and still be happy with them…and I don't know if it would be a good thing or a bad thing to leave this kind of environment, where you're already settled and you know what you're doing and you're not worried about it…(girl D, Year 11)

For some pupils, ultimately, it was a case of 'better the devil you know':

> …at (senior school), you, like, know all the staff, you know all the people…you've got your friends…you've worked your way…you've worked hard to get where you are and it would be stupid then go somewhere else…you'd have to get to know new people, and new staff…and new campus, and you'd have to, er, earn what you get rather than having a reputation almost…because, you know…I would go into sixth form having people know me as: 'H… the guy who… whatever' rather than, if I go somewhere else and: 'he's that new guy who's not done anything yet'…so I think it would be a waste of time to move off…(boy B, Year 11)

The perceived benefits of attendance at this particular independent school were varied, but were mostly positive:

> …I think it is just quite different…there is more…and there is more volume of it…more volume of sort of work and what you can do…and I think the sport is quite a lot different cos…like…you go to rugby…things…outside of school and you sort of see they have training once a week and they're not that good…whereas we have it…like…five times a week and it's…yeah there's quite a lot of differences…and I think it might prepare you for life…better in some ways but also…other ways you'll be a bit…sort of…not really know about it cos you haven't been, sort of, let out into the gang warfare…(boy A, Year 11)

and:

> …probably two major things…fitness…cos we play a lot of sport, I mean we have Wednesdays and Saturday afternoons devoted to it…three things actually…we have Saturday school, which some people say: 'oh what a waste of time'…but it means that we get more periods in every week, so we can, sort of, learn more…and thirdly, staff…here, if we, like, do badly, like the staff care, they actually want you to do well, and I think that's really important, cos, if the staff don't want you to do well…why should you want you to do well…it's nice that somebody, sort of, has faith in you…and yeah…there's this respect thing as well…yeah, if everybody respects each other and respects, you know, proper teachers as persons…it's just…yeah…all that really…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …I think one thing where private schools are leaps ahead of state school is…with the whole…dealing with people and life thing…it's confidence…the self drive…the ability to deal with people…the social skills…and the opportunities…I couldn't do rowing at state school…I wouldn't be able to do the drama that I've done…well I would, but not to such an extent…and the music and all that sort of thing…(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> …I think…academically there's probably…not that much difference in many ways, but, it's, sort of, all the other things that you do…it's all the ways that you've got the Houses and you have the competitions there…and then the sport thing…there's just so many other things going on…drama things…stuff like that…(boy E, Year 11)

and:

> …you get a better…option for life…you get better options…you get more varied…you get more opportunities….I mean in another school, in one day, you couldn't do street dance, aerobics, gym, hockey…netball…you couldn't do that in one day, but we can here…so I don't think you would be able to do that in another school…and more work…(girl A, Year 11)

and:

> …better education, I think…like, classes are smaller, so…you get, kind of like, more attention…I guess…and more people are here to work…you know, quite a lot more people want to do well, so I think that comes across and means that you do quite a lot better…(girl B, Year 11)

and:

> …I think you get a lot of relationships, like, with the teachers…it's not just…come in and you get taught…kind of…you do talk to them and they do get to know you…and…it's a lot more friendly environment as well…it's kind of: 'we are not a school, we are a community', kind of thing…we are at school so much of our year and everything…six days a week and until five-thirty two night a week…and it's kind of…it does become your home from home, almost…you do feel like…really…almost too comfortable…(girl D, Year 11)

although not everybody was entirely worldly, in their perceptions of schooling elsewhere:

> …but I think some state schools…like… are quite good and some are absolute rubbish…so…but I still think I probably hold a wrong opinion that… we're superior to them…(boy A, Year 11)

and:

> …well, to me it appears…that staff in state schools don't give a toss how well the pupils do, as long as they get in, get out, get a couple of GCSEs…(boy B, Year 11)

and:

> …I wouldn't be able to…even things like school trips…you wouldn't be able to do (outdoor activity centre holiday) now at a state school because of Health and Safety…(boy D, Year 11)

a more balanced view seemed to be held by girls:

> …it's a really good environment, I think…I don't know, maybe they have that in state schools…I just haven't ever been to one…(girl D, Year 11)

and:

> …I think in state schools, people who want to work probably do just as well…I think if you are motivated, no matter where you are, you will do well, but I think here it is probably easier because you, kind of, have to…you don't get an option…but I think in a state school you can do crap…mind you, here you can do quite crap, but more people do better…(girl B, Year 11)

Anecdotal evidence was perceived as providing confirmation of the obvious difference between state schools and independent schools; sometimes by dint of personal knowledge:

> …my mum says that she recognises it with…like…her kids when they go into an interview or whatever, and the person goes to shake their hand and they sort of recoil, whereas like, I dunno…we are like: 'hi there, it's nice to meet you'…(boy D, Year 11)

and:

> …I've got this friend who went for a job interview…and…his friend had…did the same thing, but he…went to another school…he went to (alternative independent school)…and he went here…he got the job, because he went here…they told him that, because they think (research school) is better than (alternative independent school)…(girl A, Year 11)

to some, the benefits were perceived as being useful in making up for personal shortcomings, like a lack of self-motivation:

> …I think if I'd stayed at a state school…I wouldn't have got any work done…cos I'm not a very driven person…I think here, they make you work, which is good…which I think I need…(boy C, Year 11)

for others there was the promise of permanence and stability:

> …cos I haven't moved around I've got a lot more friends here…cos in the army we moved around a lot, so I have…solid friends….that's why I came all the way here…(girl E, Year 11)

There was a perception that, in certain circumstances, the independent option could be much worse:

> …a mediocre private school (is) worse than a mediocre state school, in the sense that you don't get any advantages but you get all the disadvantages…(boy D, Year 11)

Although this was not the case for everyone; the self-perception was not all self-deprecation, and for some, the perception of the divide between what they had and what was 'out there' was rather wider; they felt:

> …a bit...almost Godly…don't record that bit…(boy A, Year 11)

Chapter 9

Longitudinal Analysis

Introduction

This chapter looks at the longitudinal picture emerging from the research. Although each discrete year has yielded data that tells a particular story, there is also a general overall picture of these pupils' perceptions to be looked at, as well as a story about development and change, between the end of Year 7 and the beginning of Year 11. As the research was completed after the research group had sat their GCSE exams, it was considered useful to add the examination data to the general picture, along with a comparison of contemporary national results. After a summary of the GCSE results, the chapter looks at data from the questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire data provided two elements; a raft of quantitative data that gave not only a general overview of pupils' perceptions of their educational experience, but also a more detailed picture of the journey through school and the shifts and changes that occurred over time. The interview data also provided a measure of the pupils' passage through school, but added a more qualitative and processual slant on the changes and influences that impacted upon pupils' perceptions, as well as offering insights into why perceptions changed over time.

The GCSE exams

Although the research data collection had concluded before these pupils sat their GCSEs, it was considered worth noting the performance of the year group in the exams, which took place only a few months after the final interviews were concluded, in the summer of 2007. Comparable statistics were available for the research year group, from the school's own figures, and for a national comparison, from the Joint Council for Qualifications (2007). The data was not exhaustive, but dealt with school subjects common to both the research school and the total school population in the UK. In fig. 13, the data reflects the percentage of each population who sat an exam for each subject. The school population, for these subjects, was 113 pupils, and the national population, for the same subjects, was 4,738,344 pupils. The listing for Latin and Classics, which were taken separately in the research school, were amalgamated into a single heading (Classical Subjects) to match the national picture. The distribution of grades (A* to U) within each

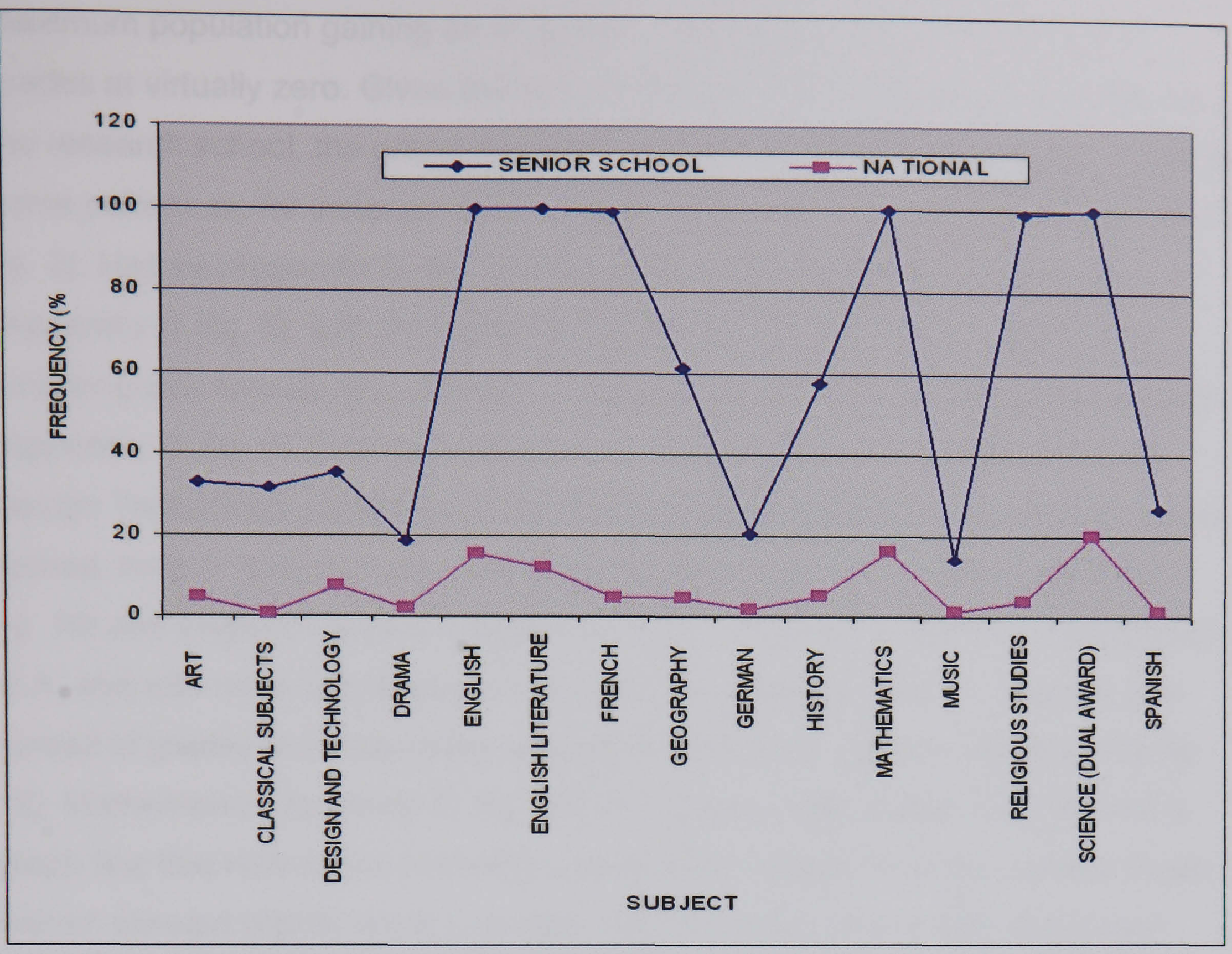

Fig. 13 GCSEs: national/local entry comparison

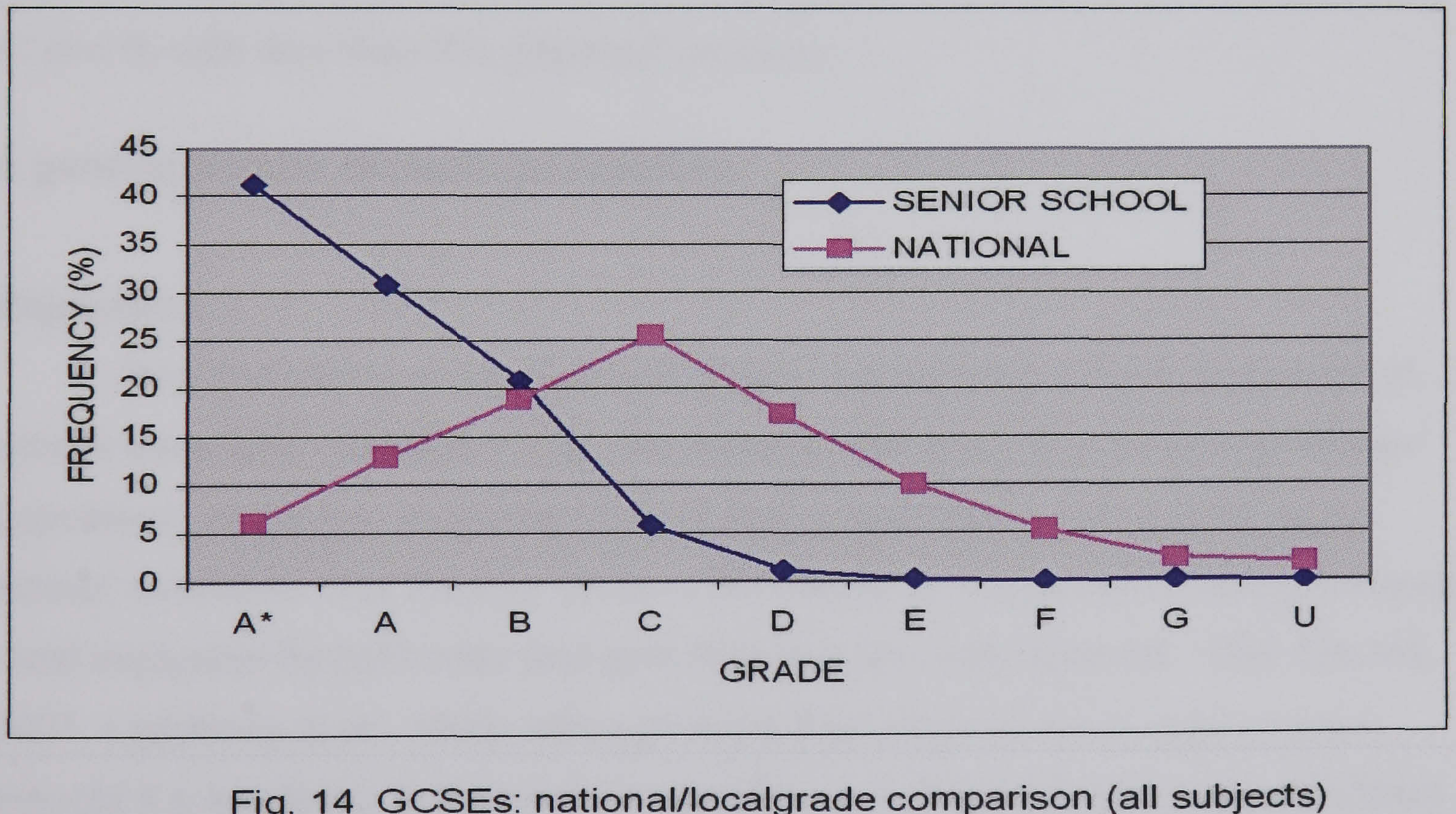

Fig. 14 GCSEs: national/localgrade comparison (all subjects)

population is shown at fig. 14; this data was averaged over all the subjects, for each group. It is evident from the graph that the distribution for the national figure followed a bell-curve pattern, maximising at a Grade C, whilst the research school, arguably reflecting a trend typical of independent schools (ISC, 2007) showed the

maximum population gaining an A* grade, and tapering off towards D and E grades at virtually zero. Given the general picture, it would be expected that, for the research school, the grade distribution within discrete subjects would follow the same pattern as, for instance, in Art (Appendix D, Fig. 1), Geography (Appendix D, fig. 2), History (Appendix D, fig. 3), Music (Appendix D, fig. 4) and Spanish (Appendix D, fig. 5), with the higher proportion gaining A* grades, and with a smaller grade spread, from A* to C. In some subjects, such as Classical Subjects (Appendix D, fig. 6), German (Appendix D, fig. 7), Drama (Appendix D, fig.8), Design Technology (Appendix D, fig. 9) the graphs reflected a very narrow grade spread, from A* to C, but with a peak grade at A. Both the English (Appendix D, fig. 10) and English Literature (Appendix D, fig. 11) graphs reflected peak grades at A, and with more candidates achieving A and B grades than A* grades. The spread of grades also was wider, ranging from A* to D. French (Appendix D, fig. 12), Mathematics (Appendix D, fig. 13) and Science (Appendix D, fig.14) had a graph line that reflects the research school trend, except for a blip halfway down; French showed slightly more C grades than B grades, and in both Maths and Science the A and B grades were identical in number. Religious Education (Appendix D, fig. 15) reflected the more typical curve; more dominant grades at A*, A, and B, with less than 5% gaining C or lower.

A general picture of pupil perceptions

Enjoyment

Over the period of the research, pupils' perceptions of their enjoyment of school were fairly consistent. Fig. 15a reflects what girls, as a proportion of their population, and boys, as a proportion of their population, enjoyed most about school, averaged over the four years of the research. Friendships were considered most enjoyable by both boys and girls (this is in line with Lambert, 1968; Bourke, 2001; Lightbody et al., 1996) although more than twice as many girls as boys thought it a key factor in their enjoyment of school. Although sport was significant to about a third more boys than girls, again, about twice as many girls as boys saw breaks and socialising as a key factor. The significance of teachers and lessons were perceived as being very low in the enjoyment stakes.

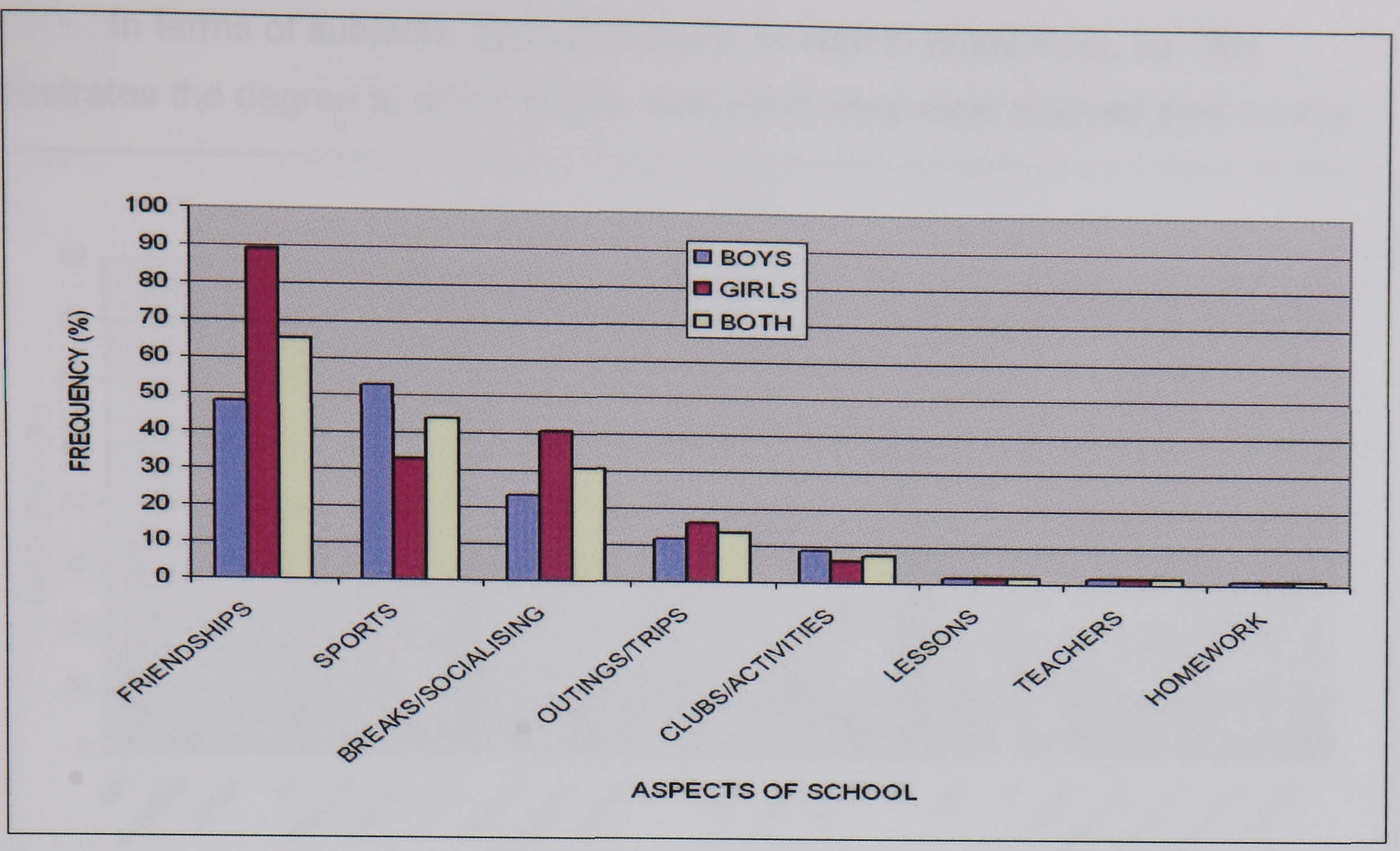

Fig. 15a Pupil perceptions of what they most enjoyed about school.

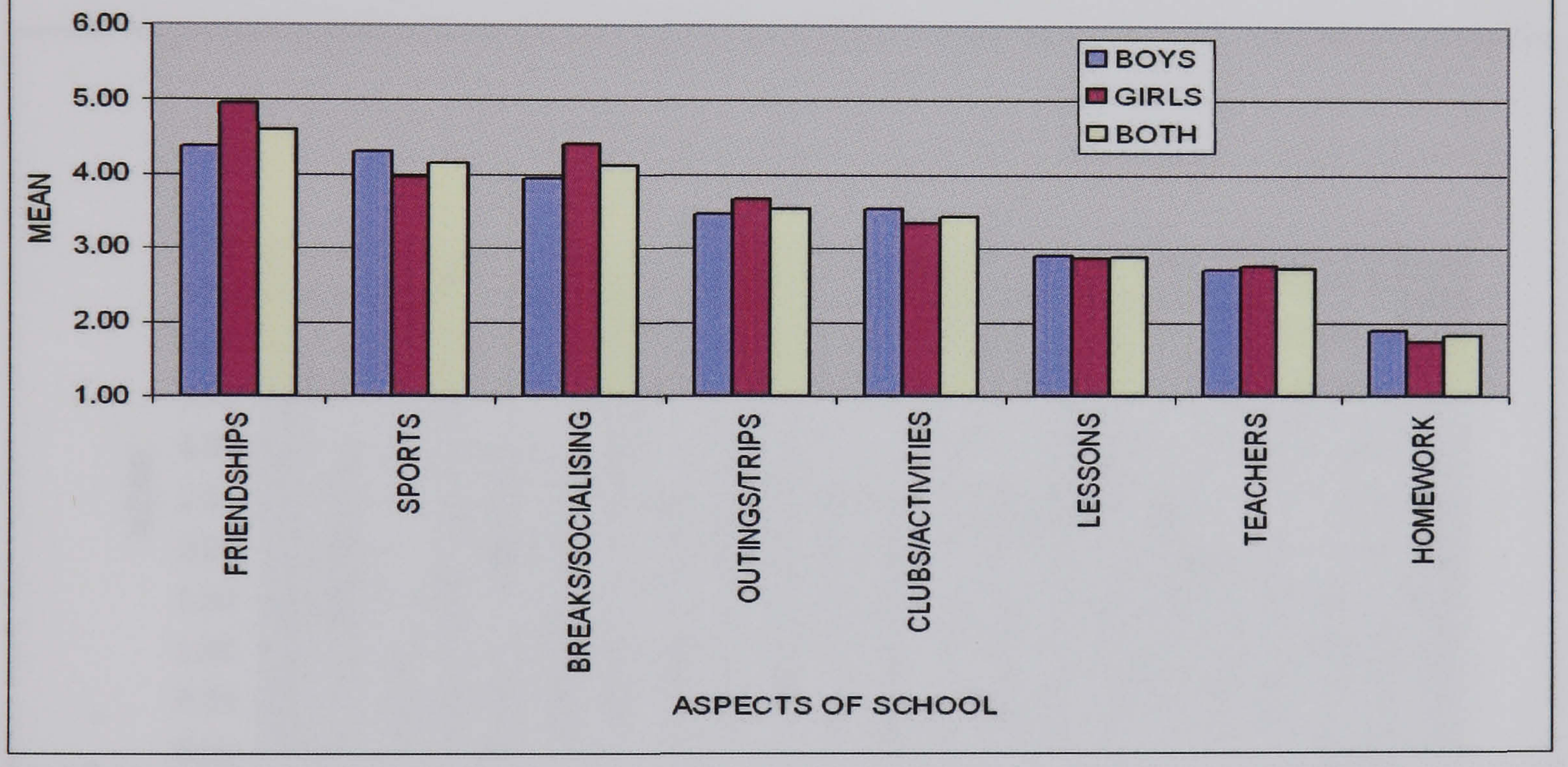

Fig. 15b Pupil perceptions of what they generally enjoyed about school.

Fig. 15b reflects the same perceptions of enjoyment of school, but has used the mean data derived from the five Likert -type responses used in the question. Again, the graph reflects the average over the four years of the research. The hierarchy of activities is broadly the same as depicted in fig. 15a, with girls expressing more affinity with social and friendship issues than boys, who seemed more attuned to sports and clubs than did girls (Bourke, 2001).

In terms of subjects, and what pupils tended to enjoy most, fig. 16a illustrates the degree to which pupils claimed to have most enjoyed their school

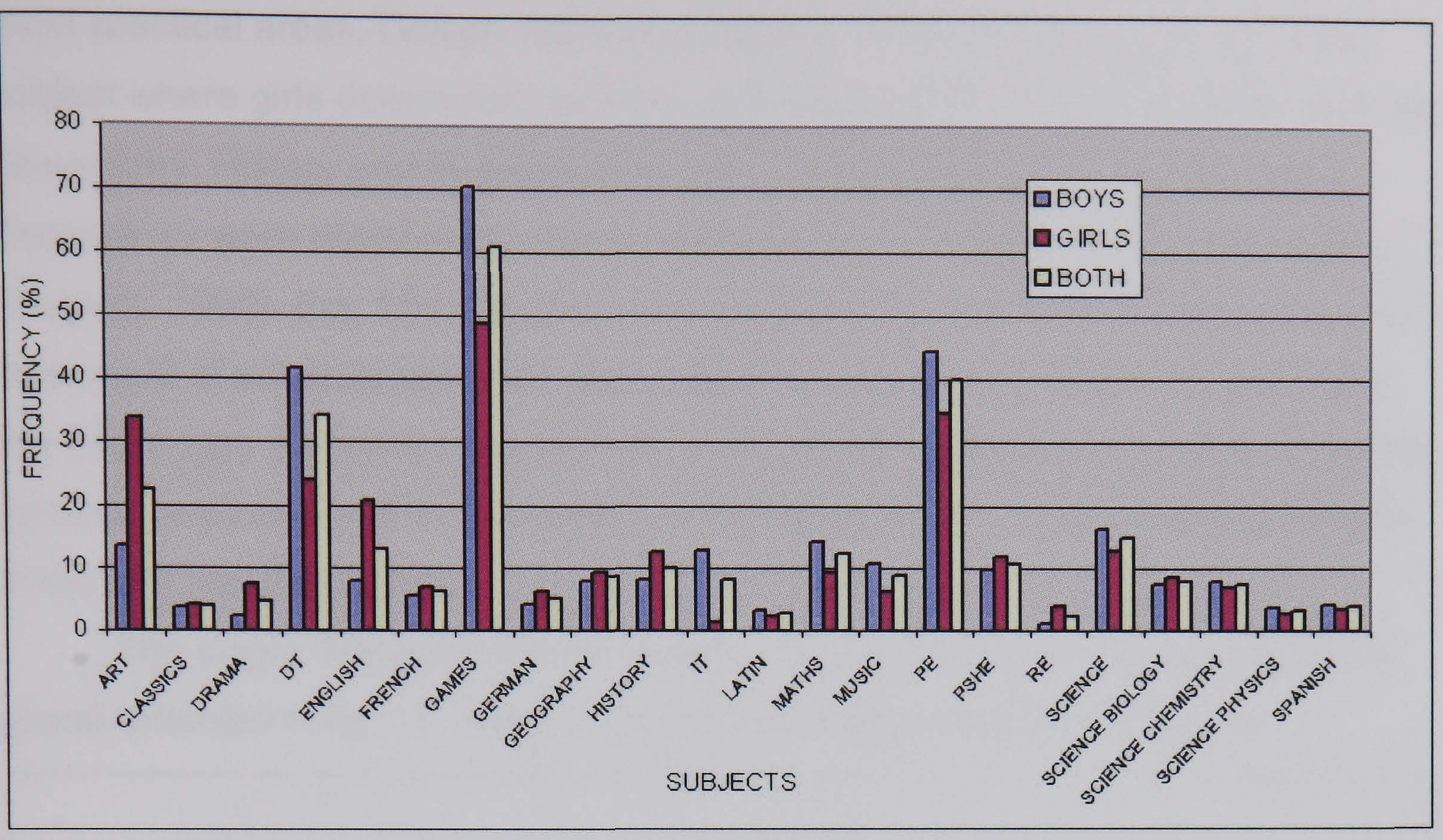

Fig. 16a School subjects most enjoyed by pupils.

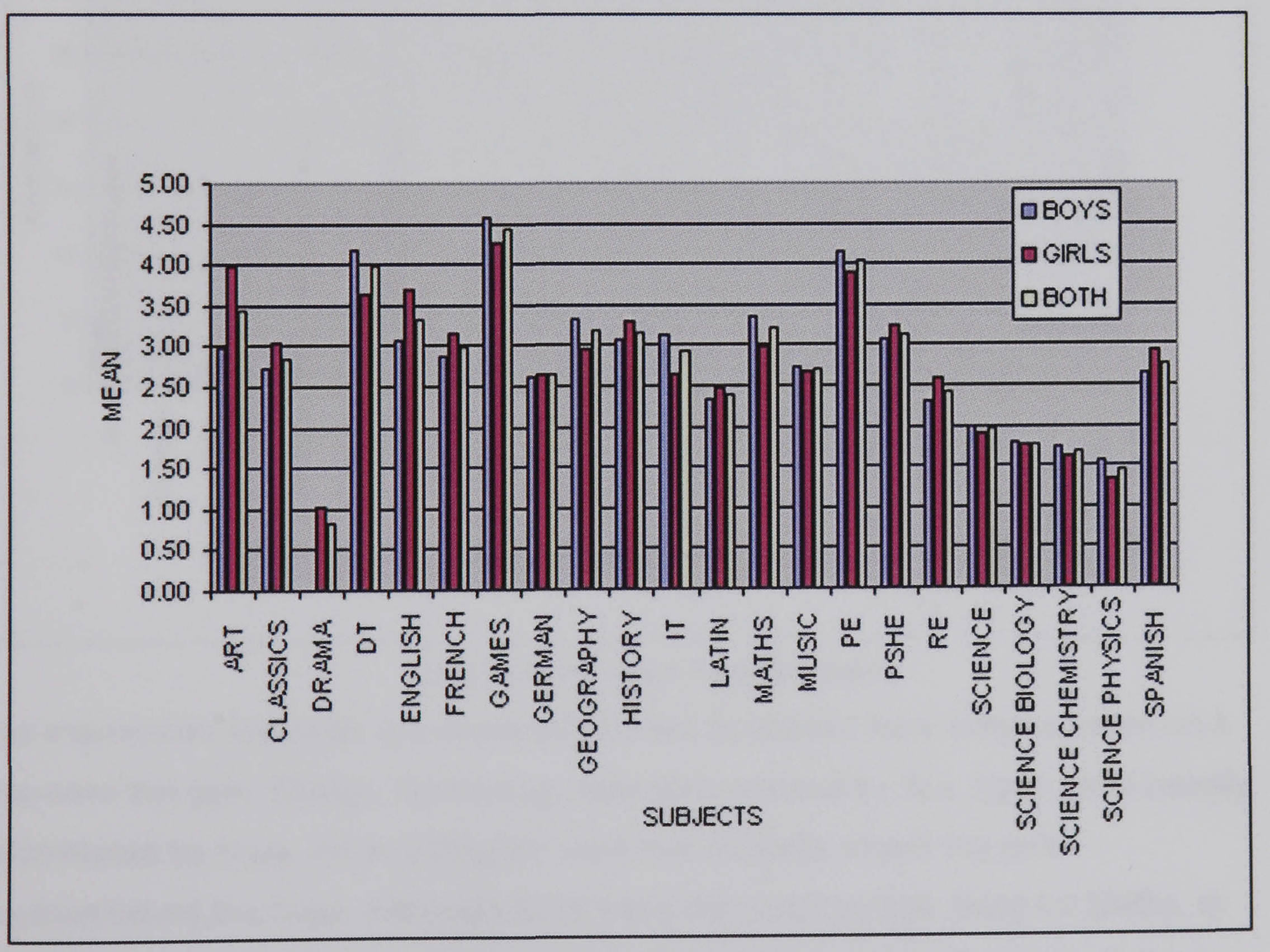

Fig. 16b Pupils' general enjoyment of school subjects.

subjects. It is clear that the practical subjects were most enjoyed (this is in line with

Nishimura et al., 2003; Colley and Comber, 2003) and principally Games and Physical Education, and in both cases, more by boys than by girls. Although, in the other practical areas, Design Technology was most enjoyed by boys, Art was a subject where girls dominated, as were subjects such as English, Drama, German, Geography, History and Religious Education. Maths, Science and Information Technology were dominated by boys (Francis, 2000; Dryler, 1999; Tinklin, 2000; Elsworth, 1999). Fig. 16b reflects a general picture of the mean reading of pupils' enjoyment of subjects over four years. Again, it is taken from the average of the five Likert-type responses demanded by the question. Here can be seen again the dominance by boys, of the technical and sports subjects, and dominance by girls of the arts and languages.

The single, favourite subject elected by pupils is (as an average over four years) reflected in fig. 17. Here it can be seen that Games has stood out

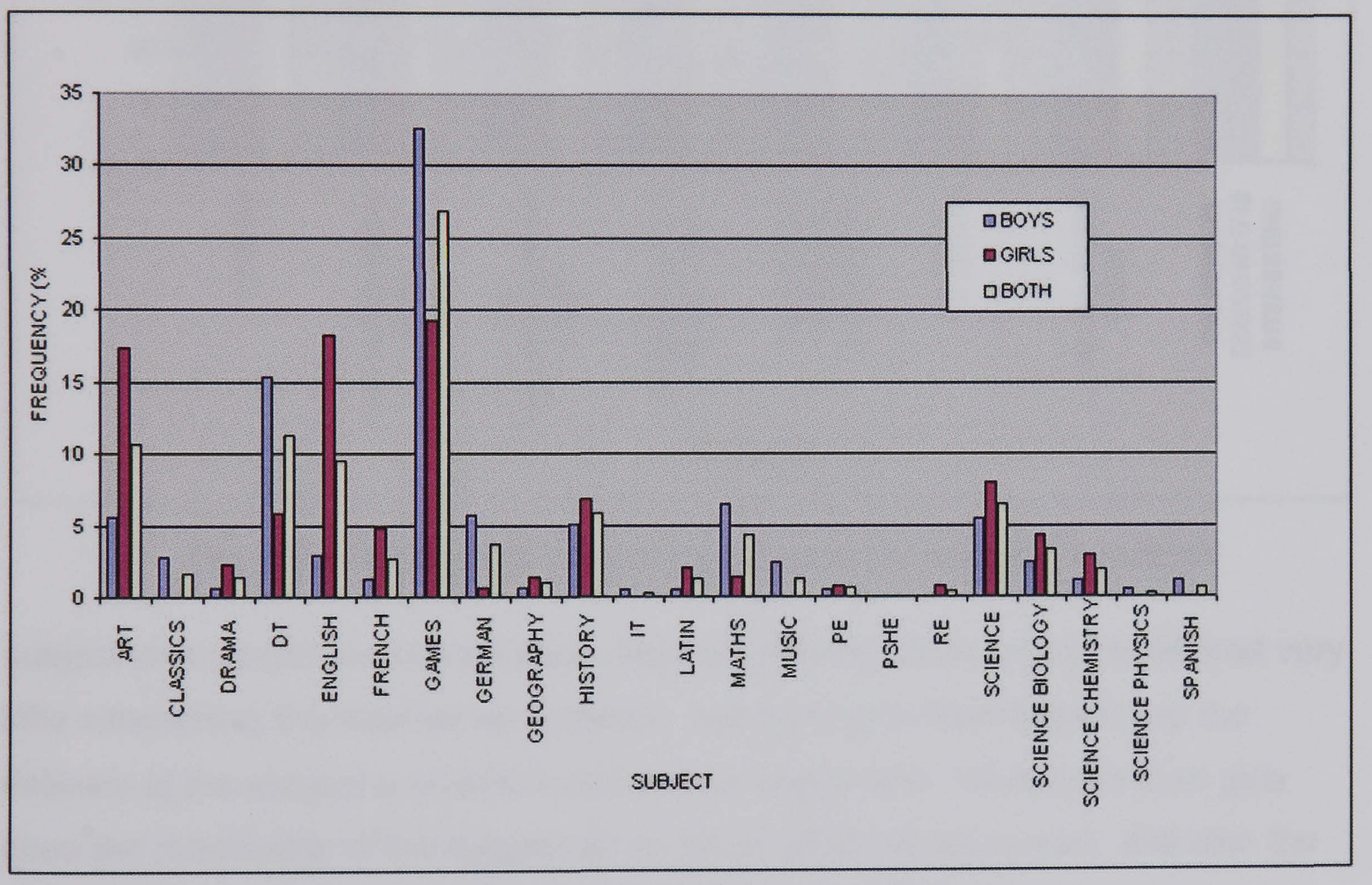

Fig. 17 Pupils' single, favourite subject.

as a dominant favourite, but especially for the boys who were twice as keen on it as were the girls. Design Technology was also a favourite, but, again, was heavily dominated by boys. Art and English were two subjects where the girls outnumbered the boys. Although Boys were dominant in their liking for Maths, in Science, there were more girls than boys electing it as a clear favourite. It can be seen in the split sciences that this female dominance was so in Biology and Chemistry, but not in Physics.

In seeking a reason why a favourite subject existed, pupils rated given reasons against a five-point Likert scale. Fig. 18a reflects the average reading over the four years for the most compelling reasons for enjoying a subject. For most pupils the key reasons for enjoying a subject seemed to be centred on the teacher; either as a person teaching the subject, or because of the way the

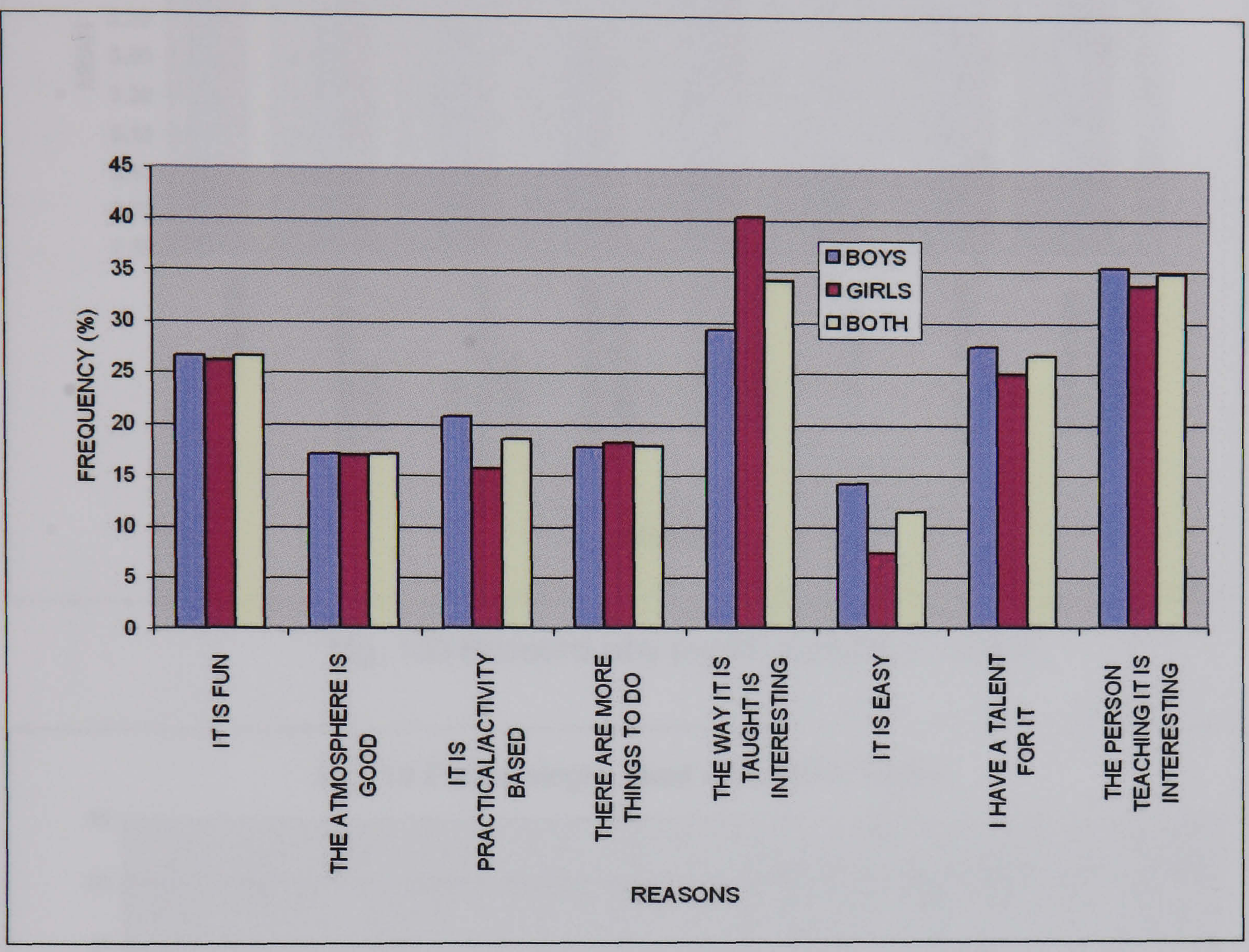

Fig. 18a Pupils' most compelling reasons for enjoying a subject.

subject was taught. As can be seen, feelings between boys and girls differed very little concerning the teacher as a person, but more girls than boys found the delivery of the subject a crucial factor in their enjoyment. More boys than girls cited the practicality of the subject as an issue affecting enjoyment, and also the perceived ease of the subject. Both boys and girls saw the fun element of a subject as equally significant in their enjoyment of it. As this data was also drawn from a question answered against a five-point Likert scale, the mean values, taken over four years, are reflected in fig. 18b. There is little deviation from fig. 18a, except that slightly more girls than boys elected to see the teacher as significant, in addition to citing the fun element and the good atmosphere as being slightly more

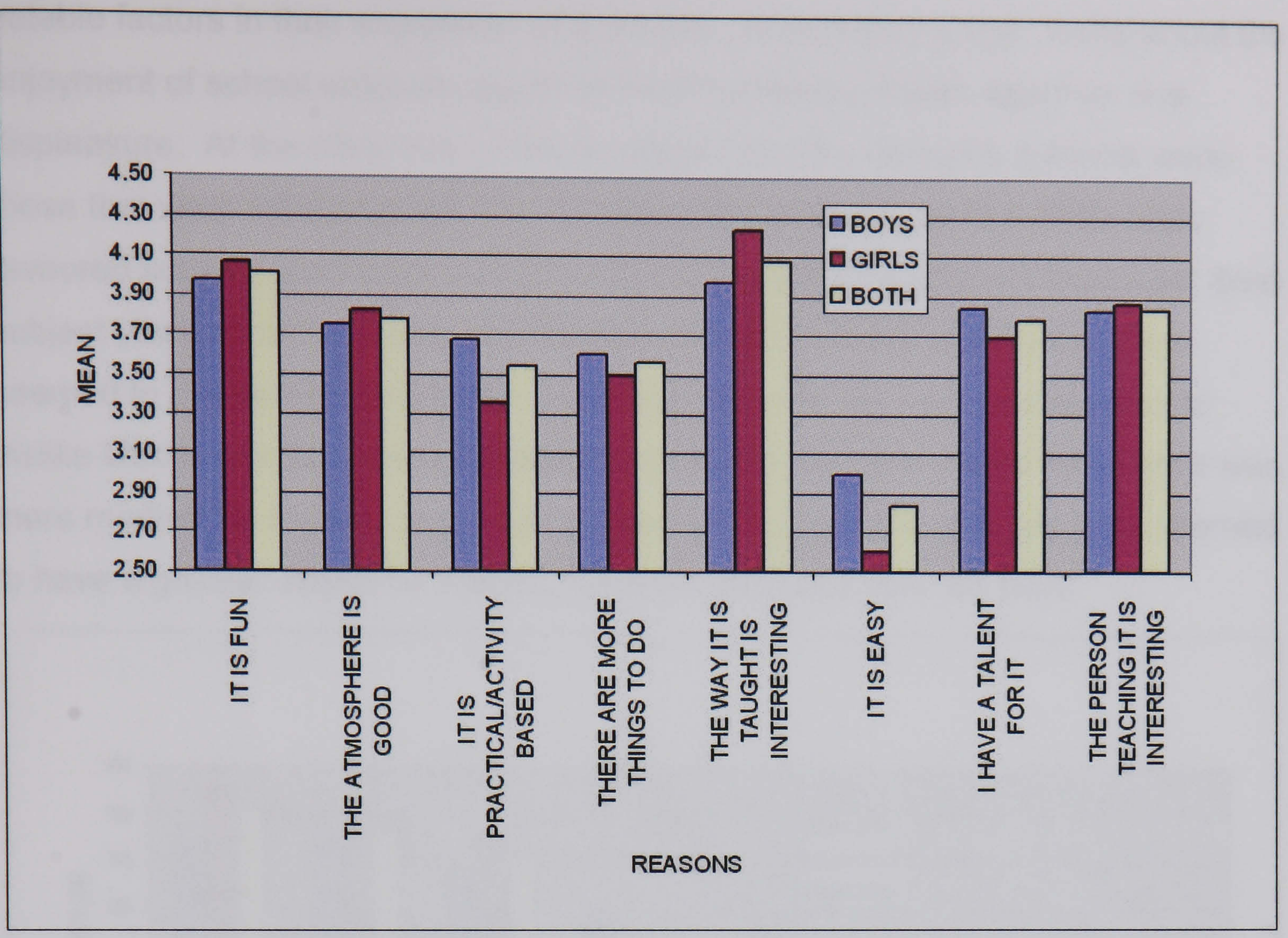

Fig. 18b Reasons why pupils' enjoyed a subject.

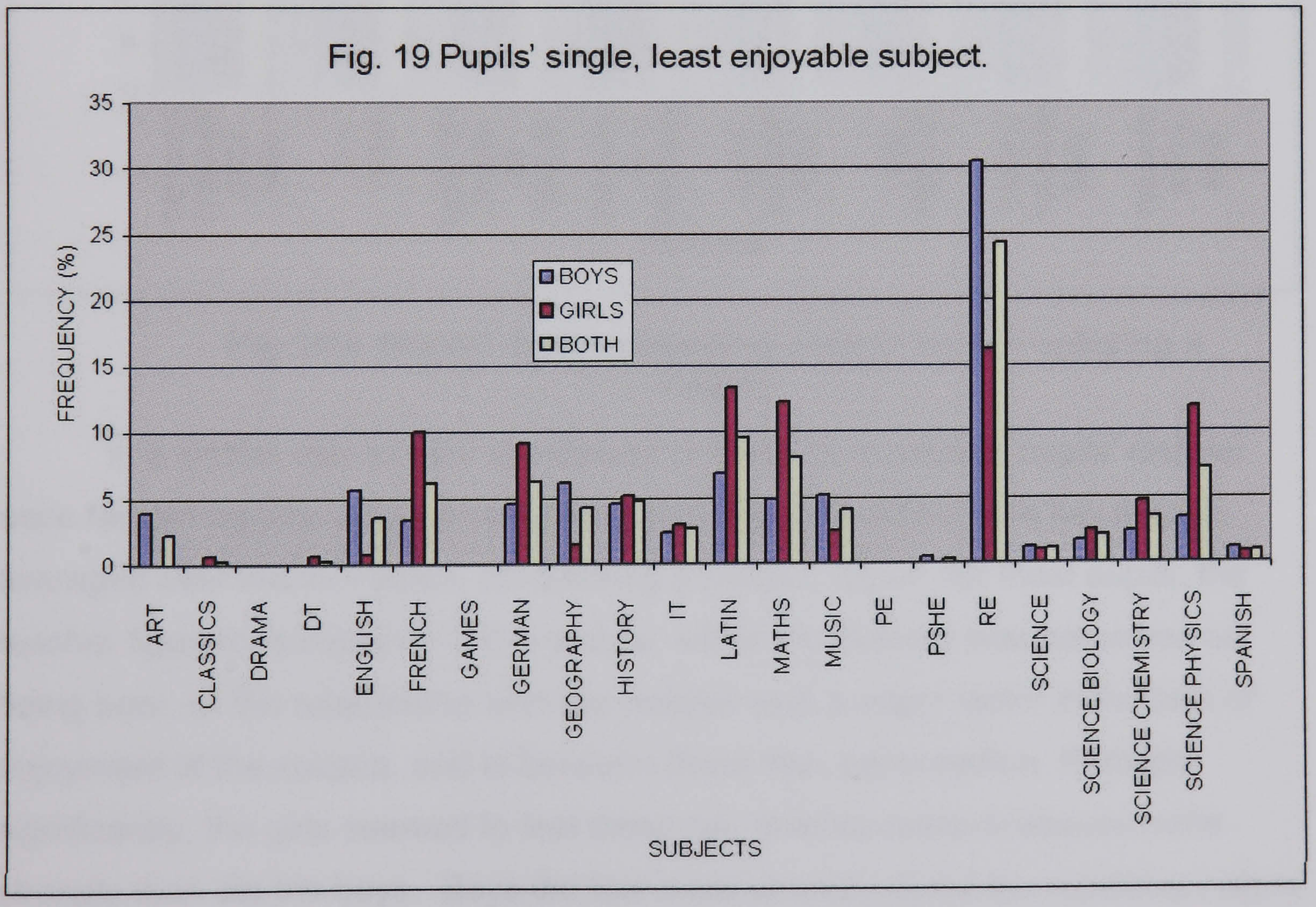

Fig. 19 Pupils' single, least enjoyable subject.

notable factors in their enjoyment of a subject. In expressing their views about the enjoyment of school subjects, pupils showed extremes of both approval and displeasure. At the other end of the spectrum from the favourite subjects were those that were least enjoyed. Fig. 19 shows the average opinion of the least favoured subject. Both boys and girls cited Religious Education as their least liked subject (Galton, 2000; Colley and Comber, 2003). Perhaps predictably, boys seemed to dislike Art and English more than the girls did, and girls seemed to dislike Maths and Science more than the boys did; the girls dislike for science was more marked for Physics and least marked for Biology. Interestingly, girls seemed to have a greater dislike for French, German and Latin than did boys.

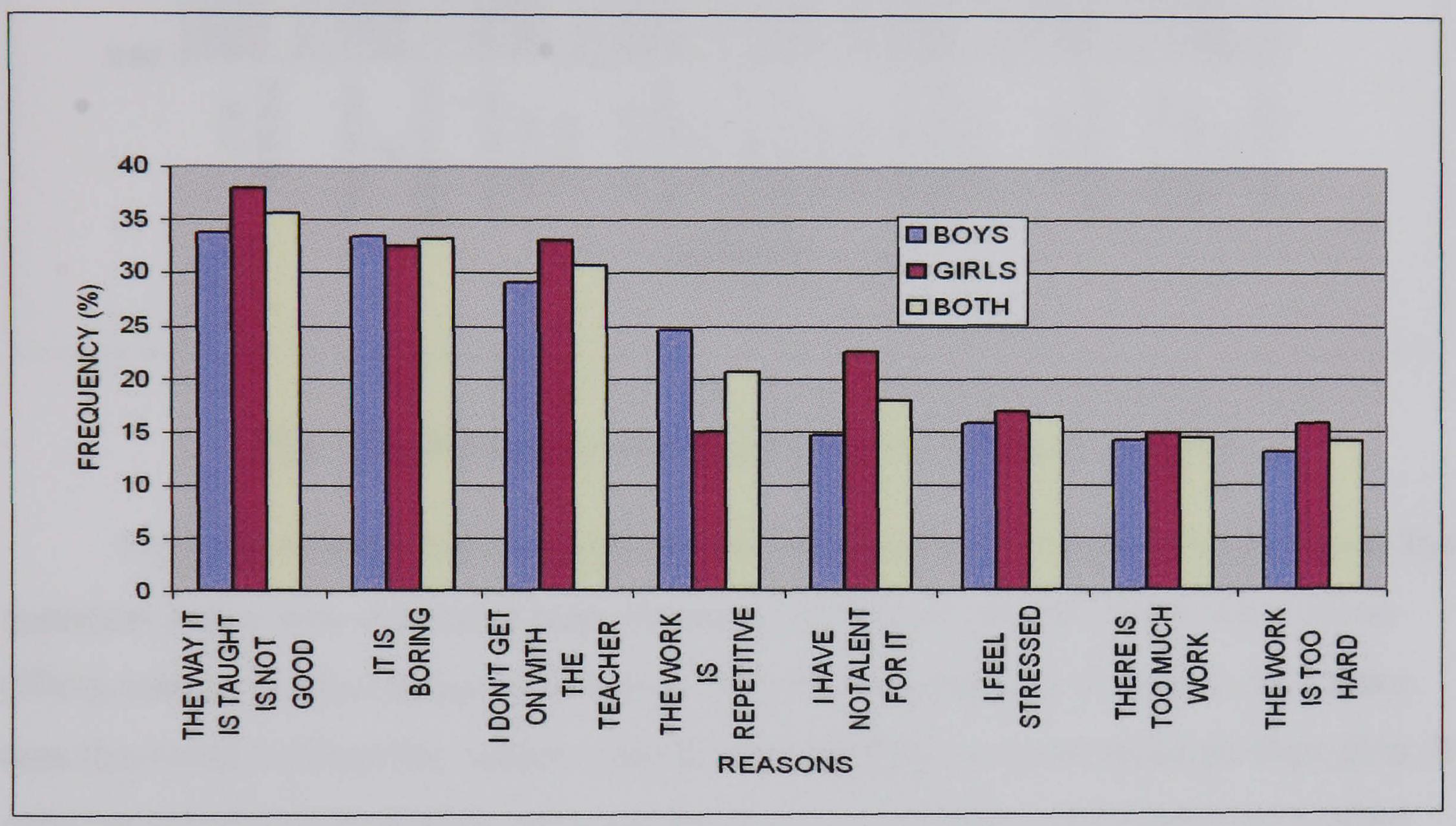

Fig. 20a Pupils' most compelling reason for not enjoying a subject.

In a similar way to their expression of liking for a subject, pupils' dislikes were ranged against a five-point Likert scale. Fig. 20a reflects the key reason, averaged over the four years, for disliking a subject. Again, for most pupils, the teacher figured prominently in the picture; either the delivery was perceived as being poor, or the relationship with the teacher was a major factor in the lack of enjoyment of the subject, and in between these two, sat boredom. Perhaps significantly, the girls seemed to feel these two teacher-related reasons more strongly than did the boys. Boys did feel more strongly about the repetitive nature of the work being a contributory factor than did the girls, and the girls were perhaps more willing to apportion blame on their own lack of talent as a contributory factor than were the boys. Interestingly, neither boys nor girls saw

either the amount of work, or the difficulty of the work, as a key reason for not enjoying the subject.

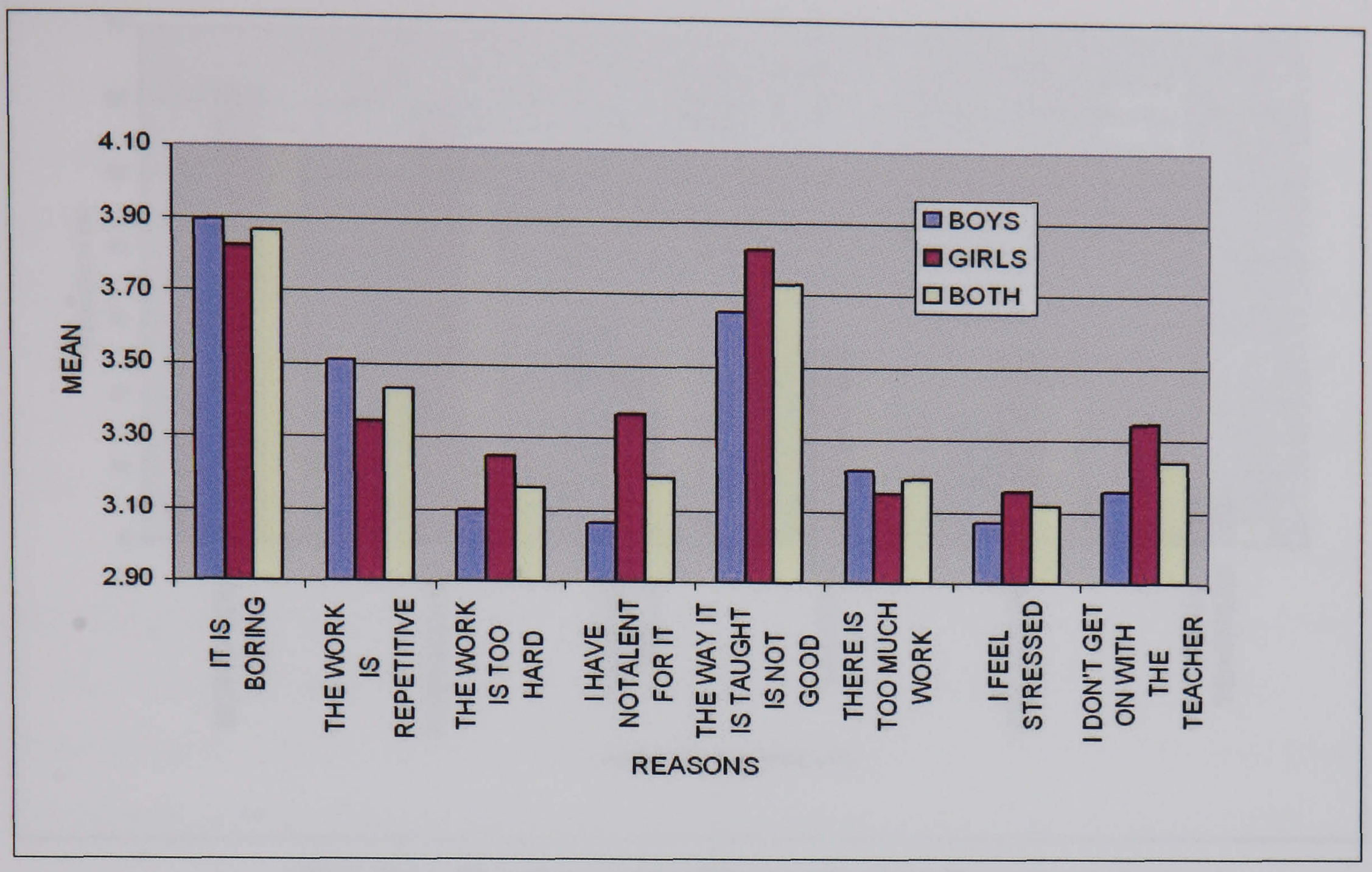

Fig. 20b Reasons why pupils did not enjoy a subject.

Fig. 20b reflects the average values for the whole range of responses to the question about why a subject was not enjoyed. Taken overall, there were some differences in pupils reasoning for their lack of enjoyment of a subject. Boredom was the most noteworthy reason overall, and slightly more so for boys than girls. It may be significant that girls, who can be considered more intrinsically motivated pupils, would regard what boys see as 'boredom' as more of an opportunity for exploration (Belton and Priyadharshini, 2007). The delivery of the subject was almost as significant, but more so for girls than boys. To a lesser degree, a perception of the repetitive nature of work was significant, but more so to boys than girls. The relationship with the teacher was less prominent here: more on a par with perceptions about talent. Girls were more concerned about their lack of talent, the difficulty of the work, and the relationship with the teacher, than were the boys.

Importance

Pupils' perceptions of what was important about school are shown in fig. 21a and fig. 21b. Because the data was drawn from a question to which responses

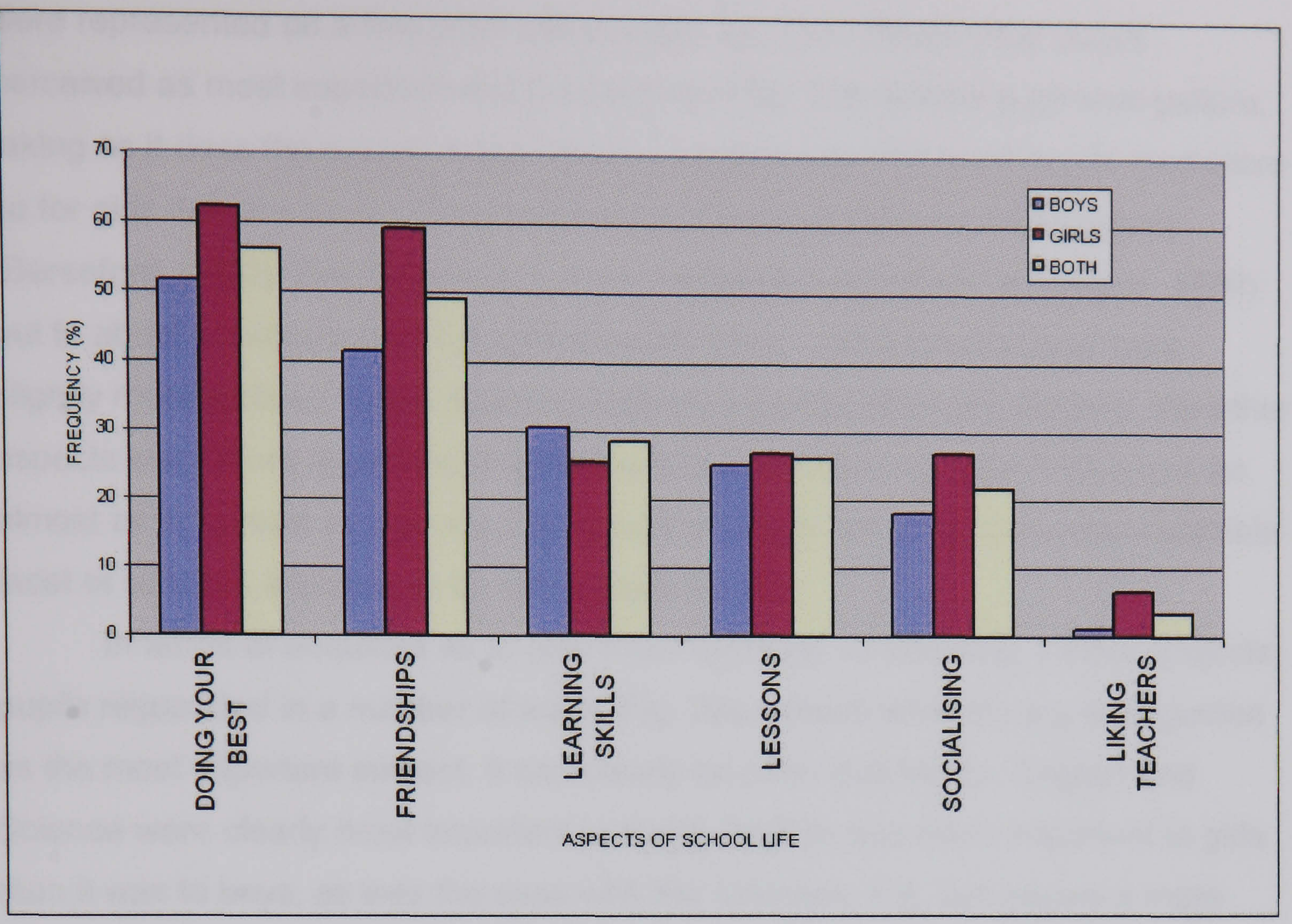

Fig. 21a Pupils' perceptions of what they found most important about school.

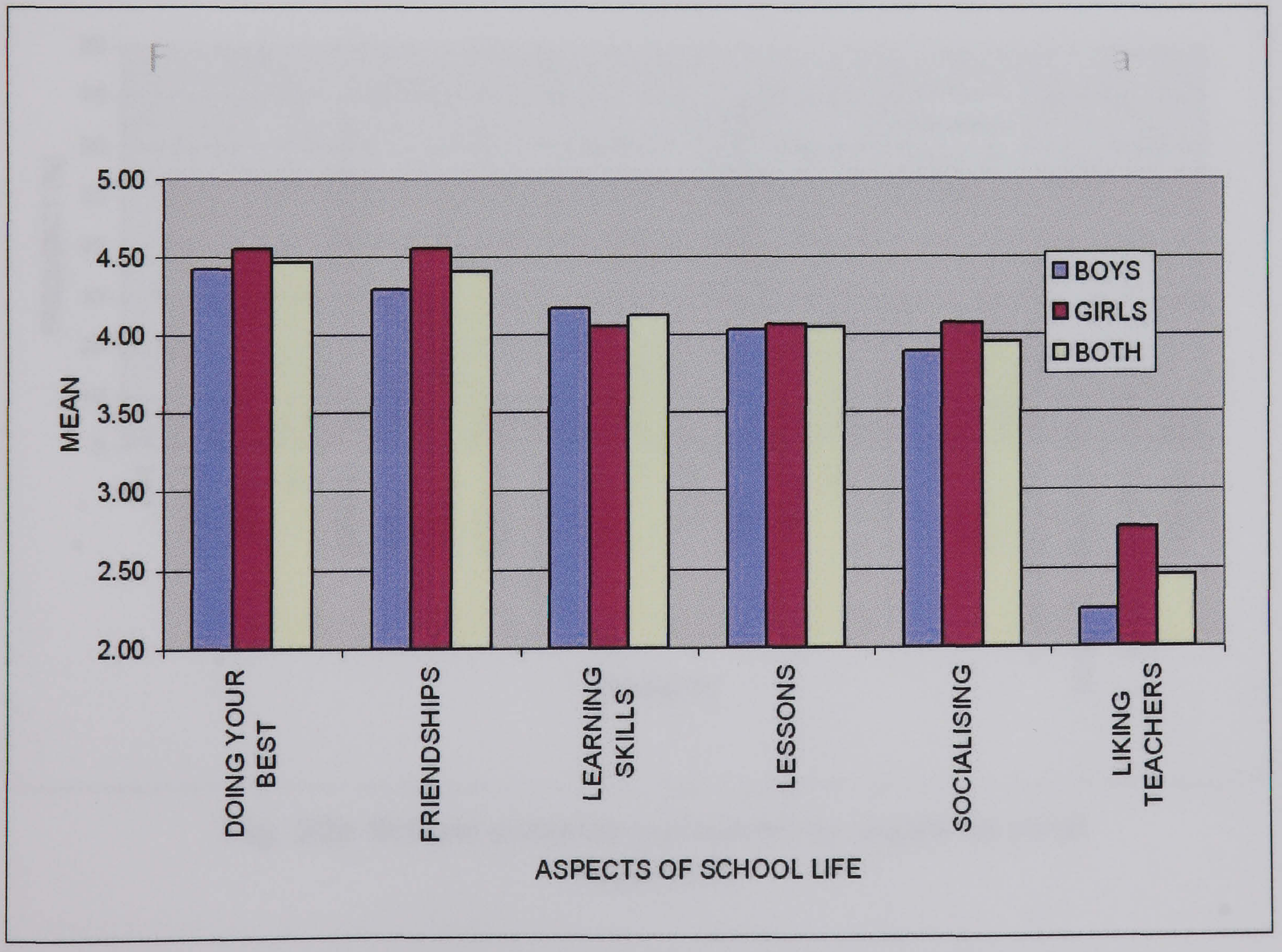

Fig. 21b Pupils' perceptions of the importance of school –a general picture.

were represented on a five-point Likert scale, fig. 21a reflects what pupils perceived as most important about school, and fig. 21b reflects a general picture, taking as it does the overall mean values of responses. For most pupils (and more so for girls than for boys) trying hard was a most important aspect of school (Beresford, 2000). Friendships too, were considered important (Anderson, 1996) but to about a third more of the girls than the boys. Although the boys were slightly more inclined to see learning skills as important than did the girls, the other aspects were more appealing to girls, particularly socialising, which they saw as almost as important as lessons. Liking teachers was not seen as a most desirable facet of school's importance by either boys or girls.

In terms of enquiries as to how important they viewed their school subjects, pupils responded in a number of ways. Fig. 22a reflects what the pupils regarded as the most important subject. It can clearly be seen that Maths, English and Science were clearly most important to them; English was more important to girls than it was to boys, as was the case with the sciences. Fig. 22b shows a more

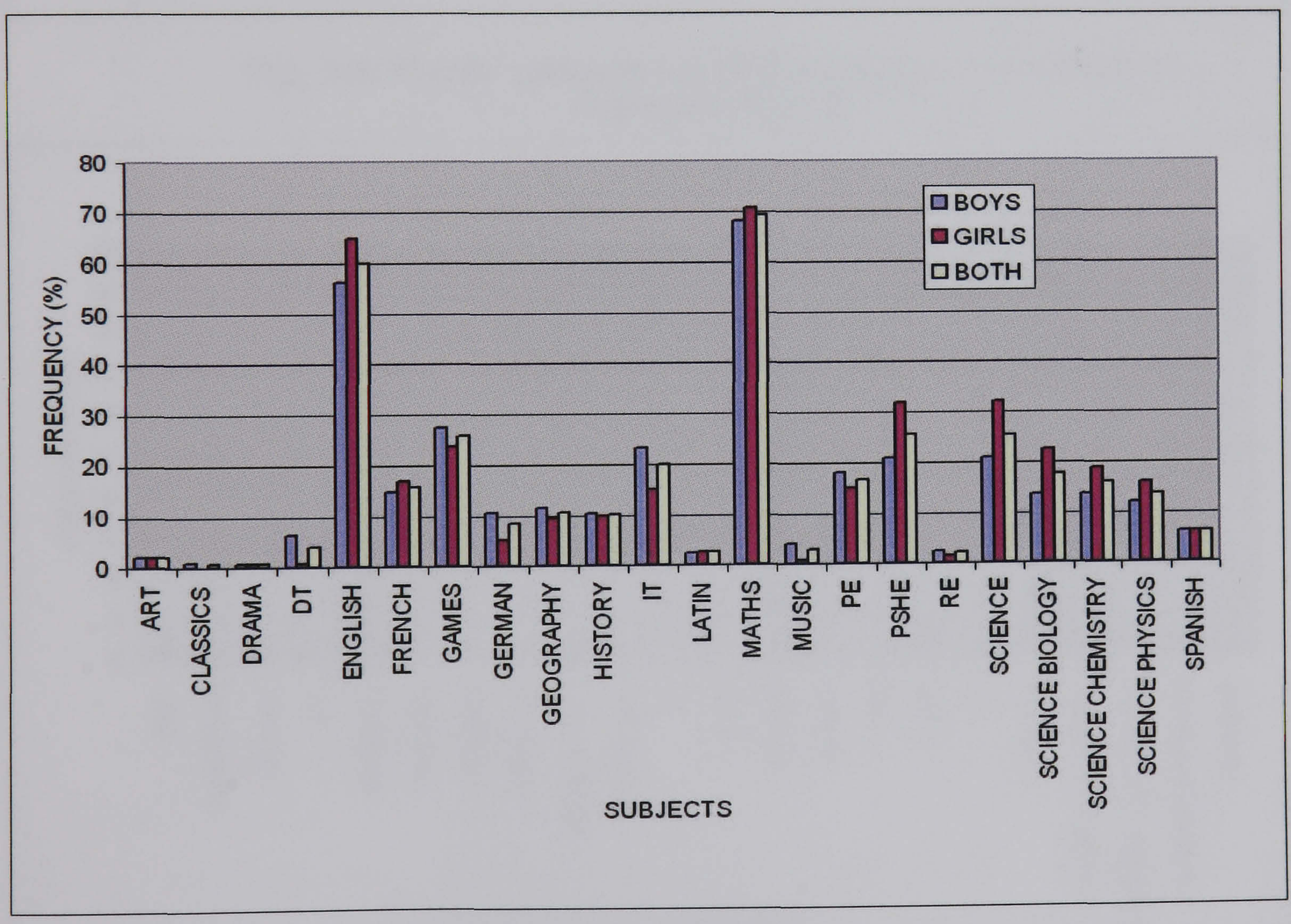

Fig. 22a School subjects perceived by pupils as most important.

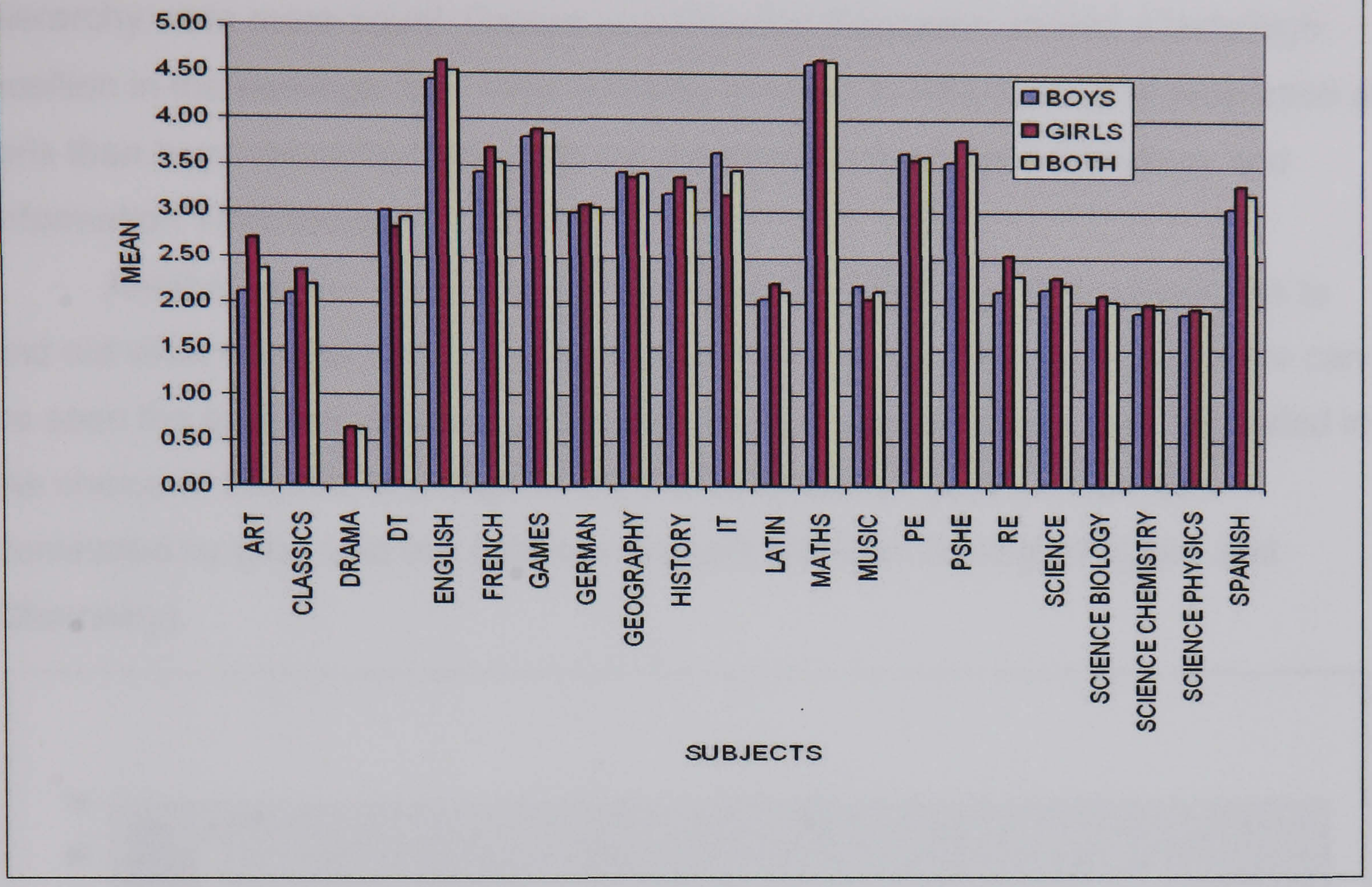

Fig. 22b Pupils' perceptions of the general importance of school subjects.

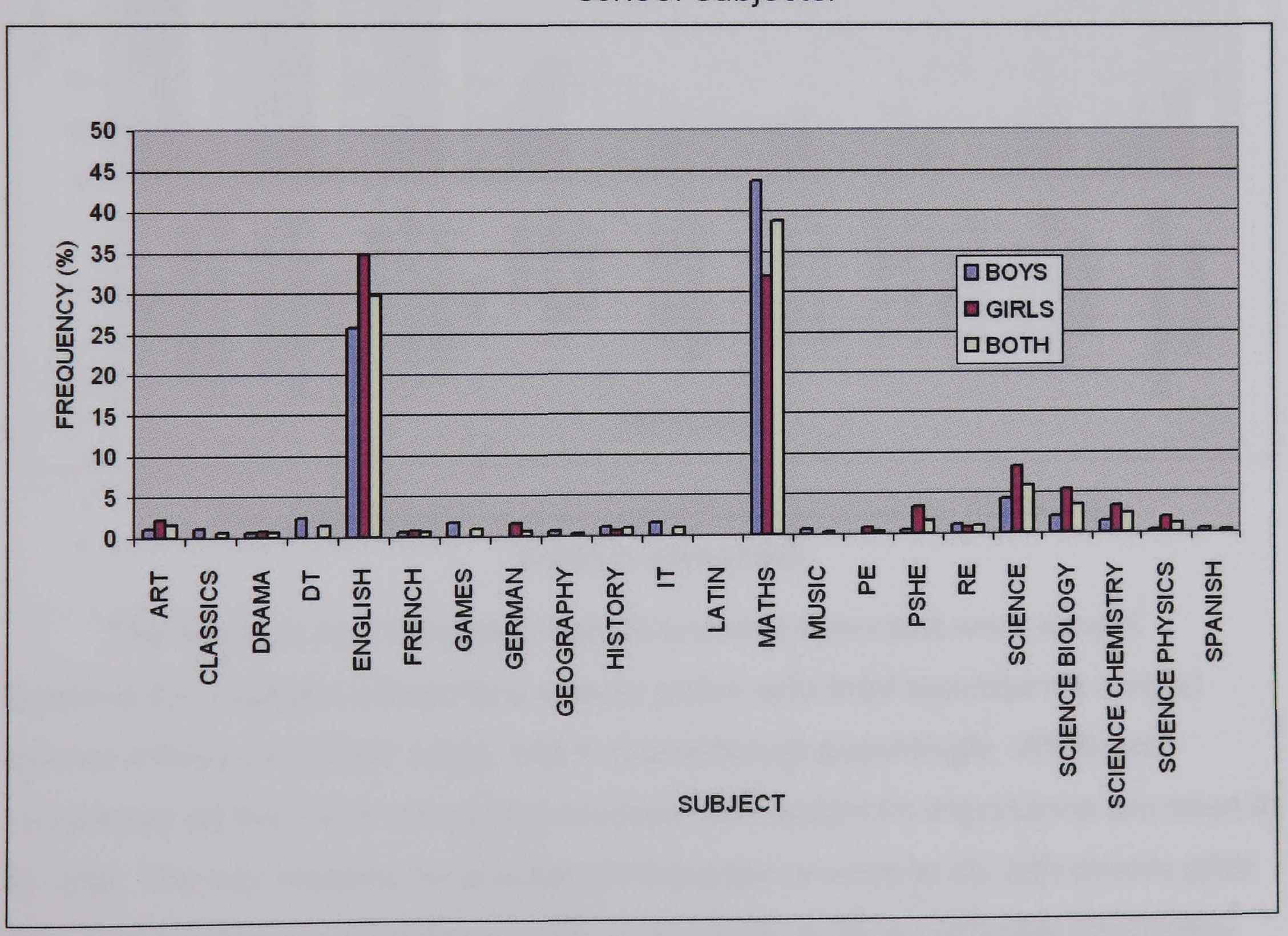

Fig. 23 Pupils' single, most important subject.

general picture, reflecting as it does, the mean responses from a five-point Likert scaled question. Here the relative positions of Maths and English in the subject hierarchy were more equal. Games and Physical Education shared a fairly high position in the rankings, too. Most subjects seemed to reflect a higher proportion of girls than boys choosing them, with the exceptions of Design Technology and Information Technology.

Another way of determining the perceived importance of a subject was to find out what was the single, most important subject; fig. 23 reflects this. Here can be seen the expected hierarchy of Maths, English and Science. Girls dominated in the choice of English, and boys in the choice of Maths. Science was also dominated by girls, and this includes the split sciences (Biology, Physics and Chemistry).

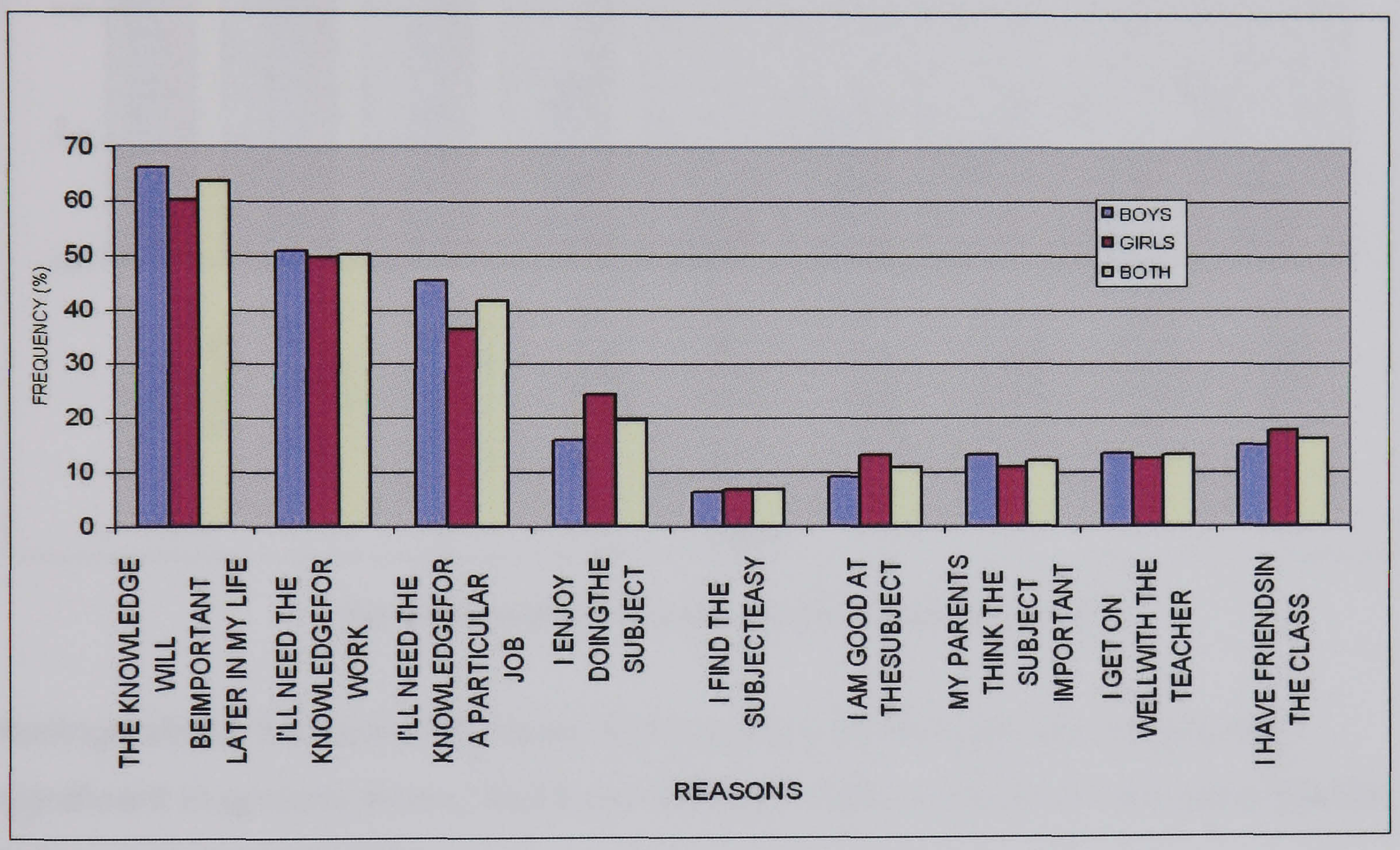

Fig. 24a Pupils' most compelling reasons for finding a subject important.

The reasons why a subject was considered important were sought. Reasons for a subject's importance were given, and their significance ranked against a five-point Likert scale, which pupils ticked accordingly. What were considered as the most compelling reasons for a subject's importance are seen in fig. 24a. The key reasons for a subject's importance were to do with events after school: the subject's value later in life, or for work, or for a particular job (Colley and Comber, 2003). More boys than girls saw value in these reasons.

Enjoyment of the subject had high import for about a quarter of pupils, and for more girls than boys. Being good at the subject made it important for more girls than boys, as did having friends in the class. Perceived parental feelings towards a subject's importance were more significant to boys. An overall mean value for all the responses is reflected in fig. 24b. There was little disparity, except that girls'

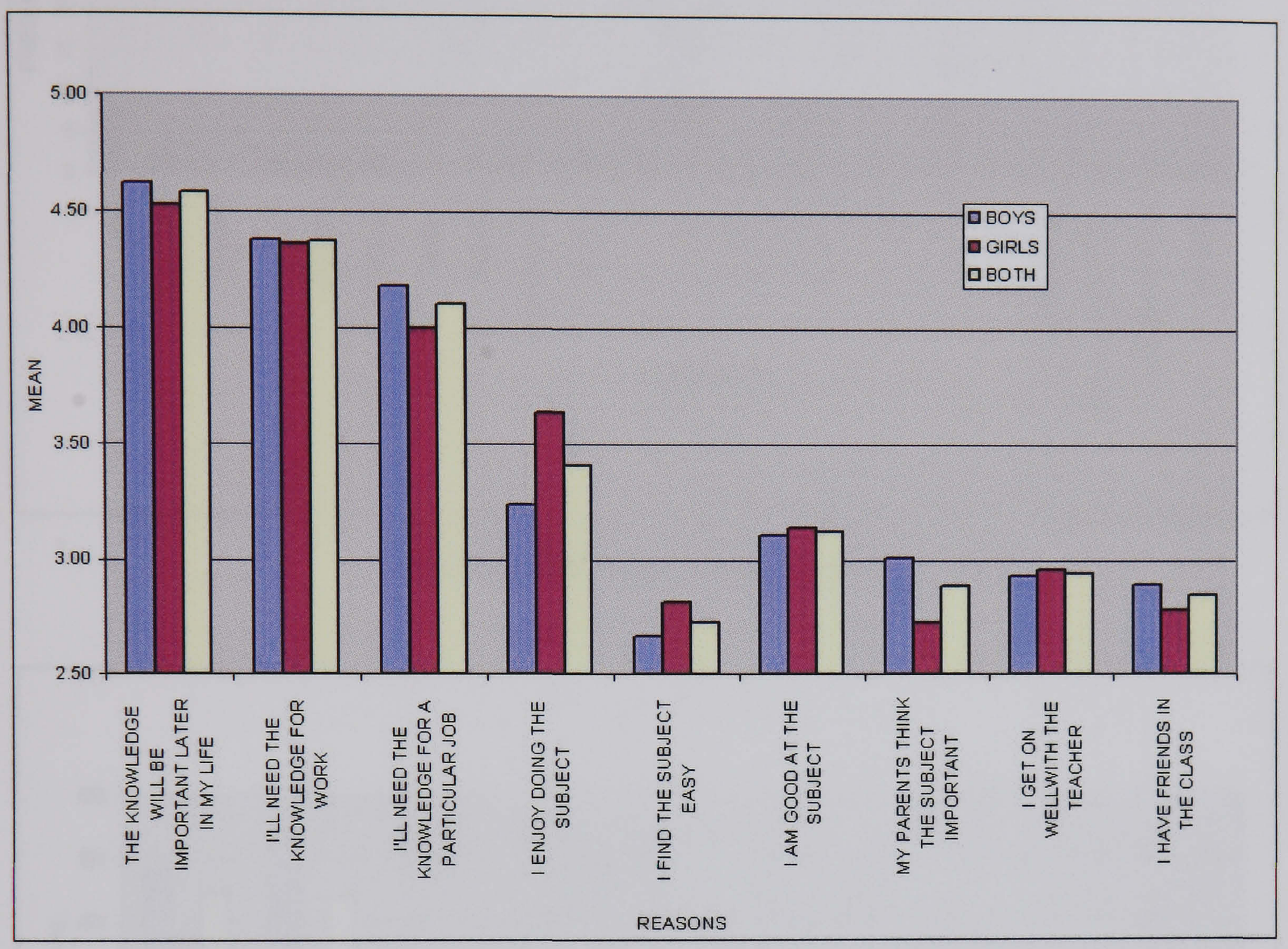

Fig. 24b Reasons why pupils' found a subject important.

feelings about their parents' views of a subject's importance were even less significant in general terms, and boys seemed to put more store by having friends in the class than did girls.

At the other end of the spectrum of importance was the subject viewed as least important. Fig. 25 shows pupils' single, least important subject. Religious Education was, by far, the least important subject in the minds of pupils, over the whole period of the research, but was considered so by more boys than girls. Latin was similarly dismissed, but by slightly more girls than boys. Music was considered the third least important subject and was closely followed by Art.

The reasons why a subject was considered unimportant were sought. Reasons for a subject's lack of importance were given, and their significance ranked against a five-point Likert scale, which pupils ticked accordingly. Fig. 26a

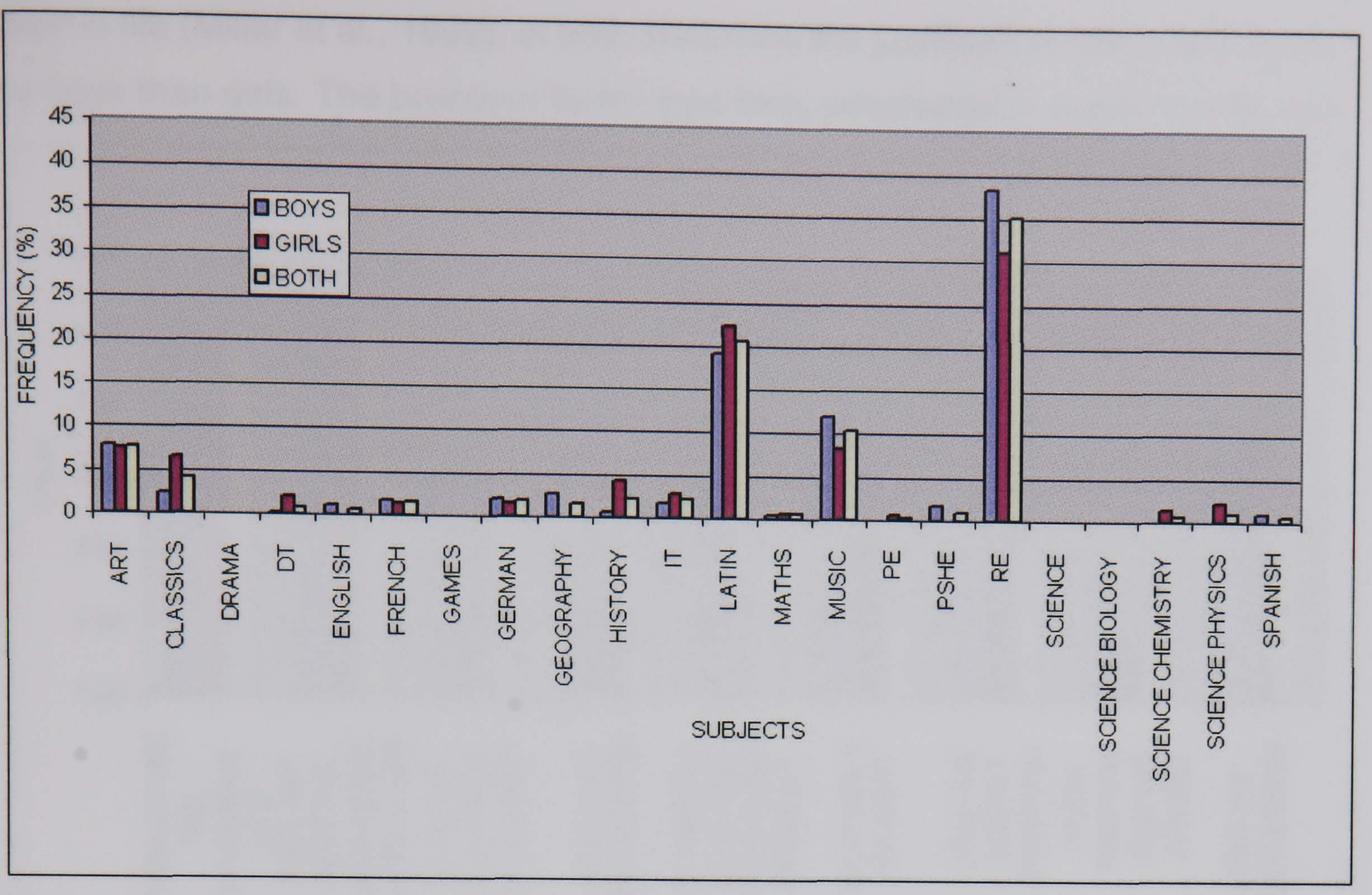

Fig. 25 Pupils' single, least important subject.

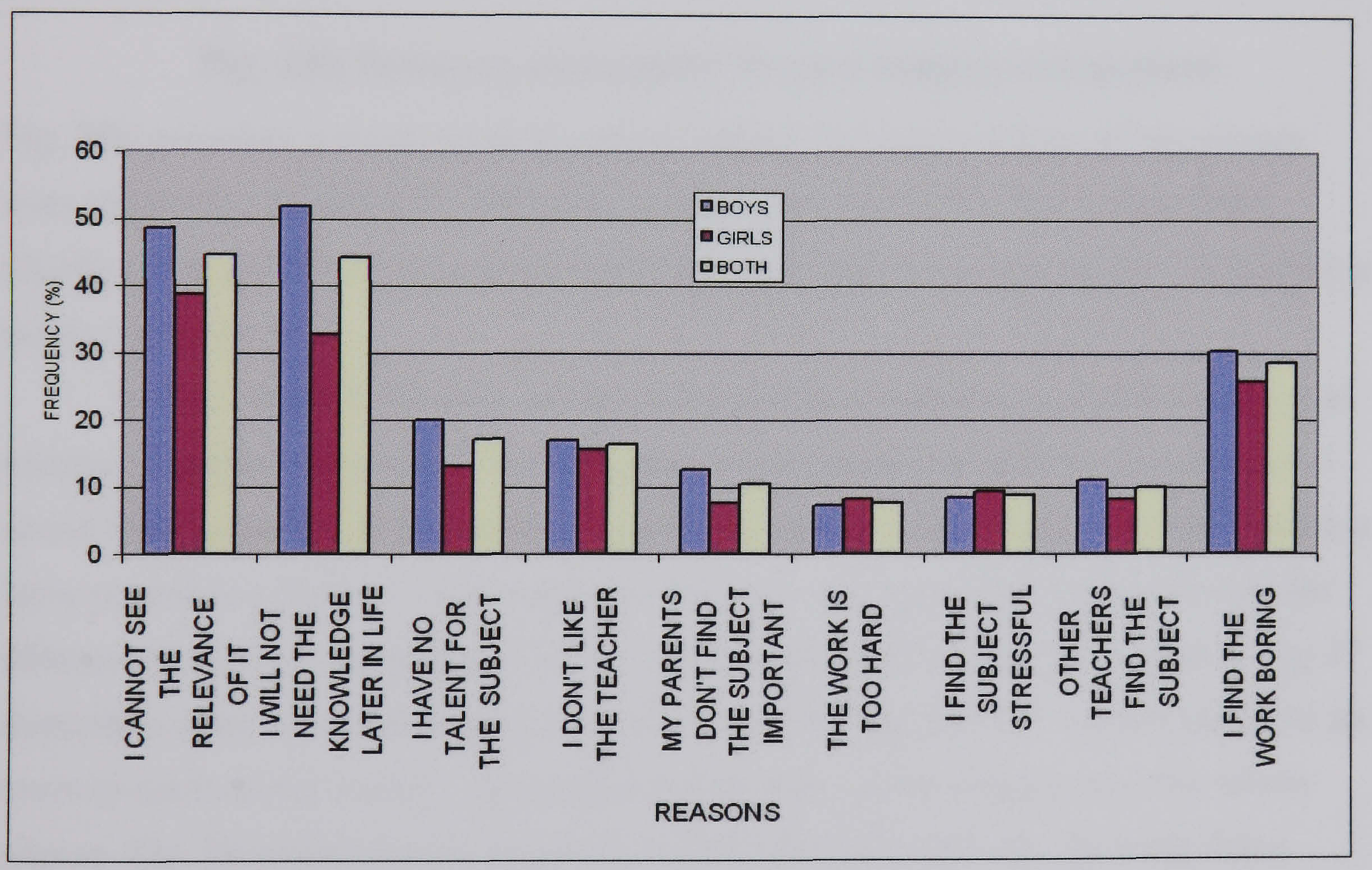

Fig. 26a Pupils' most compelling reasons for finding a subject unimportant.

reflects what were the most compelling reasons for dismissing a subject's importance. A subject's relevance (Adey and Biddulph, 2001) was seen as a most compelling reason for its importance, and the lack of relevance provided justification for its lack of importance, as did the subject's perceived lack of value

later in life (Miller at al., 1999); in both instances the justification was made more by boys than girls. The boredom factor was fairly substantial in pupils' minds, too.

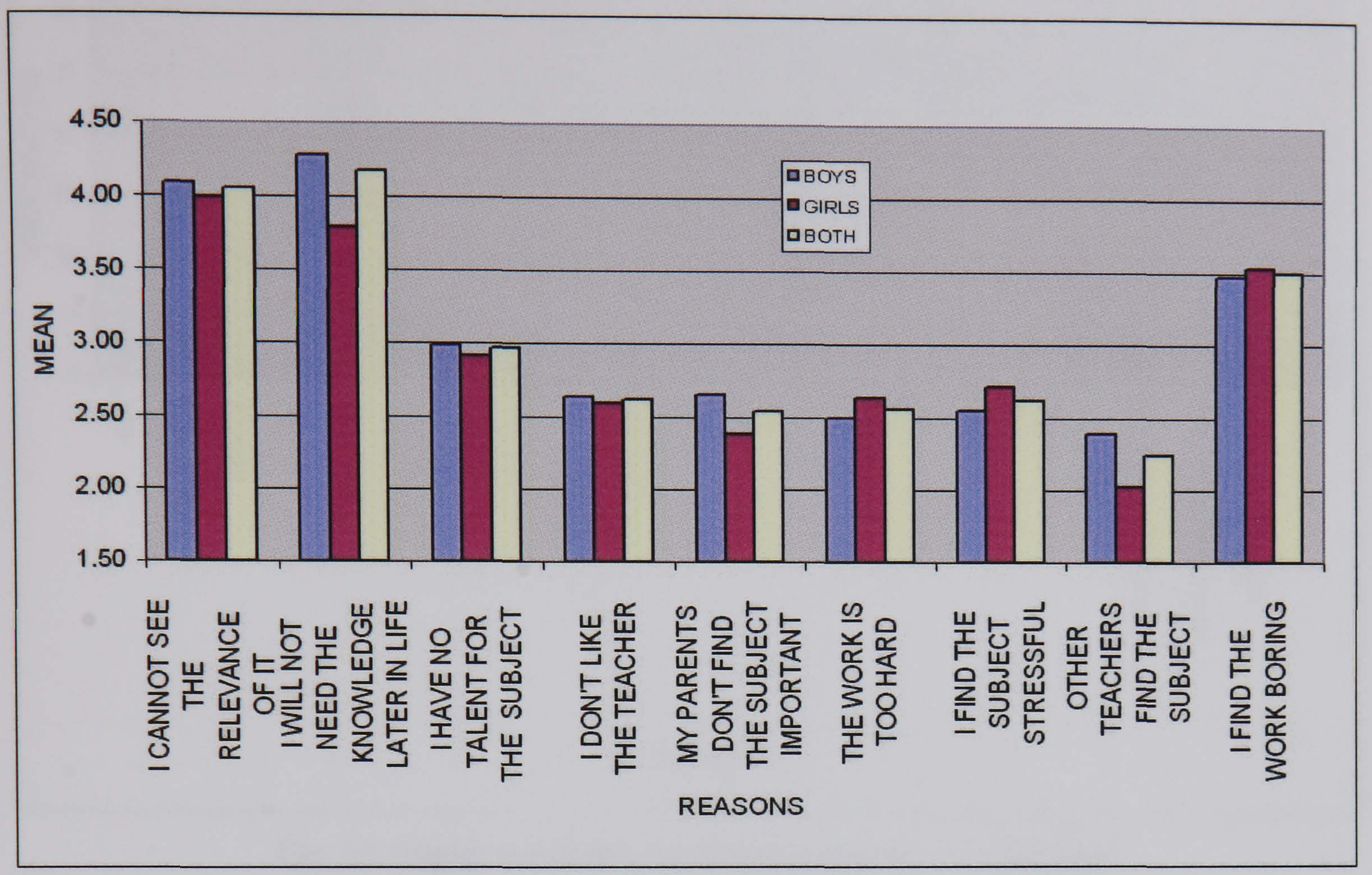

Fig. 26b Reasons why pupils' found a subject unimportant.

Fig. 26b provides a more general picture, taking the mean values of responses over the period of research; the picture is very similar to fig. 26a, except that slightly more girls than boys reasoned that boredom was a key reason for finding a subject unimportant.

It may be worth looking, at this point, at the similarities and differences that existed in pupils' perceptions of what was important and what they enjoyed most about their subjects. In the minds of pupils generally, there seemed to have been a fairly consistent view of those subjects that were important, and with little gender difference, and this stayed with them over the whole period of the research. Fig 27 illustrates what will have been pupils' views of their top three important subjects as seen in each of the current, (questionnaire) years, but averaged over the whole period. Fig. 28 shows pupils' predictions of what will have been their top three important subjects in each of the coming years (again, averaged over the whole period). What can be seen in both diagrams is the dominant position occupied by Maths, English and the sciences.

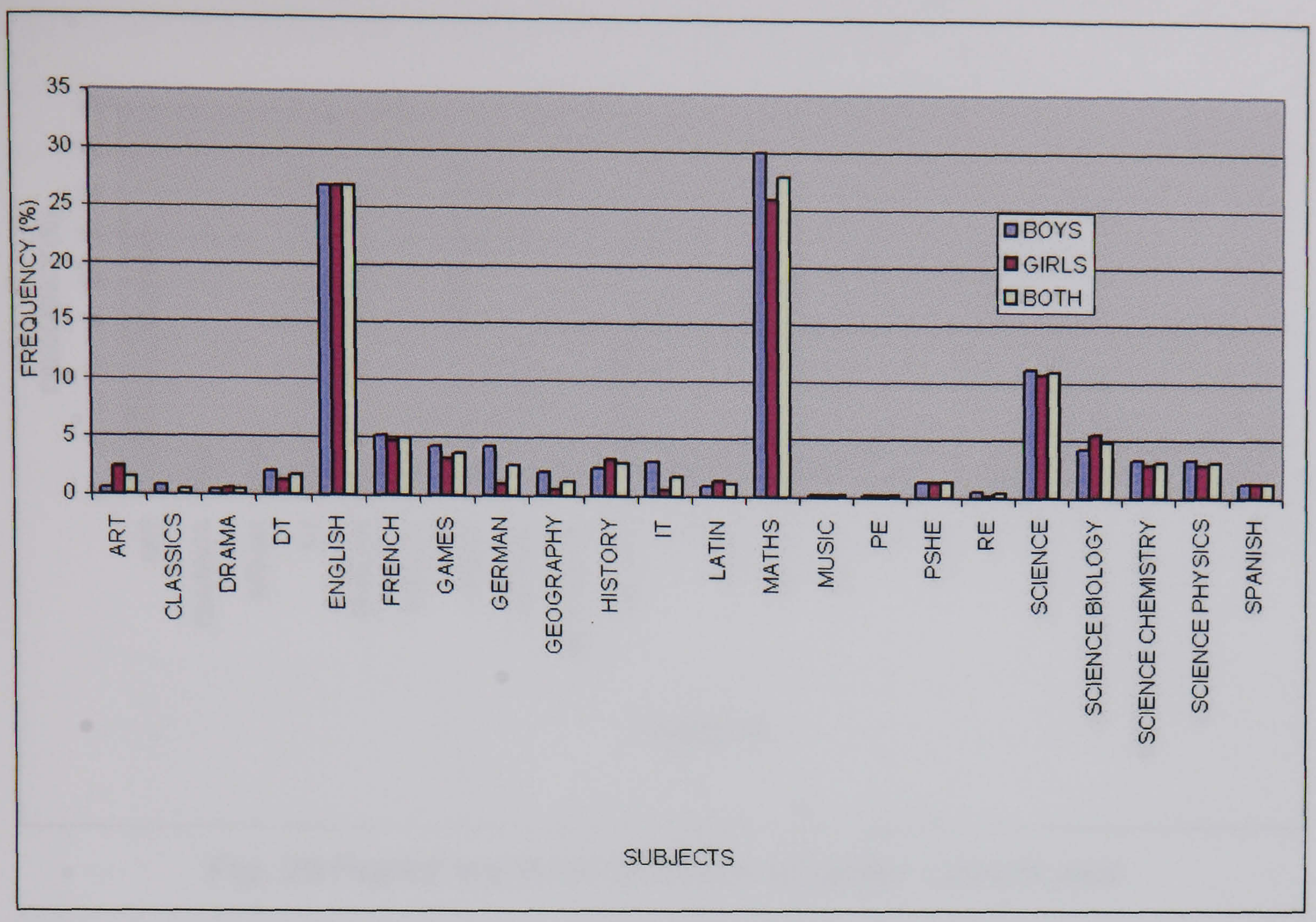

Fig. 27 Pupils' top three important subjects –current year.

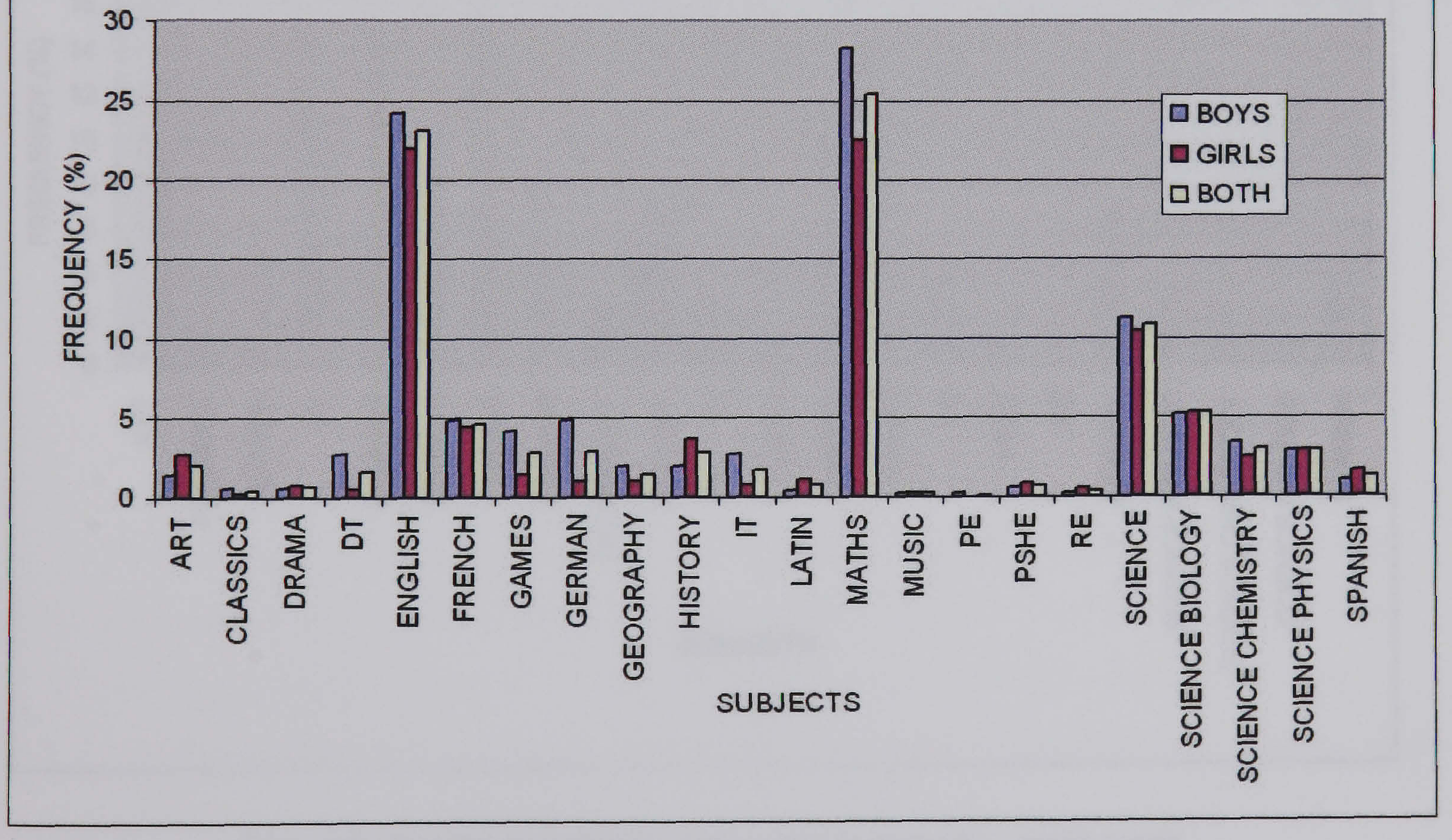

Fig. 28 Pupils' top three important subjects –next year.

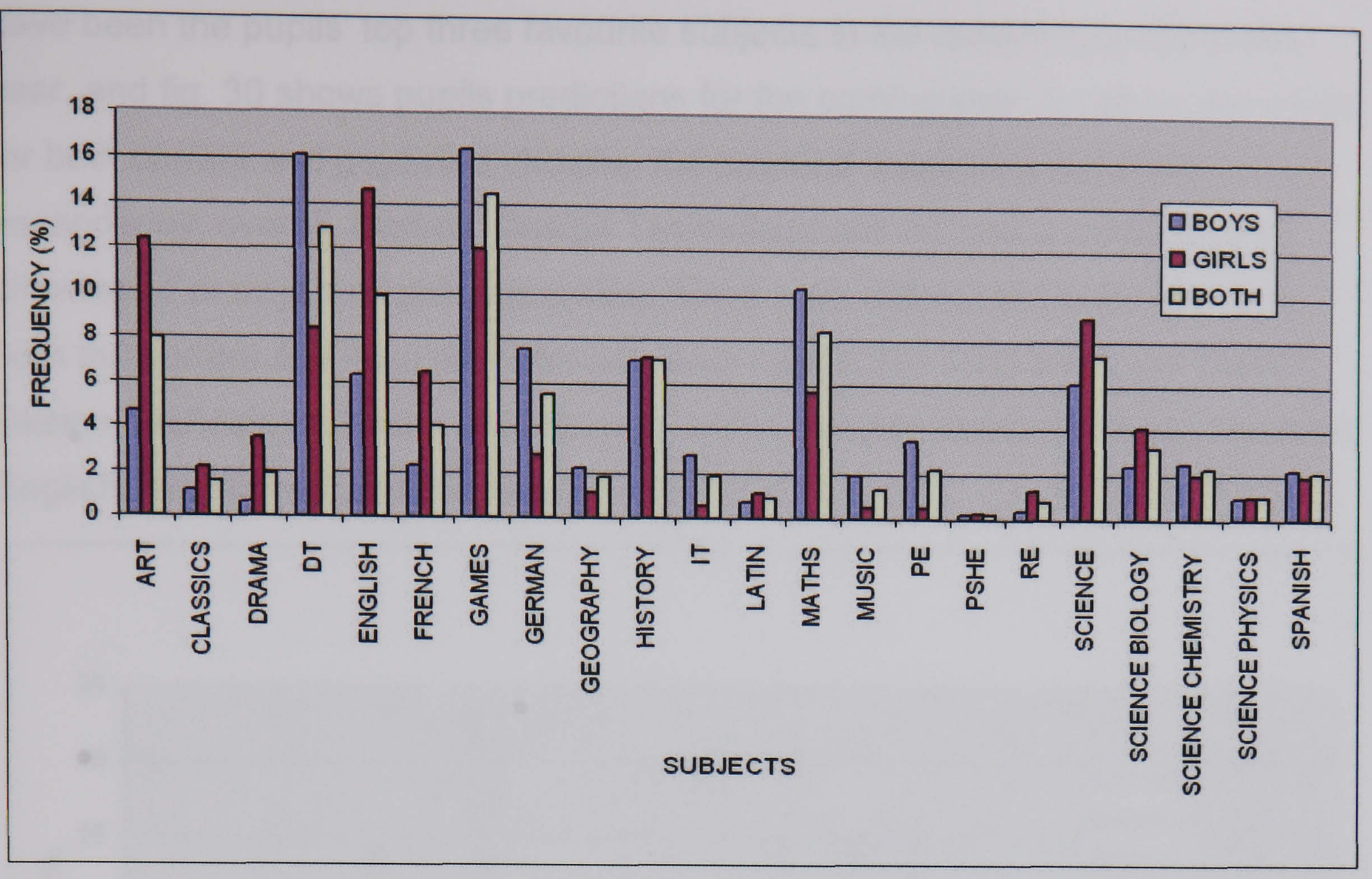

Fig. 29 Pupils' top three favourite subjects –current year.

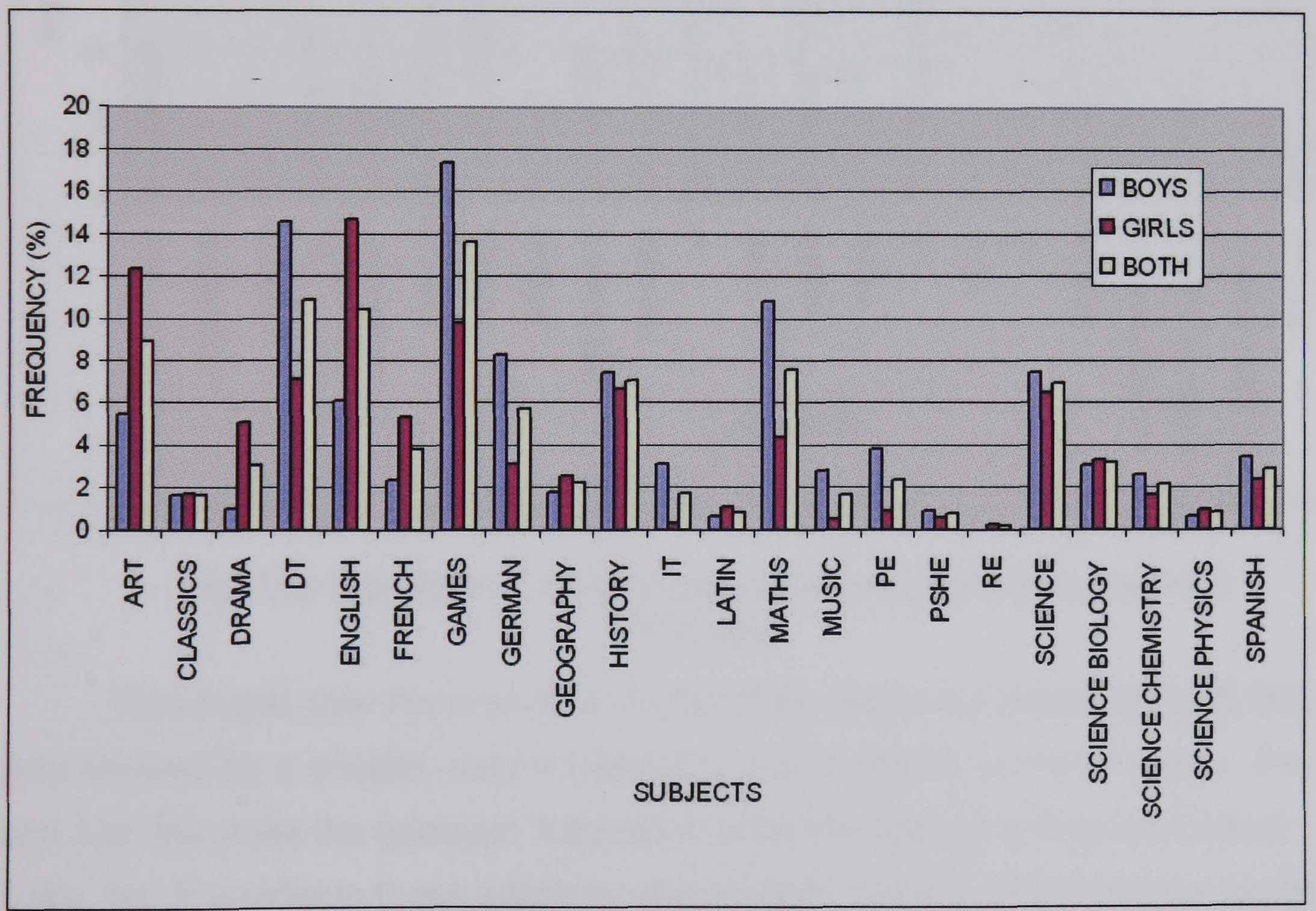

Fig. 30 Pupils' top three favourite subjects –next year.

Pupils' perceptions of their top three favourite subjects over the course of the research are similarly illustrated in figs. 29 and 30. Fig. 29 shows what would

have been the pupils' top three favourite subjects in the current (questionnaire) year, and fig. 30 shows pupils predictions for the coming year. It can be seen that, for both current and predicted choices, the practical subjects were in the ascendancy; overall, Games, Design Technology and Art had a pretty strong showing. For boys and girls separately, there were differences to be found. In both the current and predicted choices, boys seemed to have preferred Games, Design Technology, Maths and Science, whilst the girls seemed to have favoured English, Art, Games and Science.

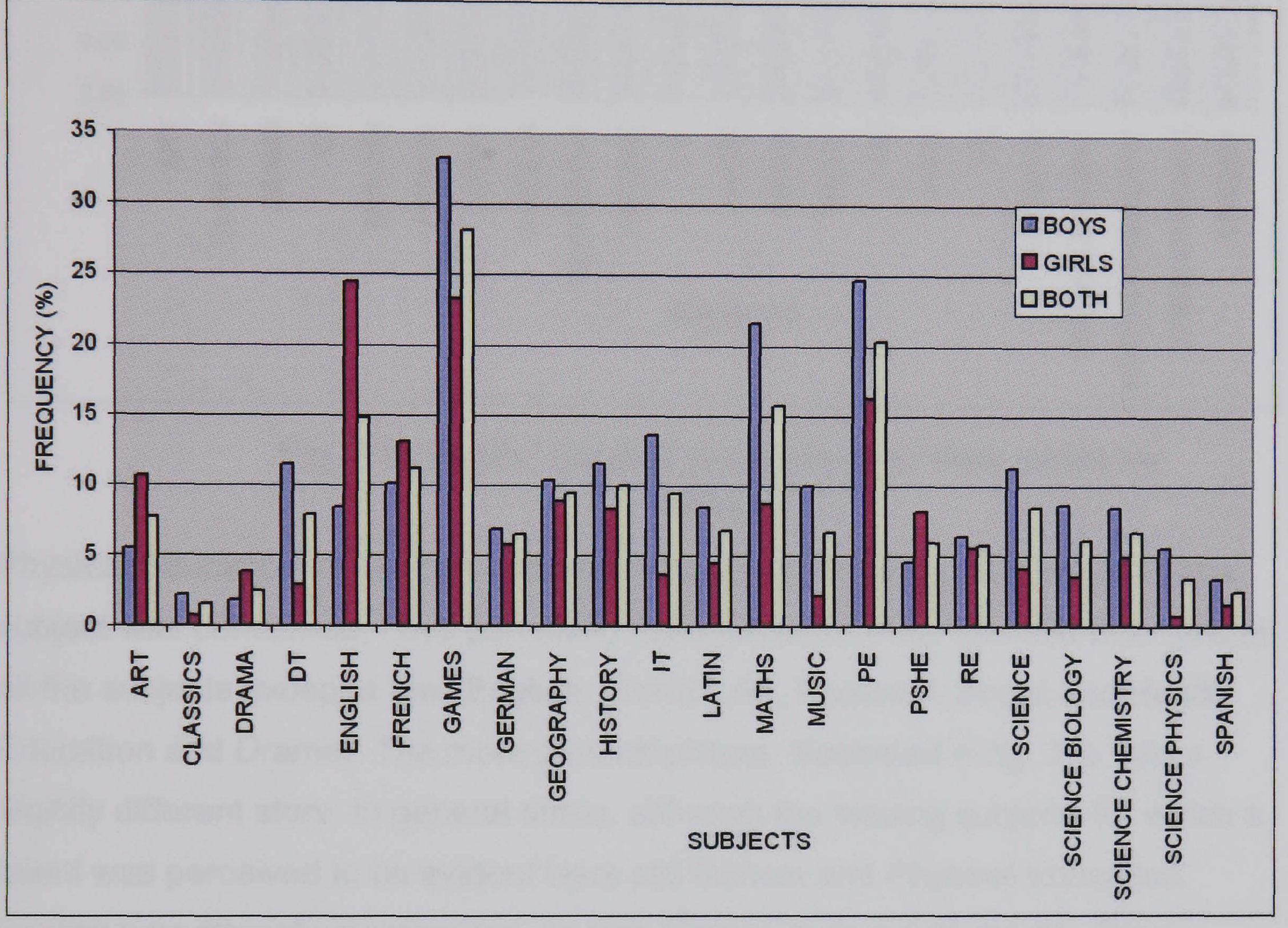

Fig. 31a Subjects at which pupils perceive themselves as most talented.

How pupils saw themselves in terms of the degree of talent or ability that they showed for a subject, over the period of the research, is shown in figs. 31a and 31b. Because the question required a response against a five-point Likert scale, fig. 31a reflects those subjects where pupils' perceived themselves as most talented; fig. 31b reflects the general picture, taking the mean value of their responses over the period. The subjects generally, to which most talent was attributed, were Games, Physical Education, and Maths. The differences between boys and girls were such that, although boys reflected this general trend strongly, girls did not; the dominant areas for girls were English first, then Games and

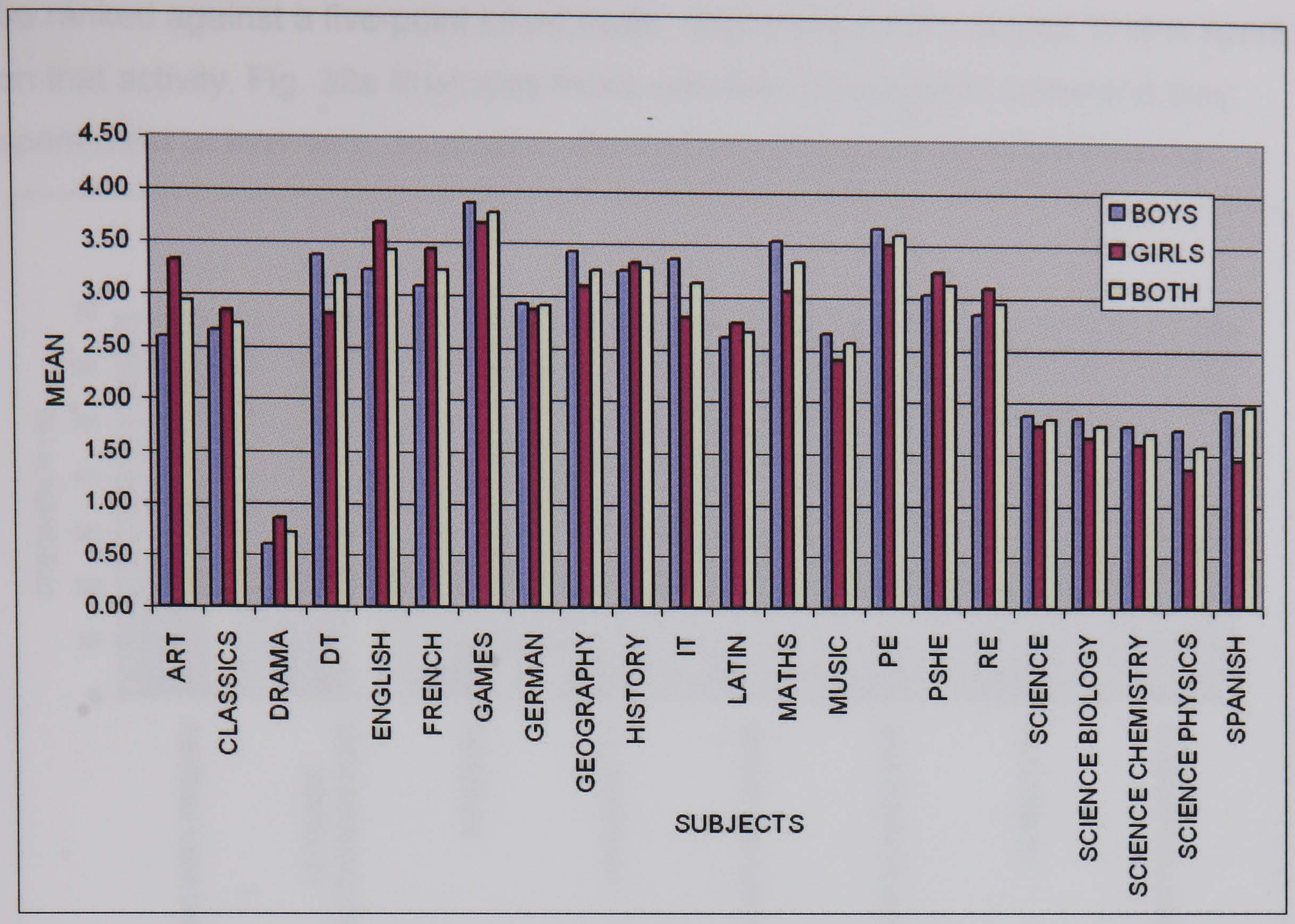

Fig. 31b Pupils' general perceptions of their talent for subjects.

Physical Education. It can be seen also, that, as far as being most talented at a subject was concerned, boys perceived themselves as more talented than girls at all the subjects except a few (English, French, Art, Personal, Social and Health Education and Drama). The more general picture, illustrated in fig. 31b tells a slightly different story. In general terms, although the leading subjects for which a talent was perceived to be evident were still Games and Physical Education, English was strongly represented, as was History. In terms of gender, Boys seemed to dominate less, but were well represented in the practical and mathematical and technical subjects, such as Design Technology, Information Technology, Games and Physical Education, Maths and the sciences. Curiously, there was a stronger male representation in Music and Spanish. Girls were strongly represented in what might be termed the 'softer' (Francis, 2000) subjects: Art, English, French, Classics, Latin, Drama, History, Personal, Social and Health Education and Religious Education.

In gaining a better overall picture of pupils' perceptions, it would also be perhaps relevant to examine the activities that they got involved in away from school. This question provided a number of activities, and required responses to

be ranked against a five-point Likert scale, depending on the degree of time spent on that activity. Fig. 32a illustrates those activities where pupils perceived they spent most of their time. In general, the majority of pupils saw themselves as

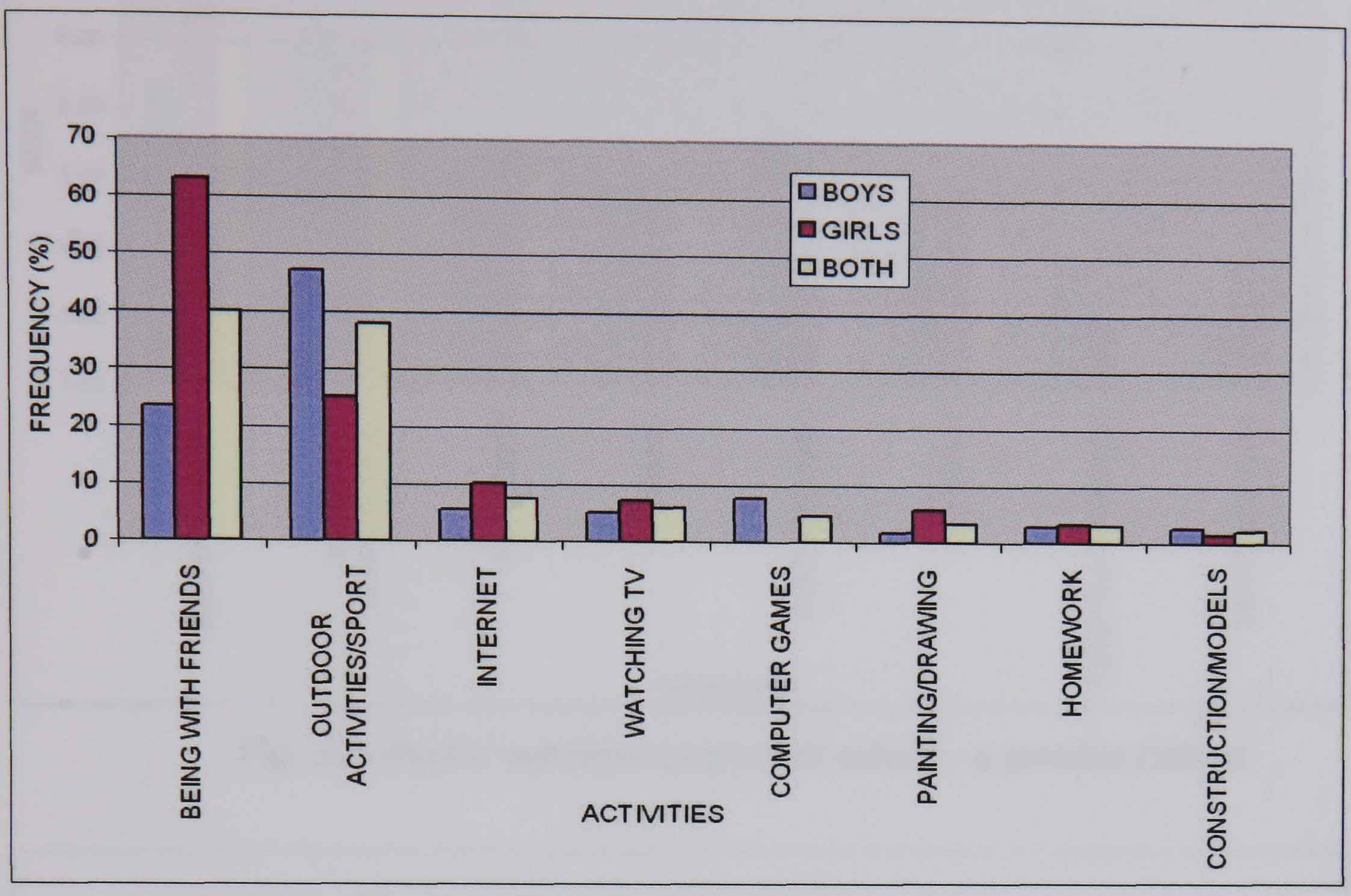

Fig. 32a What pupils' spend most of their time doing away from school

spending most of their time socialising or engaging in sports and outdoor activities. In terms of gender difference, however, a far higher proportion of girls than boys socialised as a main activity, and the converse was true for sports and outdoor pursuits. More girls seemed to engage in Internet and television based activities, but a higher proportion of boys claimed to play computer games. Fig. 32b reflects a more general picture of the activities that pupils engaged in away from school, representing, as it does, the mean data values from the same question, averaged over the period of the research. In this picture, time spent on homework assumed a higher position in the scale of things than before. Here also can be seen the boys' dominant interest in outdoor activities and sport, computer games and construction and modelling, whereas the girls dominated in other respects (friendships, TV, Internet and painting and drawing).

Another element of the research that helped to define the characters in the story concerns the world of work. On the one hand, there were the careers that pupils envisaged themselves undertaking later in life, and on the other there were the careers undertaken by the parents or carers of these pupils. Fig. 33 illustrates

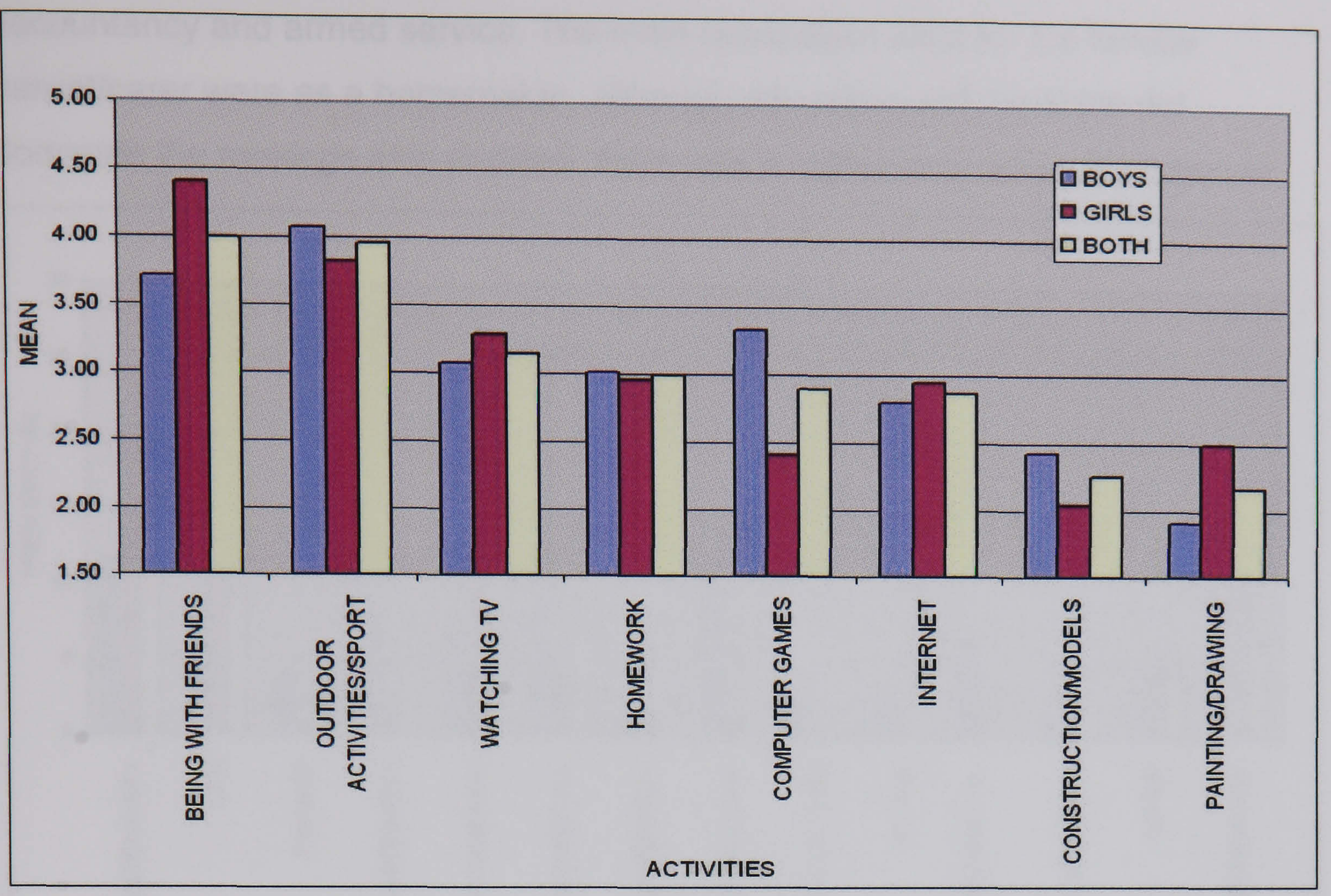

Fig. 32b Pupils' activities away from school –a general picture.

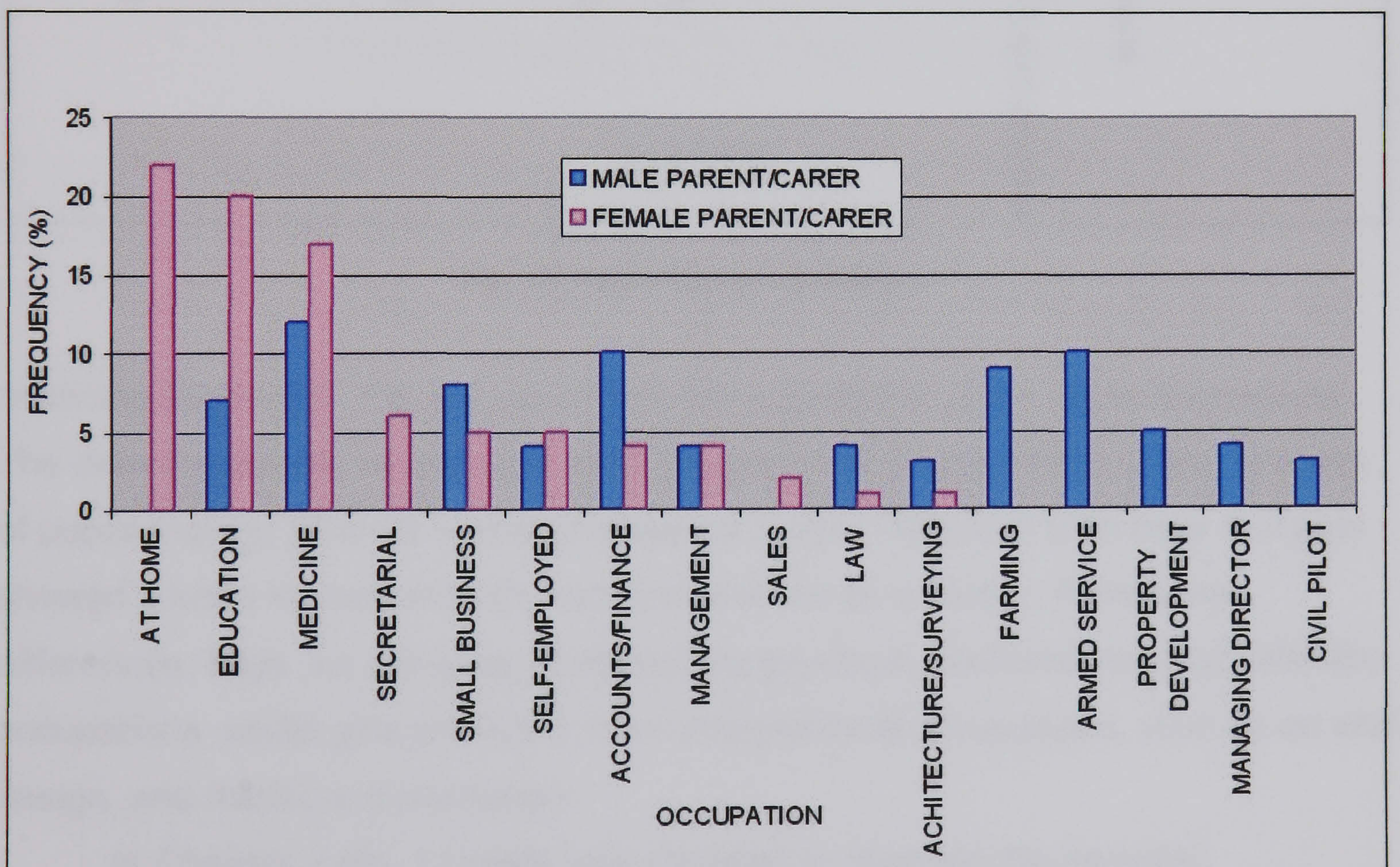

Fig. 33 Parents' or carers' occupations.

the occupations of the parents or carers, as represented by the pupils themselves. What is quite clear from this diagram is the dominance of what might be termed traditional professions. Main occupations of the male parent/carer were medicine,

accountancy and armed service. The main occupation cited for the female parent/carer were as a homemaker, although education and medicine did dominate the rankings also (indeed, there was a higher proportion of women in

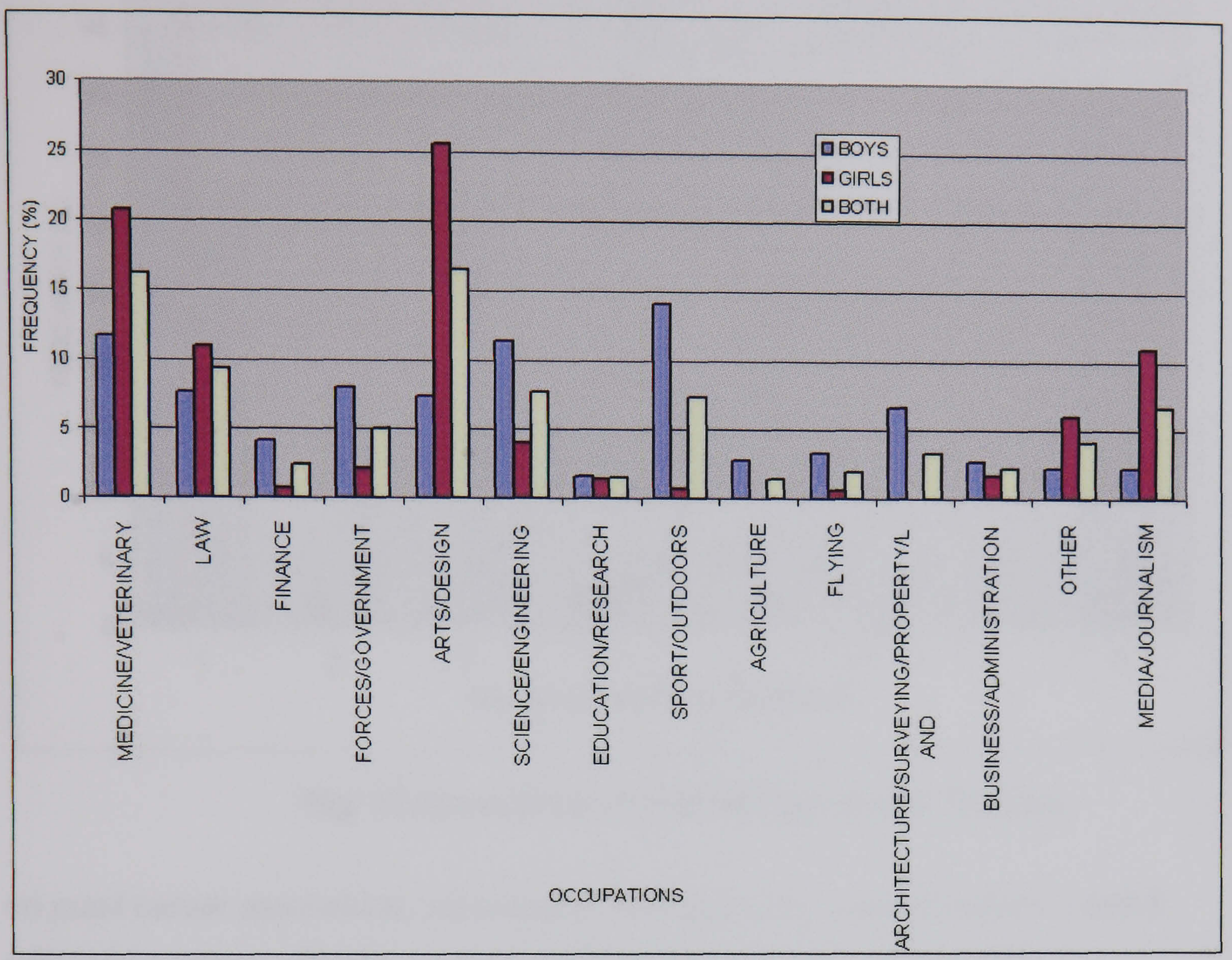

Fig. 34 Pupils' career aspirations

medicine than men). Fig. 34 represents the aspirations of the pupils themselves. The data represents an average (over the period of the research) of the numbers of pupils making discrete career choices each year. Although both boys and girls showed a keen interest in both medicine and law as a career, there were differences; boys, for instance, preferred the practical, mathematical and scientific occupations, whilst girls preferred more interpersonal occupations, such as art and design, and media and journalism.

In Chapter 3 (fig. 11) data was provided to illustrate the parental occupations as stratified by the eight value NS-SEC occupational groupings. These parental occupational classifications are repeated here (in fig. 35) with data

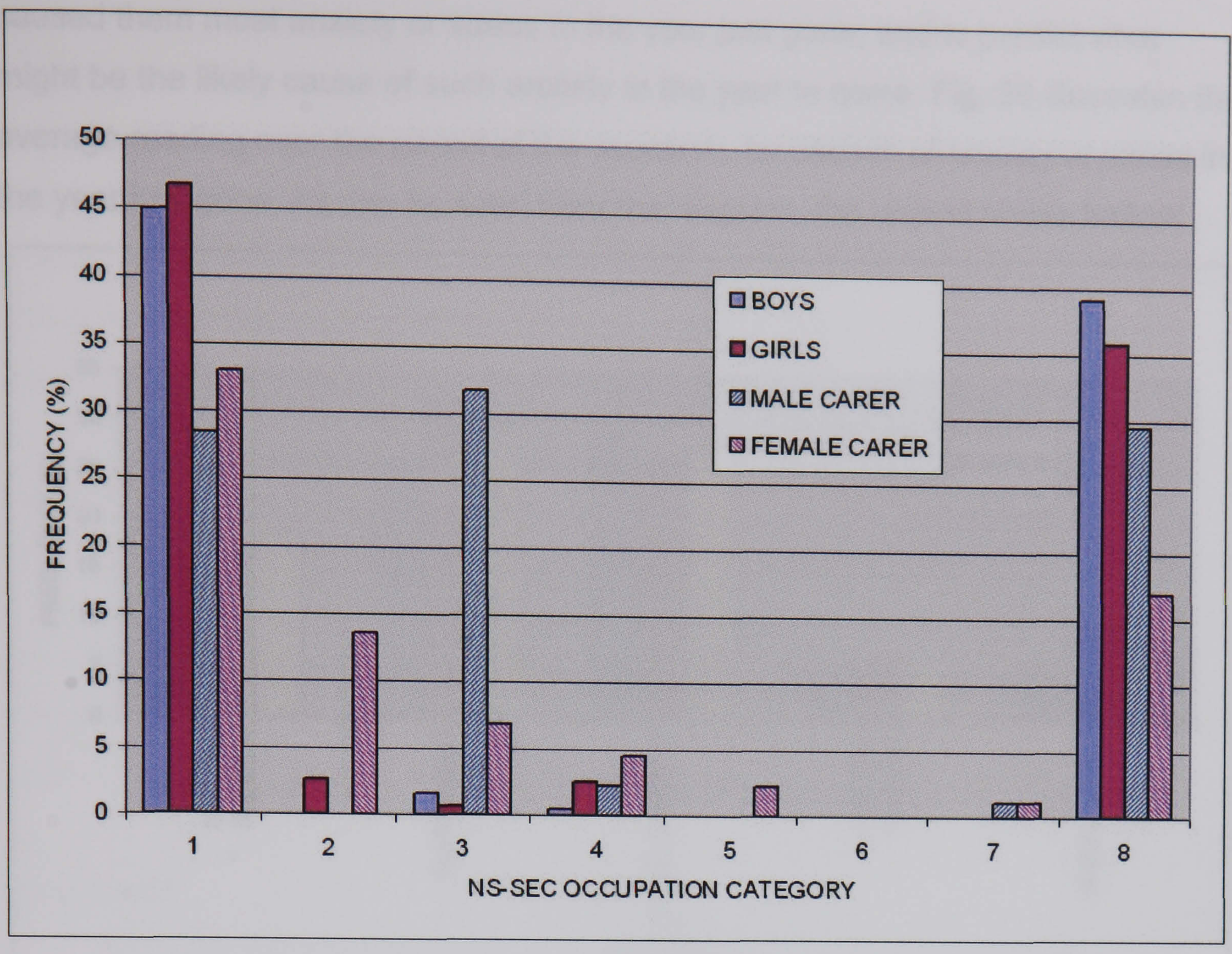

Fig. 35 Correlation of parent/pupil career choices.

on pupil career aspirations, classified in the same way. Classifications 1 and 8 reflected a strong affiliation in both parents and children; classification 1 is represented in the NS-SEC coding by modern professional occupations (such as teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, welfare officer, artist, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), or software designer), and classification 8 is represented by traditional professional occupations (such as accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, or civil/mechanical engineer). It could be argued that there was a strong correlation between the older generation and the younger generation in this data set. The anomaly is seen in the male parental data for classification 3, which reflects a career exemplified by senior mangers and administrators (usually responsible for planning, organising, and co-ordinating work and for finance, such as finance manager or chief executive); arguably a career point gained through experience and seniority, but which will certainly have originated in either classification 1 or 8.

During their time at school, pupils will have felt anxiety or stress of some sort. This might have been due to many factors, such as exams or teachers, or changing schools. At the end of each year, pupils were asked to indicate what had

caused them most anxiety or stress in the year just gone, and to predict what might be the likely cause of such anxiety in the year to come. Fig. 36 illustrates the average reading over the period of the research, for causes of anxiety or stress in the year just gone. As can be seen from the diagram, the largest stress factors

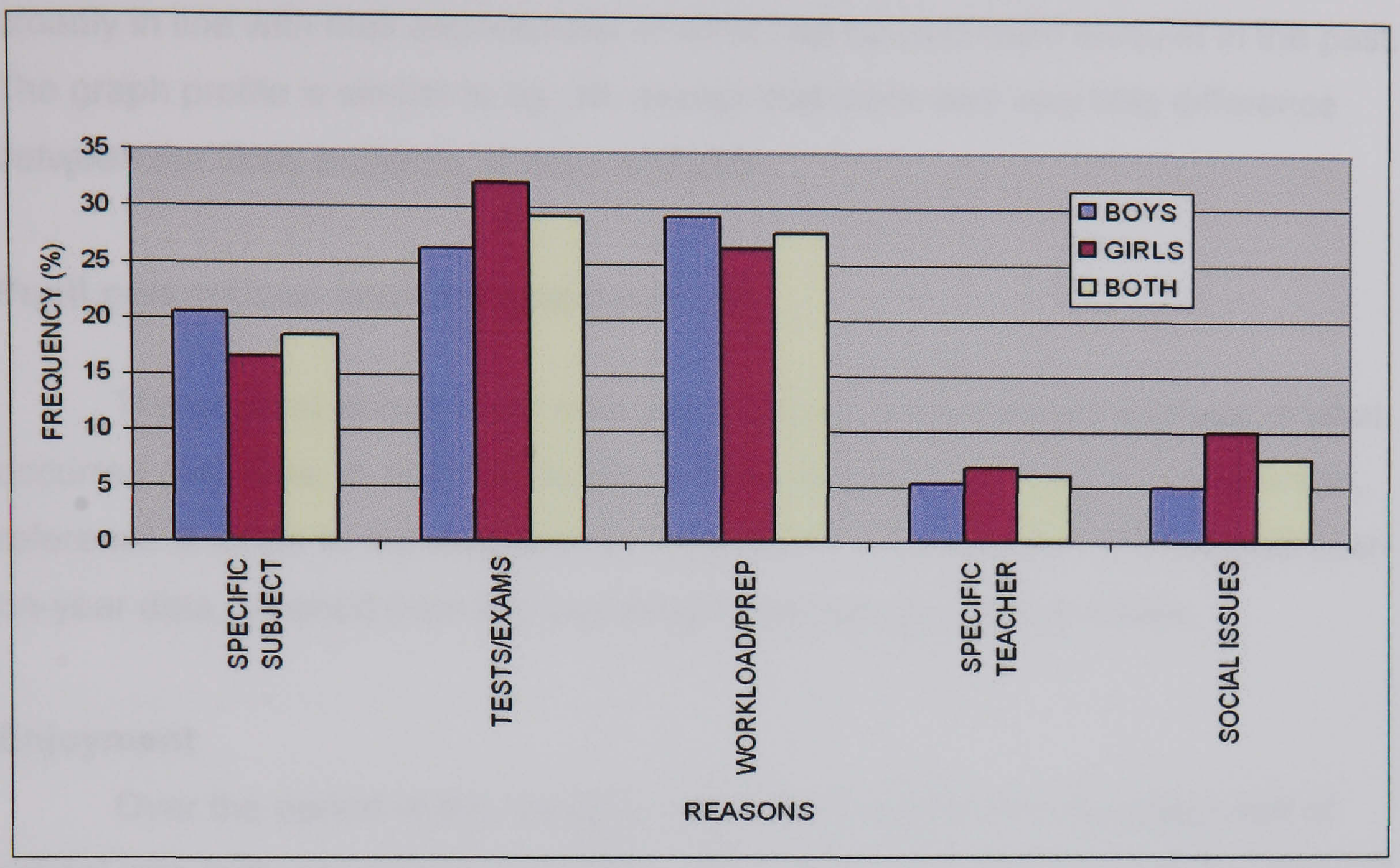

Fig. 36 Pupils' perceptions of anxiety or stress in the past year.

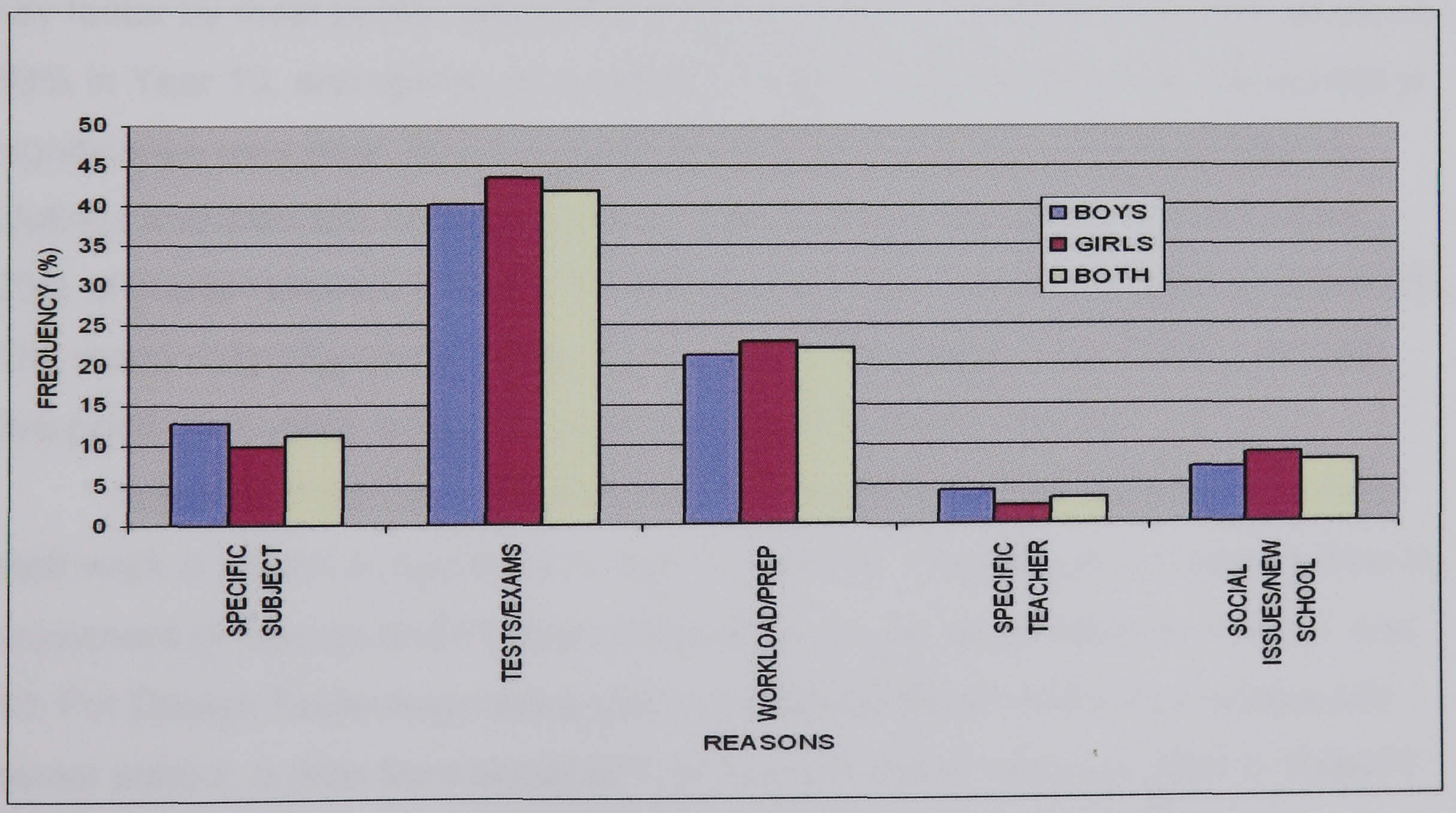

Fig. 37 Pupils' perceptions of anxiety or stress in the year to come.

were associated with tests and workload; anxiety about tests and exams was more prevalent among girls than boys. For boys, anxiety about prep and workload was more significant than worries about tests. Although a specific subject was

worrisome to about a fifth of pupils, the stress associated with teachers was relatively low. Relationships, (either with teachers or with peers) were slightly more problematic for girls than for boys. Predictions for anxiety in the coming year are shown in fig. 37. Pupils' predictions of the likely causes of unrest in the future were broadly in line with their experiences of what had caused them disquiet in the past. The graph profile is similar to fig. 36, except that there was very little difference between the likely anxieties of boys and girls.

Pupil perceptions and changes over time

The general picture must now give way to a more detailed analysis of what occurred over time, in each of the areas of the research. In order to achieve this, reference is made to the diagrams in Appendix C, which contain the detailed year-on-year data, gleaned from the four annual year-group questionnaires.

Enjoyment

Over the period of the research, pupils perceptions of their enjoyment of school was fairly consistent (Appendix C, fig. 4a), except perhaps that the place of friendships replaced that occupied by sport, over time; friendship was seen as a key factor by most pupils, rising from 50% in Year 7 to around 75%, then to about 68% in Year 10, and sports, as a most enjoyable element of school, decreased in significance over time; 60% favoured it in Year 7, reducing to 30% in Year 10. Outings and trips too, showed signs of a decreasing popularity over the years; 20% of pupils favoured these in Year 7, but by Year 10 this had fallen to about 8%. The mean data (Appendix C, fig. 4b) reflects the averaged responses from this five-point Likert-style question; broadly the profile follows fig. 4a.

In terms of school subjects, how much pupils' perceived the enjoyment of their work is shown in Appendix C, figs. 7a and 7b. Here again, the steady drop in enjoyment of Games and Physical Education can be seen, between Years 7 and 10. For Design Technology there was a notable shift between junior school and senior school: a drop from about 50% in Years 7 and 8, to below 20% in Years 9 and 10. The proportion of pupils most enjoying Science, as a part of the curriculum, decreased from 35% in Year 7, to about 25% in Year 8. In Years 8 and 9, Biology improved its stock slightly, but both Chemistry and Physics fell in popularity. Many subjects (i.e., Art, English, Maths) seemed, in the popularity

stakes, to adopt something of a 'W' profile: dropping from Year 7 to Year 8, reviving in Year 9, after transfer, and then dropping again in Year 10. In fig. 7b, the mean data readings show that, in general, the practical areas of school subjects (Games, Physical Education, Design Technology, Art, Science) were, even allowing for a decline from Year 7 to Year 10, still the most enjoyed.

The pupils' election of a single, favourite subject is shown in Appendix C, fig. 9. It can be clearly seen that Games was the most popular subject by far, in Years 7, 8 and 9. Although Physical Education was, as mentioned above, one of the most enjoyed subjects, it did not appear to warrant the same status compared to Games, as a single favourite subject. Both Maths and English gained markedly in popularity by Year 10, as did Science, proportionately. History also improved its stock by Year 10. Design Technology declined steadily from Year 7 to Year 9, but showed a revival in Year 10.

Why was a favourite subject most enjoyed? Appendix C, fig. 10a reflects those reasons that were considered most apposite in the minds of pupils. The role of the teacher figured significantly, either as a personality, or as deliverer of the subject; the way the subject was taught, as a key reason, improved slightly between Year 7 and 8; the change of schools in Year 9 may have caused a drop in significance, but a revival was apparent in Year 10. A similar drop and resurgence occurred for the rationale that delivery of the subject effected enjoyment. The largest change in fortunes was evident in the practicality and involvement pupils' perceived; the significance of having more things to do dropped hugely, from being chosen by nearly a third of pupils in Year 7, to a tenth of pupils in Year 10. Similarly, over the same period, the perceived significance of a practical/activity base to lessons was reduced by half. The degree of self-belief wavered too; enjoying a subject through having a perceived talent for it dropped slightly from Year 7 to Year 8, but revived strongly again in Year 9, after transfer, only to drop again in Year 10. The mean data recorded, from this five-point Likert-style question were fairly consistent over the period of the research, as shown in Appendix C, fig. 10b; it can be seen here that the pupils' perceptions of how a subject was taught, who taught it, the atmosphere, and it's being fun were the most significant elements that made it enjoyable.

At the other end of the scale, a least enjoyed subject was sought (Appendix C, fig. 11). Religious Education was highly disapproved of in Year 7, where nearly 40% of pupils chose it as their least liked subject. This was reduced markedly, in Year

8, to 15%, but rose again, in Years 9 and 10, to become the least favourite subject of nearly a quarter of pupils. The unpopularity of English, Maths and French each follow an 'N' pattern; their low esteem increasing from Year 7 to Year 8, then decreasing in Year 9 after transfer, then increasing again in Year 10. In the separate sciences, Biology changed hardly at all, but Chemistry and Physics tended to go in opposite directions in Years 9 and 10, with Physics becoming slightly less unpopular and Chemistry becoming more slightly more unpopular.

The reasons why subjects were not enjoyed was also examined, with given reasons ranked against a five-point Likert-scale. The results are shown in Appendix C, fig. 12a. Those reasons that were considered the most noteworthy reasons for finding a subject less enjoyable remained quite consistent over the period of the research, and were to be found in three main areas; the way the subject was taught, the relationship with the teacher, and the boredom quotient. Although the number choosing boredom as a reason fluctuated between 26% and 36%, it remained fairly consistent in Years 7 and 10, as did the subject delivery as a reason. The relationship with the teacher, as a major reason, decreased in significance, being chosen by about a third of the group in Year 7, to a quarter of the group by Year 10. The repetitive nature of the work, as a rationale for most disliking it was also reduced, from about 25% of pupils feeling this to be a key reason in Years 7 and 8; once transfer had taken place, it settled at about 15% of pupils in Years 9 and 10. A lack of self-belief, that is, perceiving a lack of talent as a key reason for not enjoying a subject seemed to decrease from Year 7 to Year 8, but then to increase in Year 9, after transfer to a new regime. Year 10 showed a subsequent drop, to a similar level as Year 8. Feeling stressed, as a reason, although at a lower level, seemed to follow a similar pattern.

Looking at what were considered to be the most favoured subjects in the current year (Appendix C, fig. 17) it can be seen that Games, as a subject became very much less favoured over time, falling from a first choice favourite of between 33% and 38% of pupils in Years 7 and 8, to a favourite of 25% in Year 9, and only 3% in Year 10. English increased in popularity from about 5% in Year 7, to 17% in Year 10; Maths too, improved, fluctuating from 8% in Year 7, down to about 2% in Year 8, and then rising to 8% in Year 9 and over 10% in Year 10. Design Technology fluctuated, rising from 15% in Year 7 to nearly 20% in Year 8, and then dropping back to a favourite of 5% of pupils in Year 9, after transfer. By Year 10, it was most popular with 17% of pupils. By Year 10, many subjects were not

registering at all in the popularity stakes; French had fallen, as had German, Information Technology, Latin and Physical Education. Religious Education remained staunchly at zero for each of the four years.

The reasons why pupils changed their favourite subjects was recorded via an open question and the responses grouped according to their nearest match. The results are shown in Appendix C, fig. 18. A key reason seemed to centre around the teacher; a majority of those who altered their subject preferences indicated that it was due to a change of teacher; from 15% in Year 7, rising to over 30% in Years 9 and 10. A perceived improvement in the subject's interest quotient seemed to appeal to between 15% and 20% of pupils in general, except after transfer, in Year 9, when it rose to 30% briefly. Attributing change to self-improvement remained fairly consistent throughout, at just below 20% (except in Year 8, when it dropped to about 16%). The introduction of new subjects or split sciences particularly, was a key factor to about 20% of pupils in Year 7. This dropped in Year 8, to 11%, and down to 3% in Year 9, but rose again to about 7% in year 10.

The graph in Appendix C, fig. 21, reflects predictions of what pupils' thought might be their favourite subjects in the coming year. As can be seen, this broadly followed pupils' experiences of their current favourite subjects. English, Maths and Biology were clearly significant favourites by Year 10, as were Design Technology and Art. The decline of Games as a predicted favourite was similar to the pupils' contemporaneous experiences (shown in Appendix C, fig. 17) except perhaps it was slightly sharper, between Year 8 (33%) and Year 9 (14%).

Reasons for changing future favourite subjects were predicted also, and the results are shown in Appendix C, fig. 22. As might have been expected, predictions about the change of work regime or teacher were cited by over 50% of pupils at the end of Year 8, prior to transfer. The proportion of pupils feeling the effect remained fairly high, at about 45%, in Year 9 as well. By Year 10, the number had fallen to about 15%, which was closer to the level found in Year 7 (20%). Self-belief as a key reason for changing favourite subjects was in steady decline: falling from about 27% of pupils (in Year 7), to 11% in Year 8, 3% in Year 9, and none at all in Year 10. Pupil numbers predicting hard work causing a change were fairly low in Years 7, 8 and 9 (at around 5%), but increased (to 50%) in Year 10.

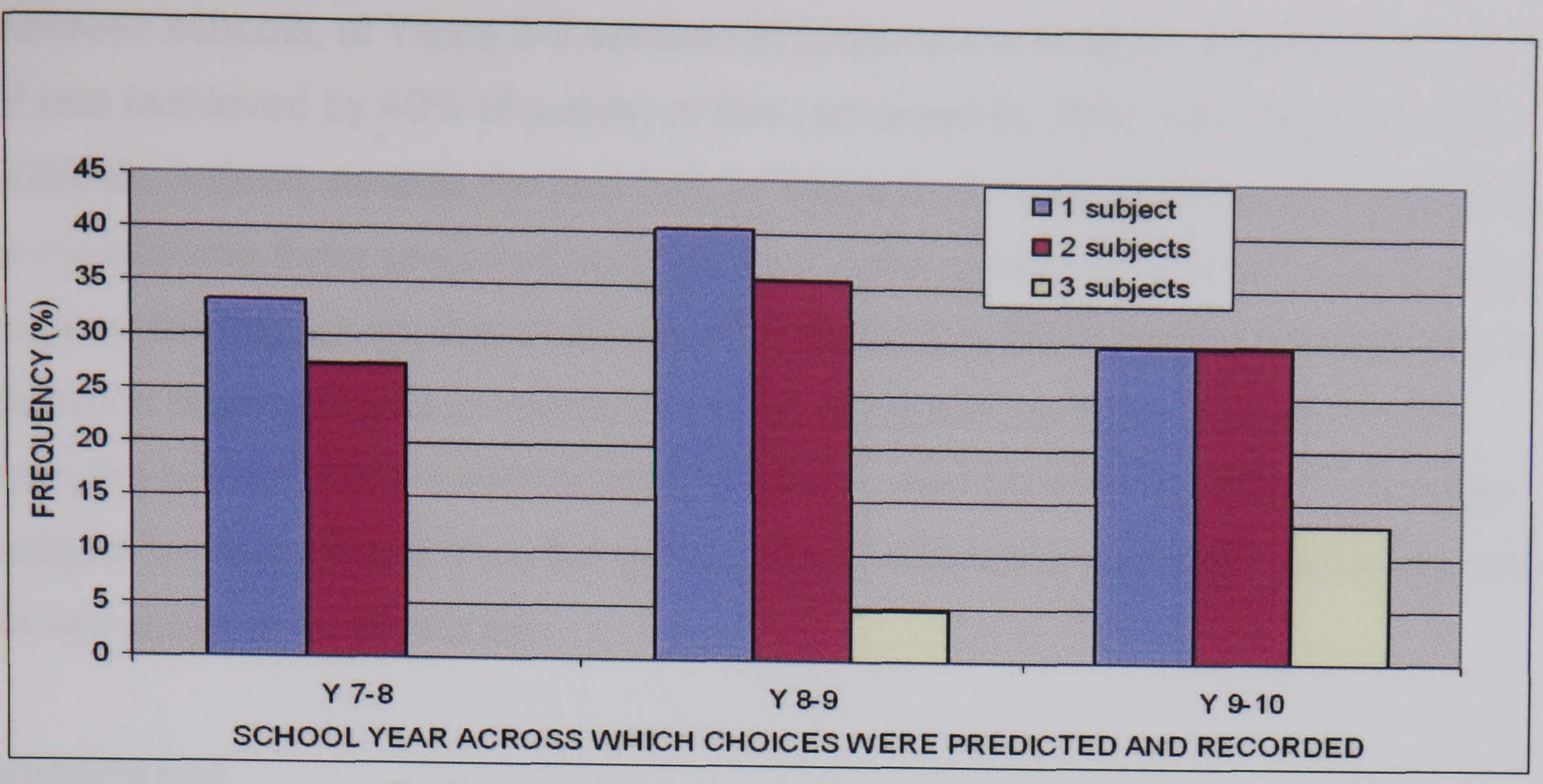

Fig. 38. Top three favourite subjects: prediciton versus reality
How many pupils maintained their predicted subject choices?
(boys and girls)

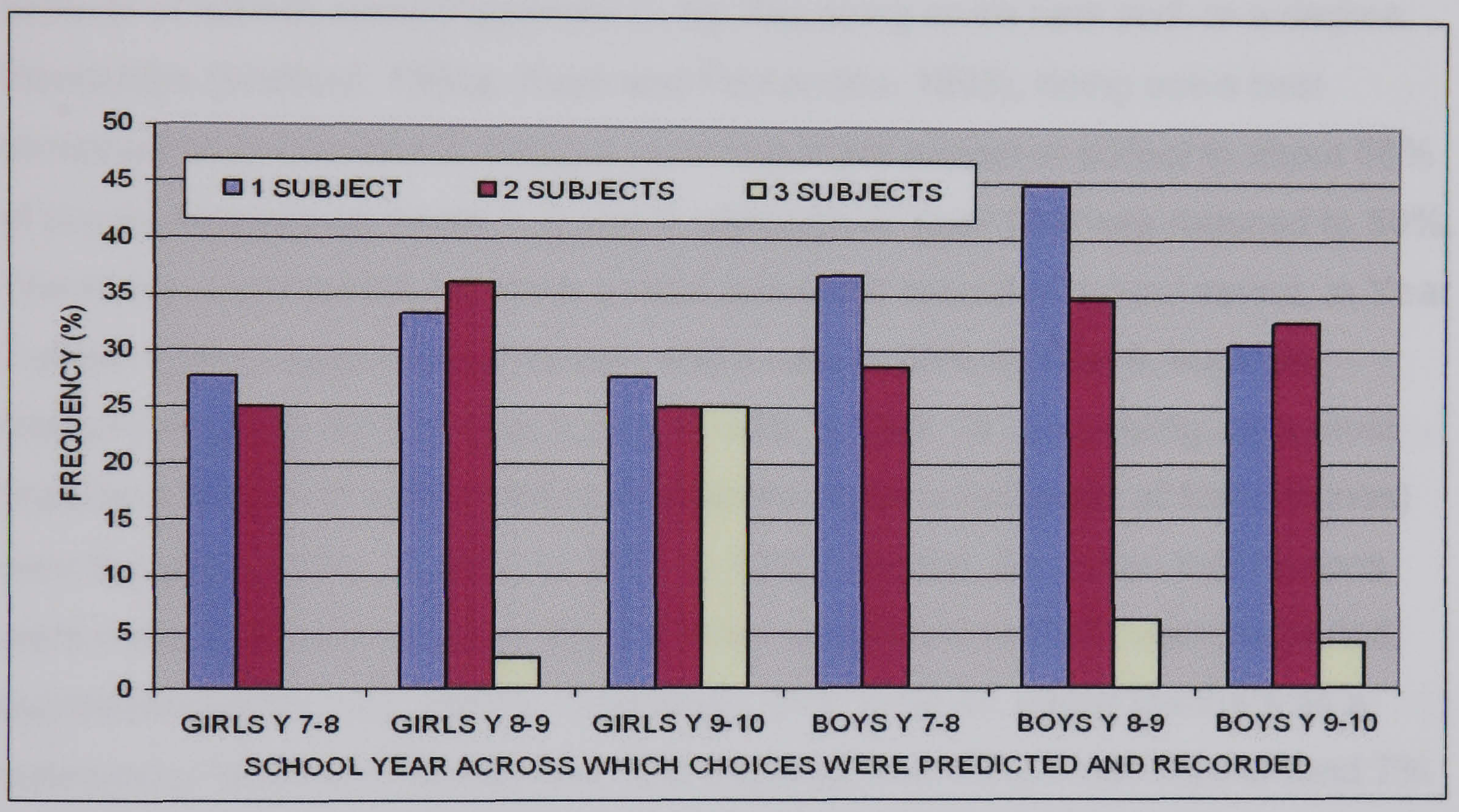

Fig. 39. Top three favourite subjects: prediction versus reality (Gender difference)
How many pupils maintained their predicted subject choices?

Because pupils were asked both to report and forecast, their top three favourite subjects (in terms of both the current year and the forthcoming year) there was an element of unpredictability. Fig. 38 reflects the accuracy of these forecasts, showing the proportion of pupils who successfully maintained one, two, or all three of their predicted subjects. As can be seen, the capacity to maintain three subjects increased from Years 7-8, where it did not occur at all, to 5% of pupils succeeding in Years 8-9, and about 12% of pupils succeeding in Years 9-10. It was easier to maintain one (achieved by 33% of pupils) predicted subject, rather than two (achieved by 27% of pupils), between Years 7-8. The transfer

between schools, at Years 8-9 seemed to produce the most successful retention of one (achieved by 40% of pupils) or two (achieved by 35% of pupils) predicted subjects; indeed, despite the fact that, in Years 9-10, more pupils were succeeding in maintaining three predicted subjects, the years either side of transfer seemed to support the largest number of successes overall. Fig. 39 illustrates the differences between boys and girls in maintaining their predicted favourite subject choices over the period of the research. Girls, it can be clearly seen, improved their three-subject score markedly over the period, whilst boys were better at maintaining one or two subjects as favourites.

Importance

What pupils in this research group considered to be the most important aspects of school, were (Appendix C, fig. 5a) doing one's best and, to a degree, friendships (Walford, 1986a; Keys and Fernandes, 1993); doing one's best remained fairly consistent, being a most important aspect of school to about 56% of pupils, throughout Years 7, 8 and 9, although in Year 10 it was reduced to 50%. The notion that friendships were a most important aspect of school varied; in Year 7 about 43% of pupils saw it as key, and it rose to 63% in Year 8, but then dropped to about 55% in Year 9, and to 35% in Year 10. Socialising, as a most important feature of school, followed a similar pattern (although at lower values) over the years (22%, to 30%, to 25%, to 10%). Overall, the notion that lessons were most important dropped slightly (from about 30% to 23%) over the period, but learning skills rose slightly (from about 25% to 30%). Liking teachers as a noteworthy factor was always low, and dropped over the period, from around 7% to 3%. Because the information was drawn from a question that ranked responses to how important a number of given aspects of school were, against a five-point Likert scale, the mean data (Appendix C, fig. 5b) reflects a generalised picture of responses. The overall pattern was similar, but there was less difference between the place of friendships and doing one's best as important aspects of school. Other aspects, such as leaning skills, lessons, and socialising, as reasons, seemed to be more on a par overall. Liking teachers, as an aspect of school remained low in importance; indeed, in Year 8, it was lowest of all.

How pupils' perceived the importance of subjects was ranked against a five-point Likert scale. What they considered as most important is shown in Appendix C, fig. 8a. To these pupils, Maths, English and Science were clearly the most

significant subjects, over the whole period. The practical subjects, such as Art, Design Technology and Music remained very low in the rankings, as did Religious Education. The importance of subjects in general is reflected in Appendix C, fig. 8b, which shows the mean values for the rankings of subjects. Maths, English and Science were still the most important subjects overall, although their importance diminished over time. Games and Physical Education remained important too, outranking other (academic) subjects. Many subjects increased marginally in importance from Year 9 to 10 (options having been taken), only Maths, Latin and Art dropped slightly.

A single, most important subject was sought (Appendix C, fig. 13) and again, Maths, English and Science were the significant subjects in the minds of pupils, although, overall, Maths dropped slightly, and English rose slightly. In general, Maths garnered the support of between 33% and 45% of pupils, and English between 25% and 35%; Science was important to between 7% and 15% of pupils.

As to why these subjects were considered important, Appendix C, fig. 14a reflects the proportion of pupils finding the given reasons most compelling. Requiring the knowledge for later life, for work, or for a particular job, were most significant in the minds of pupils (Adey and Biddulph, 2001) and this even in spite of a fall in the overall numbers of pupils thinking this over the period of the research. For pupils in Year 7, there was a degree of significance attached to having friends in the class, a significance that declined steadily between Year 7 and Year 10. A similar trait seemed to attach to adult influence; getting on with the teacher, and parental influence over the subject's importance, also saw a decline as a most important reason. The mean data is shown in Appendix C, fig. 14b, and it can be seen that the general trend overall is similar to that in Appendix C, fig. 14a.

At the other end of the spectrum, a single, least important subject was sought. The results are shown in Appendix C, fig. 15. Religious Education was perceived as the least important overall, followed by Latin and Music. Although Religious Education was least important to 40% of pupils in Year 7, its unpopularity decreased in Year 8 (33%) and Year 9 (21%), only to surge in year 10 (to 47%). With the exception of Religious Education, by Year 10, most subjects were certainly disliked by less than 7% of pupils.

As to why a subject was regarded as being unimportant to pupils, a number of given reasons were ranked against a five-point Likert scale; the results recorded for those reasons that mattered most to pupils, can be seen in Appendix C, fig 16a. Not needing the knowledge later in life, or it being seen as irrelevant, were generally seen as the two most notable reasons for dismissing a subject, although the relevance of a subject did seem to waver; more Year 7 pupils saw subject irrelevance as a factor (50%) than did Year 8 (36%) pupils. Similarly, more Year 9 pupils (52%) cited irrelevance as an issue than did Year 10 pupils (39%); an increase in relevance seemed to coincide with moving schools and the onset of GCSE. Those subjects that were considered unimportant were also thought to be less useful later in life; 36% of pupils in Year 7 considered this to be a factor, rising to 46% in Year 8 and 59% in Year 9. The perspective had changed by Year 10, however, with a similar number (37%) of pupils as in Year 7 citing a subject's lack of usefulness as a consideration. Boredom was a key factor for pupils in Year 7 (39% thought so), although this declined to around 23% of pupils by Year 10. Negative feelings about the input of the adult world also decreased as a factor over the period of the research. Not liking the teacher declined between Year 7 and Year 10: from about 28% of pupils to about 7% of pupils citing it as a major factor. Other adult inferences, in the form of parental considerations about a subject's worth also declined between Year 7 and Year 10 (from 21% to 4%). The mean data for this question is shown in Appendix C, fig. 16b; the results overall do reflect those in fig. 16a, with a subject's perceived lack of relevance and usefulness to the fore, closely followed by boredom as a factor. In general terms, the pupil rationale for disaffection declined for most reasons, between Year 7 and Year 10, except in the case of boredom, which remained fairly static at about 3.5.

The top three subjects regarded as important in the current year were sought; Appendix C fig. 19 shows the results for those given as a first choice. Maths, English and Science were clearly the most significant, and in that order, over the whole period of the research. No other subject was noteworthy, even to a 5% level. Maths generally declined in importance between Year 7 and Year 10 (from 47% to around 36%), whilst English rose, from 23% in Year 7, to 28% in Year 10 (there was a fluctuation upwards in Year 8, where its importance was cited by 36% of pupils). The stock of Science improved also, and as split sciences, Biology and Chemistry rose, but Physics declined.

The reasons why pupils changed their top three important subjects in the current year were charted. The results are shown in Appendix C, fig 20. The significance of a subject being split and it being new, was high in Year 7 (a reason for 45% of those who altered their choices), but then reduced in significance to about 4% of pupils thereafter. A subject being perceived as having become more importance increased in significance over time, being cited as a reason for change by about 28% of pupils who changed in Year 7, to over 80% of pupils who changed in Year 10.

Predictions of important subjects for the year ahead were sought, and the results (for the first choices of important subject) are shown in Appendix C, fig. 23. The same three subjects (Maths, English and Science) were considered to be the most important (Miller et al., 1999); here though Maths was becoming more important over the years rather than less, and English moved slightly lower overall, from Year 7 to Year 10.

Reasons why these choices might change are reflected in Appendix C, fig. 24. The subject's perceived usefulness in the future was an increasingly important one for changing choices; 47% of Year 7 pupils who thought that they might change their minds did so because of this. 63% of Year 8 pupils did so, as did 65% of Year 9 pupils. In Year 10, the proportion had slipped back to about 33% of pupils. As this reason had risen then dropped (in Year 10) in significance, other reasons had declined and then revived; the subject changing, and the work getting harder followed similar patterns, both reducing as key reasons between Year 7 and Year 9, and then reviving in Year 10. In Years 7, 8 and 9, the subject's usefulness was a major reason for changing; in Year 10, all three reasons were equally weighted.

GCSE

GCSE as a discrete issue was tackled, via one question, throughout the four years. At the start, (in Years 7 and 8) pupils were asked which subjects they would elect to study for GCSE, if they were given a free hand. Responses were ranked on a four-point Likert scale, possible responses ranging from a definite decision to study a subject, to a definite decision not to do so. Once options had been taken (in Year 9), the structure of the question changed, as subjects fell into those that were being studied, and those that were not; pupils were tasked with saying how happy they were with the choices they had made.

Appendix C, fig. 27a correlates data from Years 7 and 8, where pupils had positively elected to choose a subject for GCSE, and Years 9 and 10, where those who were studying a subject for GCSE were reportedly happy to be doing so. The preferences for Years 9 and 10 follow each other quite closely. The majority of pupils studying English, Maths and Science said that they were happy to be doing so, and the number was slightly increased in Year 10. In the sciences, more pupils were happy doing Biology in Year 10 than in Year 9, but the situation was slightly reversed for Chemistry and Physics. The non-core compulsory subjects (French and Religious Education) improved their ratings over time. French was freely elected as a GCSE subject by about 22% of pupils in Year 7 and about 38% of pupils in Year 8. By Year 9 this had risen to about 65% saying they were happy doing it, and marginally more (67%) saying so in Year 10. The number of pupils being happy with Religious Education as a subject rose steadily too; in Year 7 about 4% said that they would elect to study it; in Year 8 this had risen to about 10%. After options, in Year 9, 20% were happy to be studying it, and in Year 10 this had risen to 40%. Geography, as a subject, behaved similarly, the proportion of pupils electing, and being happy with it, moved from about 8% in Year 7 to just over 50% in Year 10. Art and Design Technology behaved in fairly similar ways for Years 7 and 8, being elected by around 10% (Art) and 15% (Design Technology) of pupils. In Year 9, those pupils happily studying Art had risen to about 35% (25% for Design Technology). In Year 10, the number of pupils happily studying Art dropped slightly whilst the number doing so in Design Technology rose slightly, so that numbers were fairly even at between 28 and 30% of pupils. For Latin and Music, the movement of pupil choice over four years was marginal; in both cases the numbers remained fairly constrained at about 9-12% of pupils reacting positively for both subjects.

Appendix C, fig. 27b correlates data for pupils who made almost the opposite case to that above. It correlates data for Years 7 and 8 (pupils who stated that they would definitely not choose a subject for GCSE), and Years 9 and 10, (pupils who were happy not studying a subject for GCSE). Predictably, numbers of students electing not to choose English, Maths and Science were low, in Years 7 and 8, reflecting a perception that, even given the choice, pupils would elect to study what they saw as hard subjects. The compulsory none-core subjects were not wholly perceived as being a real part of the GCSE scenario for some pupils in Years 7 and 8; around 37% of pupils, for instance, said that they were definitely

not studying Religious Education for GCSE, and about 8% said the same for French. For the rest of the non-compulsory subjects; in general, decisions about what would not be studied were made in Year 7, and (with the exception of German) became more entrenched by the end of Year 8. The fact that numbers of students making these decisions increased rather than decreased, perhaps reflected a consistency of purpose in their minds.

The successful GCSE option choices having been made in did not necessarily mean that pupils were completely happy with the status quo. Appendix C, fig. 27c reflects data for those pupils who were studying a subject, but would have liked not to have done so. In the compulsory core subjects, there were a small number of pupils who would have preferred not to do GCSE courses in them. The numbers for English were about 18% in Year 9, dropping to about 10% in Year 10. In Maths, the disaffection led about 23% of pupils to express disquiet in Year 9, dropping to about 17% in Year 10. In the sciences, Biology was the least disliked, only about 16% of pupils in Year 9 would have dropped it (and about 7% in Year 10). Chemistry stayed fairly static; about 20% of pupils each year saying they would have preferred not to do it. Physics was the science that was most disliked; nearly 30% of pupils (in each year) said that they would not have done it, had they been given the choice. The non-core subjects attracted a greater degree of disaffection; Religious Education was terribly unpopular in Year 9, with nearly 75% of pupils saying that they would have preferred not to do it. By year 10 this had dropped to about 53%. French attracted slightly less hostility; around a third of pupils in each year said that they would have liked not to study it for GCSE.

Appendix C, fig. 27d reflects the data for those pupils who had not chosen a subject for GCSE, but then thought that perhaps they would have liked to. The practical subjects seemed to attract the highest numbers of disaffected pupils; about 17% wished that they had done Art and about 20% wished that they had done Design Technology. Drama, even as a new subject, nevertheless drew the attention of about 12% of pupils in Year 10. Although they were not GCSE subjects at all, both Games and Physical Education were each subjects that attracted the interest of about 15% of pupils. Reflecting on a choice at the end of Year 9 will have been different to reflecting on a choice at the end of Year 10, so, for each subject, a decrease (over the two years) in numbers showing disaffection might be natural. The opposite was the case in Drama (markedly) and in both

Design and Technology and Music, where more pupils in Year 10 signified that they would have changed, than was the case in Year 9.

Anxiety

Because the questionnaires were conducted toward the end of each academic year, in the summer, questions addressing causes of anxiety and stress in the current year and the year to come were considered a useful way of gauging some of the influences felt by the pupils. The questions were open, so responses were grouped according to a nearest match.

Appendix C, fig. 25 reflects pupils' feelings about the stresses experienced in the current year; data that could be considered more retrospective. As pupils developed, the stress caused by a specific subject seemed to lessen (an issue for about 38% of pupils in Year 7, but only about 5% of pupils in Year 10), whilst anxiety about workload and prep seemed to increase (about 11% of pupils in Year 7 felt it to be an issue, rising to over 50% of pupils in Year 10). Tests and exams did worry between 25% and 35% of pupils generally, but the levels in Year 7 were broadly the same as levels in Year 10; it was the two years either side of transfer that seemed to cause most anxiety in this respect. Issues about specific teachers were similarly confined, to between 5% and 10% of pupils overall. Social issues did worry an increasing number of pupils over the period but always below 10%.

Pupils' predictions about what might cause anxiety or stress in the year to come are shown in Appendix C, fig. 26. Here it can be seen that tests and exams were an increasing worry: from about 28% of pupils in Year 7, rising to about 70% of pupils in Year 10. For the early years the predictions and the actuality were fairly accurately aligned; the large increase in Year 10 perhaps reflects anxiety over the impending GCSE exams. A specific subject causing anxiety was an anxiety that lessened (affecting around 20% of pupils in Year 7, reducing to about 3% in year 10). Again, the number of pupils predicting anxieties with subjects was fairly close to the actuality. Workload and prep as a predicted issue was rising from Year 7 (10% of pupils citing it) until Year 9 (40%), after which point it dropped back in Year 10 (19%). For this, matches of prediction against actuality were slightly low (by between 5% and 15%); in retrospect, pupils found that workload and prep was a cause of greater anxiety than they had anticipated. There was little predicted anxiety about a specific teacher: an issue for about 5% of pupils, rising slightly for the transition year (10%). Predictions about social issues being

problematic were low, except for the year prior to transfer, where it concerned 28% of pupils.

Pupil perceptions derived from the yearly Interviews

Although the research generally used a complete year group, interviews were conducted using a sample of ten pupils: five girls and five boys, selected at random from the group. The sample was gender balanced although, in the year as a whole there were more boys than girls (about 60% to 40%). The even split was thought necessary to get a gender balanced reflection of viewpoints. Although the selection of pupils was random, there were, in the group, one boy and one girl who were full time boarders, and one boy who was a 'day boarder' in that he stayed in school until late evening.

The analysis of the interviews that follows looks at the impressions gained from the exchanges, over time. As with the chapters that looked at data from each discrete year, the material is arranged by headings that reflect the main research questions: the enjoyment and importance of school and subjects, and the influences that have been brought to bear over time.

Enjoyment

School

For most pupils in Year 8, there was a sense of enjoyment of the moment; the responsibilities and the benefits of being at the top of a school hierarchy, but these were tempered with a sense of nervousness about the impending move and the unknown; especially the prospect of forging new relationships with a fresh group of teachers. From the perspective of junior school, the prospect of serious schoolwork, working in smaller sets, seemingly divorced from contemporary social groups, seemed daunting:

> ...when I was going around it just looked scary and you'd see people in classes doing A levels or whatever they were doing and there'd be like four people there and it just...looks really hard and you're kind of by yourself and you can't sit next to one another...(girl B, Year 8)

but the prospect of common rooms and more freedom countered this apprehension to a degree. In general terms, friendship was the key to enjoyment

of school at this stage; being with friends and learning how to get on with people socially.

By Year 9, this seemed to still centre around friendships, and to a degree, sports and games. Also, having now gained what they had foreseen the previous year, pupils reported how much they enjoyed the new freedoms and having common rooms.

Although friendship was still important, sports and fitness had become more significant, and there was, by Year 10, a perceived increase in the pressure of work (Chaplain, 1996); this, coupled with the sense that time was more constrained, tempered pupils' enjoyment of school somewhat. Time was an important element in pupils' lives, and the long week (six days) was now providing a focus for disquiet.

The main emphasis in Year 11 was still on friends and sport, although the relationships with teachers were enjoyed more.

Subjects

The enjoyment of subjects in Year 8 was marked by a perception of there being a divide between what were seen as the serious subjects and what were viewed as the more frivolous subjects; non-serious subjects signified more fun and more freedom. Subjects such as Games and Physical Education were most enjoyed because there was a sense that the work done was stress-free and fun (Alerby, 2003; Nishimura et al., 2003; Pollard and Triggs, 2000). The degree of practicality involved in a subject was a facet of schoolwork that suggested a high level of enjoyment too; in Art and Design Technology this was seen as a positive aspect of the subjects, but Chemistry was more enigmatic; it had a practical and exciting side to it, but was considered to be part and parcel of a serious discipline –science. Perceiving oneself as talented at a subject also had a bearing on how much it was enjoyed (Adey and Biddulph, 2001) and this could be influenced by perceptions of how peers coped with the same work:

> ...I can't read music and that makes it hard, and like you get lost on a keyboard...like there's the (boys) who go off and do this big thing and there's me just going like that and I'm blooming lost...I can't play anything...(girl A, Year 8)

Creativity was something that pupils perceived as being a precursor to enjoyment of a subject; if creativity were allowed or encouraged, then a subject would

become more enjoyable as a result. This was more evident in Art and Design Technology, but could be found, at times, in other subjects, such as History. The teacher was perceived as being the gatekeeper of fun at times; a teacher who was seen as being strict would not be someone who would allow 'fun' to happen. The teacher was seen as someone with whom a relationship had to be established, and through whom the subject was to be learned. There were, in the eyes of pupils, both 'good' and 'bad' teachers; for some pupils, getting to grips with a subject was wholly dependent on the relationship they had with the teacher:

> ...when I was in Year 6 I hated (subject x)...I was terrified of it...I struggled to do the work and I had (male teacher S), yeah? As soon as I got into Year 7 I had (male teacher B), and it all seemed to click into place you know? cos (he) is much more laid back than (male teacher S) and it became so: 'oh I get you', stuff like that, but, err, yeah, so I was terrified of going into school on Friday morning...(boy B, Year 8)

Even though some subjects were seen as being easier than others, teachers were perceived as being crucial to success in understanding the subject (Morgan and Morris, 1999).

In Year 9, pupils seemed to enjoy the challenge and perceived complexity of new subjects or ways of teaching. The introduction of new curriculum material and the fact of having new teachers seems to have made some pupils change their minds about their enjoyment of subjects; a lot of what was being experienced was classed as more interesting; subjects were opening up and new ideas were being explored. What had been seen as the 'doss', or low-stress subjects were still enjoyed, but the evidence of high quality (by their standards) work by older peers, in, for instance, Art, was having a positive effect on attitudes to the subject. The preference shown by the boys for Science and Maths seemed to become more entrenched (Warrington and Younger, 2000), as did the girls dislike of these subjects.

In Year 10, GCSE options will have reduced the perception of subjects as being irrelevant, by and large; there were still the compulsory and core subjects, but having made a choice will have made some difference. Although it was not the most enjoyed subject, Religious Education was going through something of a renaissance and this was, in the minds of pupils, something to do with both the relevant content of the subject, and the degree of involvement the pupils felt that they enjoyed. The practical subjects were, for the most part, still the area where most enjoyment was to be had. It was also thought to be the variation in

curriculum, teacher approach and the teacher as a personality that improved the enjoyment of lessons. It was also the case that a perceived talent for a subject enhanced the enjoyment of a subject, and vice versa. A lack of enjoyment was still linked to the perceived value of a subject, a case that, although easier to make for peripheral subjects, did occasionally affect core subjects:

> ...(English is)...too much of the analysis thing, and it's not about the English language and how to use it...it is all about analysing poetry and stuff like that which, when you leave school, are not going to be any use to you at all...(boy E, Year 10)

and in particular, in the case of girls, towards Physics, which was (sometimes confusedly) linked to Maths:

> ...(Physics)...can be quite boring and if you are bad at Maths then you are likely to be bad at Physics, although I am quite good at Physics, but I am crap at Maths, so I don't really know how it works...(girl B, Year 10)

Subjects were, by and large, enjoyed more in Year 11 because of the personality of the teacher, or their adopting a laid back teaching style, or pupils engaging in more group work. Enjoyment was still more evident in subjects that had some practicality, or were perceived as easier, or where pupils perceived that they had a talent. There was more evidence of 'doss-surrogacy' where the pupils labelled a subject as one where they could adopt a more laid-back attitude and rest:

> ...Physics is really dossy...well it's not cos I can't do it...but it is, cos you don't do anything...so...don't know if that counts...(girl E, Year 11)

Subjects could be considered a doss for almost diametrically opposite reasons; either because everyone was perceived as so smart that the work was a breeze, or because there was a perception that pupils felt that they could get away with doing very little work at all. There was still a hearty defence, by practitioners, of those subjects that were generally considered as the doss subjects (Art, Design Technology, Drama). A lack of enjoyment of subjects was put down to them being too hard, or the work not being understood. Boredom was a key factor in not enjoying subjects (boys cited English and girls cited Physics). If expectations were not being met (not enough practical lessons in Design Technology, for example) then this could reduce the enjoyment.

Importance

School

The concept of importance, in Year 8 was seen as being multi-faceted:

> …one of those things that you know but you don't know…there's what's important to you and what's important to everything…there's what you like and there's what you think is important and I don't really have an important…I have what I like…(girl E, Year 8)

Important lessons were equated with hard work, and vice versa, and friendship was considered important, as was the idea of getting along with others and learning social skills. That being at school was important in that it helped one to get a good job later on (Rudduck and Day, 1996) was understood:

> …so later on in life you don't have to be a dustbin person or working in MacDonald's…(girl B, Year 8)

By Year 9, Friendships were still important, as was the learning of manners and social skills and being able to get on well with other people. Teaching was acknowledged as important, but so was having fun, especially before the serious work of GCSE coursework started.

The important features of school in Year 10 were still friendships and sports and games, but there was also the business of going to school and learning 'stuff'; the imminence of GCSEs had seen to that. By now, pacing ones-self was seen as an important part of the game.

GCSE provided the main impetus for importance of school in Year 11, but there were other considerations too; the social aspects of school were important, such as learning life skills and experiencing relationships with other people (Anderson, 1996). Importance was also attached to consideration of what came after GCSE.

Subjects

Although the general perception of the importance of subjects had broadened by Year 8, beyond the core subjects of Maths, English and Science (because of testing prior to entry to senior school) it was the core subjects that were still considered as the most important. The rationale was that, certainly for Maths and English, these were subjects that were necessary for successful entry into good jobs and careers, as well as being valuable generally in life (Duffield,

1998). Science, as an important subject was often seen as being useful for 'doing science'; pupils related its value to helping their own children with science homework. Important subjects were the ones that were worked hardest at; one had to try hard at these because they were important (Adey and Biddulph, 2001; Colley and Comber, 2003). Conversely, those subjects that were seen as unimportant were also those that were perceived as having no value later in life.

There was, in Year 9, a sense of everything increasing in importance, because of the impending GCSEs, and this involved strengthened opinions about the compulsory nature of some of the non-core subjects, as well as a more eloquent rationale for the necessity of Maths, English and Science:

> ...Maths is one of the staples of life; it's where all the theories come from...I mean, if Maths didn't exist, then you wouldn't be able to have that filing cabinet, because they wouldn't have been able to work out the theories of...I mean, everyday life...you use Maths all the time, you go to buy a CD and you buy some sweets, and you think: 'have I got enough money to go to the cinema later?' or whatever...(boy D, Year 9)

although there was a stronger sense (mainly from the girls) that some of the core science subjects could be dispensed with without serious consequences. There was, too, a more obvious divide between the boys and the girls over their feelings about Maths and English; girls enthused over English, as boys did over Maths. Boys tended to link Maths and Physics in a positive way, but girls seemed able to rationalise Physics away because it was seen as a form of Maths. For other subjects to be accorded any importance, there needed to be some sense that there was a practical use there:

> ...like, for Geography, you'll need to know how to read a map when you're older...(boy A, Year 9)

This strengthened the argument against Religious Education as a compulsory subject, as it could not be rationalised as being useful or relevant. It was the case too, that, because of GCSE option choices, some pupils were already beginning to sideline those subjects that would be dropped at the end of the year. The perception of subject hierarchy still relegated those subjects that were considered as 'doss' subjects to a secondary position, but there was a sense that the third form was considered the calm before the storm, and should be regarded as a bit of a 'doss' year, and this seemed to be something that was understood from

observation of what went on in other year groups, as well as being a message picked up from older peers.

In Year 10, the core subjects, Maths, English and Science were still seen as the most important, although, since options, there were arguments made for the value of the more peripheral subjects that had been option choices. There was a link made between the need to do something you enjoyed later on, as a career, so it validated the desire to do something (subjects) that was enjoyed now. There was, too, a clearer perception of the relative skills needed to tackle different subjects; Physics, for instance, was harder to do than Geography:

> ...anyone can do it; you get any thick person and just give them a load of facts and stuff and get them to write it down...(boy D, Year 10)

Those subjects that had been taken as options were now argued for more forcefully as being important; their status was higher now. Consequently, subjects that had been dropped were rationalised away more readily as being irrelevant and their lack of usefulness was seen as key to this. In pupils' minds, the important subjects were beginning to emerge as those that had value, where one had a talent for them and which were enjoyed. Those subjects seen as unimportant were those that were irrelevant, where no talent existed and which were boring.

The amount of work that a subject entailed had some impact on its perceived importance. In the third form, there were still lessons that could be generally classified as 'doss' lessons; by Year 10, although these had disappeared, for many pupils, some subjects (for instance, Art, Design Technology and Drama) still had 'doss' written all over them; their adherents often felt that they had to stoutly defend the subjects and make the case that there was plenty of work to be done, in order to justify them as proper subjects:

> ...like, DT...I thought that would be an easy thing but ...I mean...you get loads to do, like drawing...(girl D, Year 10)

The compulsory subjects did cause some disquiet, although, in general there was a sense that Religious Education was at least a GCSEs, so pupils ought to just get on with it. Arguments against its compulsion were more livid, and took the line that not having a Faith made the subject more irrelevant, although it was (reluctantly) accepted that the Christian roots of the school meant that the subject's inclusion had some inevitability. A compulsory language was not disliked;

French was not so badly thought of; it was seen as relevant for, at the worst, holiday shopping, but there was a feeling that a language choice ought to be available.

By Year 11, GCSEs were considered almost as part of the furniture, attitudes to subjects had changed somewhat and Religious Education was still enjoying something of a revival. Maths, English and Science were still the prime subjects, but there was more awareness that these three were not necessarily a panacea for all career choices, and there was evidence of individual subjects having importance:

> …a subject like Drama…if you'd asked me about Drama a couple of years ago I'd have probably said it's not important…but now…because it's a career option, it's actually very important…it's all about looking to your future…(boy B, Year 11)

The concept of enjoyment was considered important at this stage; it was better to do something that was enjoyed. There was a sense that intrinsic motivation existed inside extrinsic motivation:

> …I think it's because, if you enjoy it, it will go further up (your list) because you enjoy it…then you are happy in that subject, but if you don't like it, it will fall to the bottom…(girl A, Year 11)

GCSEs

The GCSE itself provided some motivation, even in Year 8. For some, (boys in the main) a sense of reassurance was derived from current successes; if one was able to do well at this stage, then how hard could it be, really? For others, the prospect of GCSE indicated more work, which would require longer hours and more concentration (a view shared more by girls). As to specific GCSE subject choices, some pupils had a definite sense of what they wanted to do, whereas others were still unsure even about what the process of choice entailed.

For some pupils in Year 9, the GCSE option choices were still not thought of in any great detail but others had already considered the implications of GCSE choices on what might be subject options for AS and A level. The evidence provided by senior peers moving on and out of school had concentrated the minds of many, and the prospect of their having to do the same was now becoming a reality.

By Year 10, some pupils had managed to rationalise their GCSE choices quite easily, some had elected what they saw as safe and 'doable' subjects. In

some cases, as a result of higher than expected achievement, subjects were chosen that had heretofore not been considered as contenders. Not all subject choices were perceived positively; for some pupils, they were a rationalisation of the least bad choices. For some, the choices made were not supportable in practice, and they managed to change. Now that GCSEs had started, the exam was not seen as such a bogeyman. Coursework, although hard, was seen as making an incremental contribution to the ultimate goal. Getting good grades was important, for the most part; avoiding a 'C' grade especially, except, perhaps in those subjects seen as irrelevant.

The sixth form courses were beginning to impinge upon the consciousness by now; there was a realisation that work did not cease, but continued with AS, then A levels. Some pupils had already made tentative subject choices for sixth form:

> ...I am not worried, I am massively ahead, I have already decided what I am doing for AS level, but I don't know what I am doing for A Level...I am looking forward to it; I am looking forward to just doing the ones that I like...every subject will be my subject...(boy D, Year 10)

and many were beginning to filter the definite 'no' subjects from the possible 'yes' subjects. The approach of A levels made something of a connection between the end of school and the start of careers; it was almost as if the end was in sight by now; an awareness that would have been intensified by the shared experiences of older siblings and peers. There was also, by Year 10, lingering disquiet about option choices, which meant that some misgivings were expressed about the limited GCSE curriculum on offer. This was particularly effusive when linked to the heavy financial investment made.

There was, in Year 11, some criticism still, of the lack of perceived breadth in both the GCSE curriculum, and also the AS and A level curriculum.

Career choices

Career choices were, for some in Year 8, too far away to be significant, but for others, a path had been mapped out quite carefully. The relative difficulty of pursuing some professional career paths was becoming clearer, with some understanding of the specific subject requirements, or the perceived workload, and these were affecting judgements about possibilities. There was a perception that

some careers were more secure than others; that they paid better, and could thus be considered 'good' careers.

In Year 9, GCSE and AS and A level subjects all impinged on choices, and for many pupils, distinct and set career choices were pronounced with less vigour; there was now thought to be a wide choice available and it was not necessary to stick to a single plan.

There was still, for some in Year 10, a feeling of ambivalence about what specifically might be taken up as a career, although a number of pupils had mapped out a path that they saw themselves following. There was more serious consideration given to how rewarding a job ought to be; pupils wanted to pursue an enjoyable and interesting career.

The prospect of having to go to work, was, by Year 11, becoming a reality and getting closer. Rather than adopting high profile careers *per se*, there was more discussion about taking up interesting or rewarding careers.

Stress or anxiety

Stress or anxiety felt by pupils in Year 8, was largely to do with work; either the amount that was being done, or the perception that teachers were driving them forward at a fast pace. For some pupils there was a feeling too that the business of having to keep up with peers was stressful; there seemed to be an air of competitiveness, particularly in the higher sets. Perceptions about the degree of stress experienced in a subject, only served to differentiate more obviously those subjects that were perceived as being more relaxed, where one could work slowly, or talk, or enjoy the lessons more freely.

Transitional stress having been largely dissipated in Year 9, the anxiety was superseded by the prospect of GCSEs and coursework. There was perceived to be a noticeable increase in workload, but this was coupled with a concomitant improvement in the work ethic of most pupils. Observation of more senior year groups who had been through the process, together with the reassuring statistics of the previous years' GCSE results, served to reassure pupils to a large degree.

There was less worry, by Year 10, about the GCSE exams themselves, although coursework was considered stressful, and consequently pupils saw themselves as tired and overworked. There was a tension between the encouragement provided by historical exam successes, and anxiety about being seen as the candidate who gained a 'C' grade.

There were, in Year 11, still pupils who felt reassured by the historical high GCSEs grades achieved in the past, but there were still also those who feared being a lone pupil with a 'C' grade. There was, though, an underlying mantra that work equalled reward:

> …when you sit and think about it, you have so much time to revise, and so much of it you know, and it's just…like my friend was saying: 'we're the above average part of the country, and therefore we can do this, it's not difficult'…because, in, like, in History and stuff, he says: 'you are my A star set, and you will get A stars'…and, you know: 'you will achieve that'…and …I don't think it's pressurising because, I think, most of the subjects that say it, they know that you genuinely can do it…in Maths she keeps saying: 'I need you to all get your Bs'…and stuff, so it's not really saying: 'you will get it'…it's sort of saying: 'you can get it'…I don't think many of them say: 'you're gonna get an A star'…because it means you don't work…but it's a…kind of thing…I think I will work because I don't like to think I'm going to do badly in stuff…I think it's quite important for me to do well…I really think I will work… and I'm going to try really hard…I mean…however much they drilled it into me, I'd still …want to work a lot as well…and I'd still kind of test myself against what they said as well…(girl D, Year 11)

Transition

The imminent move to senior school did cause some anxiety in Year 8, even though this was assuaged, to some degree, by the fact that pupils were (largely) moving together, as a peer group, and into a regime where the older peer groups were also widely known. Much of the anxiety centred around new or unknown teachers, learning a new site geography, and being setted in subject groups with friends.

Pupils in Year 9 were happy with what they perceived as a greater sense of freedom and responsibility. Anxieties about the move seemed to have been largely unfounded. They perceived their treatment as being that of a 'young adult' rather than an 'older child' as had been the perception the previous year; it was the case that the junior school now looked even smaller and younger, its style more regimented and restrictive. Getting older had made the proportional difference in age between the research pupils and the top of the school smaller; they now found it easier to relate to the older peers, than the younger peers.

As they had done in the third form (Year 9), pupils considered their current year (Year 10) to be the best position from which to get a real perspective of their place in the hierarchy that was school. It was acknowledged that now the work was harder and faster, but this was more accepted, because they had, to a

degree, chosen much of it. Looking back towards the junior school, they perceived it as much smaller, more regimented and more prescriptive:

> …when you go through (junior school) sometimes and you see signs like: 'Make sure you change before you go outside'…(laughter) and I find that incredible…(and)…it looks a lot more smaller and a lot more caged in…(girl C, Year 10)

Looking back, from Year 11, to junior school, views were perhaps more wistful; more good memories were reported, but there was still an air of disbelief that one was once that small. Big school was, by comparison, seen as much more serious, with harder work and more pressure, coursework and extra lessons, as well as a myriad of after-school activities and sports. Some felt this pressure, some revelled in it. There was, at this point, a keen sense of place in the pupil hierarchy of school, and, as had happened in other years, the current place was viewed as being the best year of school.

Influences on pupil perceptions

Teachers

Teachers were, in Year 8, crucial to pupils' perceptions of their subjects. Pupils made judgements about what they saw as teachers' skill and expertise; they had little time for those that they considered as not being up to the job. Pupils were astute enough to see that how one used the pupil-teacher relationship dictated what one could get away with; different teachers required different approaches from pupils. Some subject teachers were already talking about GCSEs, and there was, by and large, a good deal of encouragement; a measure of attainment was sometimes expressed in terms of its likely GCSE grade.

After transition, in Year 9, perceptions were that teaching was more relaxed, on the whole. As always, funny teachers were liked; good humour helped the enjoyment of lessons. The new experience of senior school had allowed some pupils to see the relative merits, or otherwise, of what they had experienced before, and how their perceptions of subjects had been coloured by what they saw as 'bad' teaching early on. Having said that, teachers at senior school could still be disliked for their perceived unfairness or attitude; often what was now seen as pettiness or poor interpersonal skills, rather than vindictiveness. Teachers were held responsible for the boredom quotient in a lesson; too much writing was still

seen as boring. Creativity, enjoyment and practicality were seen as being linked, and the practical lessons were still perceived as those where more enjoyment could be experienced. The relationship that pupils enjoyed with teachers was improved by the sense that they were now grown up; teachers were seen as more 'normal', and 'human'. Having said that, the fact that, due to option choices, there were (unlike their experience of junior school) a number of teachers that would never teach some of the pupils, made gauging how to deal with them difficult; not having a relationship of any sort made life disconcerting. Although what was seen as 'bad' teaching was still deemed unacceptable, a perception of increased GCSE pressure causing more 'strict' teaching was thought of as quite tolerable, indeed, most pupils were positively encouraged by teachers' talk of GCSE coursework beginning in earnest at the start of the third form. There seemed to be more of a perception of mutual respect; it was as if both the pupils and the teachers had to go through the same process, together.

In the minds of pupils in Year 10, a positive teacher allowed a constructive relationship, which imbued a positive perception of the subject. Although teachers were perceived hierarchically, and some were better than others, there was thought to be less of a difference in approach in senior school:

> ...I've actually got quite close to them over the year...so...if you keep quite a few of your set ones...and they don't, sort of, treat you like...like maybe in Year 4 to Year 8...they treated the Year 4s a bit more babyish than the Year 8s...but they don't really do that in (senior school)...and it's, like, the same amount of attention in all the years...(girl C, Year 10)

After options, with a greater proportion of time spent in the company of individual subject teachers, the relationships were seen as getting closer as pupils and teachers got to know one another better. There was also a perception at this stage that some junior school teachers would be able to teach in the senior school, but that no senior school teachers would be able to teach in the junior school. Pupils were beginning to see the difference between the teacher as an individual and the teacher as deliverer of a subject. It was possible that a good teacher (person) could also be a boring teacher (deliverer).

In cases where teachers were distrusted or disliked, pupils' perceptions allowed adolescent behavioural symptoms to be transferred to the teachers:

> ...the teachers are really, really bad...they are either really patronising or really, really, like, moody or something...(boy C, Year 10)

and being boring was seen as a cardinal sin, as were an inability to teach, and not engaging with the pupils.

Although there were still, in Year 11, good and bad teachers, they were, by now, seen as more human. It was perceived that a bad teacher could not teach a good subject, but a good teacher would be able to do justice to a bad subject. Positively regarded teachers were those who were funny, and who had a good teaching style. Teachers who had expertise (often beyond their remit) and made things seem easy were very positively regarded, but there was also a perception that being clever was not the same as teaching well:

> …in Maths…well…I've got this arse-hole of a teacher…I don't get on with him at all…but anyway…he just…it's like: 'right, this is what we do'…and he will…he won't even teach you, like, the very boundaries of what you need to know, he'll keep within this core…of about…'you need to know this; you do need to know this, but we won't go into that because that's for really smart people'…and, it's just, like: 'cheers'…cos…he's…the man's a genius…he knows everything you could possibly know about Physics and Maths…he's more qualified to teach Physics…um…and you can tell he's just so smart…but, my God, he can't teach…which is quite a shame…(boy B, Year 11)

In the minds of pupils, any failure to engage was laid squarely at the teacher's door, and those teachers who relied on props or who consulted books for answers were treated with circumspection. The influence of teachers on both pupils' uptake of certain subjects, and their reaction to subjects, was reported, and by this stage in their careers, pupils were willing to acknowledge the very long-standing influence of teachers:

> …you have to send so much time with them, so…if you don't get on with them it's a bit of a pain…I remember…in Y6, I had (subject X) with (male teacher S), and…how I couldn't get that right…then in Y7 I had (subject X) with (male teacher B) and it was much more laid back, but we still got the work done, and now I'm doing (subject X) GCSE…which I probably wouldn't have done before…so things like that…(female teacher S)…well, I probably didn't do (subject Y) because of her…which was a bit of a shame, cos I did quite enjoy (subject Y)…(boy B, Year 11)

Family

Parents

The influence of families over pupils in Year 8 was sometimes subtle, sometimes overt. Of parents, it was the mothers that seemed to have the most influence over pupil perceptions. Parental influence was generally aimed at reinforcing the importance of the core subjects, and sometimes the lack of

importance attached to what were perceived as the more peripheral subjects. Pupils also sometimes took their cue from parents in their approach to teachers. Although there was some discussion of GCSEs, the main thrust of the parental support seemed to be concerned with getting down to hard work and achieving the best grades possible in tests. Pupils did, at this stage, perceive different degrees of pressure from parents about their schooling. For some, there was little or no coercion felt; for others there was a sense that an investment had been made (Stafford, 1985; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003; Walford, 1990) and a return was expected. Discussion of careers was fairly limited, but there was a sense that one had to do something 'good'; one would not consider wasting the opportunity by electing to pursue a 'bad' career choice.

Although there was, in Year 9, reportedly more noise and disagreement between the pupils and their parents on what constituted fair involvement in the decision-making that took place, it seemed that in general, parental participation was thought of as positive and proactive. There seemed to be a general consensus that professional and successful parents were to be trusted, and were capable of sound judgement, even if this was not always agreed with at the time. For some pupils, parental influence was open, and clear expectations were expressed, but for others the pressure was subtle, and was perceived as fairly neutral.

In Year 10, GCSE choices still held some sway. There were, at this stage, reportedly more arguments at home, and more adolescent battles fought about freedom of choice. There was a sense, still, that some parental influence was overt, some subtle, and it was often the mother, more than the father, who seemed to provide the strongest overt influence over pupils. There were extremes; for those that professed freedom, it often seemed to operate within parameters:

> …my parents are quite laid back…they want me to do what I feel happy with, but they don't want me to do something stupid…so they are looking after me, but at the same time letting me have my freedom and so that is nice…(boy B, Year 10)

and for some, taking the same option choices as parents had done was not a problem. There were, on the other hand, those who felt coerced by parents:

> …they weren't very happy when I said that I wanted to do Drama and Art, they were like: 'those are two 'doss' subjects'…I think that they would have let me, but they were just kind of like: 'hmmm'…but I didn't really want to do Drama anyway cos I'm not very good at it…but that's not the point…they

> told me to do what I wanted to do, but then when I said that I wanted to do Art and Drama they were like…yeah, they influenced me… they always seem to put up a really good argument… they were just like: 'that wont be very helpful'…I don't know…they were just saying: 'what will you get out of Drama?'…and all this kind of stuff and so I thought about it and I was like: 'hmmm'…now I am doing Spanish which I am rubbish at…(girl B, Year 10)

Although, by Year 11, the move onward and upward in school was broadly inevitable, there was an awareness that sixth form was optional, and some flexing of adolescent muscles resulted, with a desire to experience sixth form elsewhere. For many, this did not go further than discussion at home, but reported parental influence was, however subtly displayed, strongly in favour of staying put. For many, staying on for sixth form was a natural part of the order of things; 'better the devil you know' seemed to be the common consensus.

Siblings

Older siblings of pupils in Year 8, who were at the school, also provided a strong family influence. Older sibling could be counted on to provide information about what was expected of the coming regime, and about the personalities that would be encountered there. Even for those without siblings of their own, the information was eagerly sought from friends who had them.

By Year 9, older siblings, and even more distant school-age relatives, provided a useful yardstick against which success could be measured. The experiences, of both school subjects, and the idiosyncrasies of teachers, reported by older siblings were regarded as providing useful insights into what was about to happen, and could be very influential.

Siblings were, in Year 10, still useful as an insight into, and experience of, the different courses and teachers. There was also, for those with much older siblings, an impression to be gained of the world that lay beyond school -university placement.

There was still, in Year 11, a good deal of reassurance to be had from older siblings, in terms of course and teacher expectations. For some pupils, with GCSEs so close, there was the impossible dichotomy of unrealisable expectation now that older siblings had gone through the hoops. For those with clever and successful siblings, the bar had been set high and now had to be reached. For those with less successful siblings, the achievements were clearly there to be exceeded.

Peers

Although, in Year 8, peers were felt to be slightly influential (in that discussions were engaged in about a myriad of different aspects of school life, from subjects choices to career choices) pupils strongly protested their independence in decision-making. Different social groups *per se* were a construct that interested the boys more than the girls at this stage; boys were more willing to pigeonhole discrete groups of boys and then to provide some sort of hierarchy. Girls were less inclined to do this, and were more aware of the desirability of social inclusiveness.

By Year 9, adolescent behaviour observed was (though not always reviewed favourably) among peers:

> …some boys are getting more boulshy, some boys are getting, totally, unbelievably, annoyingly cocky…all the boys' hormones are coming out, and no one wants to be the boy with a high voice, who hasn't actually reached puberty yet, so everyone is talking like this (deep voice)…(boy D, Year 9)

Friendships were still an anchor point for most pupils and differentiation via social groupings was evident, though this particular perception was more significant among boys. The junior school experience of a fairly broad-based but close-knit horizontal social group had been fractured, and there was a recognition that the vertical structure of the House system had forced relationships to develop where they might not have done before; now, vertical networking was viewed as a valuable tool in both gaining knowledge and tapping into experience.

By Year 10, older peers still provided a calming and reassuring voice about the realities of each year's workload; pupils (again) heard that, where they were now was comparatively easy, and that it was the future (sixth form) that was hardest. Pupils reported that they were aware that much of what was said to them by their older peers had to be filtered in order to glean anything useful in what could be biased reportage, particularly with reference to the personalities of, and relationships with, teachers. Although the influence of friends was acknowledged, pupils still vigorously protested their independence of mind (Connor, 1994). Friends, it was acknowledged, did influence choices for GCSE, but this was only something that other pupils generally did. The perceived hierarchy of pupil aptitude was, to some, evening out:

> …I have got new people in my classes and…you sort of talk to people more, and then you get a lot bigger friendships with them…a lot of the people that used to be clever last year have, sort of, evened out a bit, so, like, I am moved up into the middle…and so you meet, sort of, new people…I think that the clever people who were really clever have got cleverer, and have sort of moved up…and it has sort of pushed the other people who were…cleverish…down…and they have, sort of, lost it a little bit…(boy C, Year10)

and it was acknowledged that newcomers had altered the group dynamic somewhat. There was still an element of competitiveness in the classroom, either to do well (girls) or to seemingly work less hard (boys). Setting seemed to provide grounds for both competition and cohesion; higher sets seemed to thrive on the former, and lower sets on the latter. Moving down sets seemed to reinforce a feeling of stupidity, especially if one was subsequently moved up again. For those who stayed put in them, the lower sets seemed to provide comfort and reassurance. And it was acknowledged that where you sat in the classroom still had an effect on how you behaved. The familiar groups based around teaching classes and sets had altered because of option choices, so the mix had changed again:

> …everyone's kind of dividing…it's quite funny, cos, as a year, we used to all be in the same kind of classes and, like, you wouldn't get through a day without seeing almost everybody, but now it's…kind of…you can go the whole year and not speak to someone, which is really strange, cos there are that many people in different sets, you're never with the same person in everything…(girl D, Year 10)

There was more awareness of different social groups. In the case of girls this was based on socialising and mixing together more than it was for boys; for them, the emphasis was more hierarchical, and dwelt on separateness and groups (van Houtte, 2004). Boys found it easier to classify members of each House as being of a type.

In Year 11, having a familiar peer group around seemed to serve as a useful buffer; the move from junior to senior school, with a large peer group, had served, for some, to blur the experience such that it did not feel as if much had changed over the years. There was still an acceptance of the various social groups within the year, but these had, for some, become less relevant as a social necessity. There was more open acceptance of difference; those pupils perceived as the cleverest and most studious ('geeks' or 'boffs') were now seen as useful

conduits of knowledge that should be engaged with. Keen competition within classes was still evident, particularly in the upper sets, but poor behaviour was less tolerated, and it was observed as coming from a 'type':

> …there are people who mess about, but still do well…like…I find it really annoying because people just sit there…and it is usually the people who are quite clever…but you would think it would be stupid people that would do that, but it's not necessarily, it's people that are…quite clever, so they can do that, cos they don't necessarily have to listen…(it is) clever boys, stupid girls…well not stupid, that sounds really mean, but you know…like…stupid people think that's funny and that comes from like, the girls, and the clever guys that can get away with doing no work, do it…and the stupid girls do no work…(girl B, Year 11)

Motivation

For most pupils in Year 8, trying hard was a key part of their psyche. Trying hard was a movable feast, however; it was perceived as easier to put the effort into subjects that one enjoyed, or subjects that were simpler, or subjects that one had a talent for; it was more difficult to make an effort in the complex subjects, or those where no talent was perceived, or those that were felt to be demanding. The system of effort grades seemed to motivate children, in particular those in the higher sets. Because of the way attainment grades were structured, and the way pupils were placed in sets, there was a clear expectation, at both extremes, of where pupils would be likely to fall in the grade hierarchy.

Pupils in Year 9 were motivated by a number of things. Maintaining a feeling of happiness worked for some pupils:

> … mostly just being happy…cos if you hate the school you're not going to do anything…(girl D, Year 9)

and there was a clear sense that competitiveness (in the classroom and on the sports field) worked for others. GCSE was by now a big part of the picture, and this provided a clear extrinsic motivation for most pupils at this stage (McNess, 2006; Colley and Comber, 2003). Evidence of exam success in the past had provided a simple incentive that was difficult to ignore. There was, within this positive consensus, a fear of failure still; with so much success, how much more damning would it be to appear as the only candidate with a 'C'; grade? Even acknowledging the fact, as some did, that the school's position, as a selective school, was still ahead of its contemporaries in the maintained sector, pupils still wrestled with this anxiety. Older peers, who were known, and had been for some

years, were seen going through, (or had already been through) the same process. For many pupils, this was the point where they rationalised the requirements of the workload and the range of possible outcomes; many came to the simple conclusion that if you put in the requisite hours, the results would accrue.

Pupils in Year 10 were competitive, but reported that enjoyment of lessons, having talent or ability in a subject and succeeding in a subject were all linked; being good at something encouraged pupils, feeling relatively bad at something did not:

> ...if you are bad at something then it is boring and rubbish because you know you are bad at it and everyone else is better so you're, kind of, like: 'hmmm'...and you just switch off...(girl B, Year 10)

There was an acceptance that, to do well, one had to work hard, and there was a lot to do; the perceived high (coursework) load was a positive motivator for some, but not for others.

By Year 11, GCSE grades were still a strong motivation to work. Although a 'C' grade was thought to be a poor attainment (Bishop et al., 1999) there was some acknowledgement of its value nationally, but this was tempered with the argument that, having paid for education, results should be better:

> ...it's average...'C' is like the UK average, or something, for each GCSE...and if we got 'C', it means we were average...nobody wants to be average, everybody wants to be better than average...and, you know, we pay all this money...to go...to a good school, and we try really hard, and if we got a 'C', it would be like: 'that was a waste of time'...yeah...you want to be the best...really...probably sounds really arrogant...(boy B, Year 11)

What had independent education provided?

By Year 11, pupils had developed their perceptions of the benefits of attending an independent school. They enjoyed having smaller classes and saw a more pronounced and positive peer work ethic, that they had more caring teachers and that there was mutual respect shown. There was a perception that pupils engaged in a wide variety of activities, that they enjoyed more sports and games. For some, there was a feeling that, because of attending such a school, they were more self-confident and more driven, and were better at dealing with people. Boys seemed to feel more able to level criticism at maintained schools for their lack of such opportunities, but girls seemed to take a more tolerant and circumspect view, which took into account the fact that they had no experience upon which to base their opinions.

Chapter 10
Discussion

The main focus of the study has been on the pupils' perceptions of their experience of schooling over the period of the research, particularly their perceptions of the enjoyment and importance of different aspects of school, their perception of change that has occurred over time, and what has influenced these perceptions. This research looked at the perceptual picture of pupil experiences over slightly more than four years of schooling. During this period of time, the pupils in the research group not only matured and developed as people, they moved from one school to another; from the top of a known environment to the bottom of a less well known environment, they made new acquaintances and cemented friendships, and they met with and learned the foibles of, a whole raft of new teachers. As well as these changes, over which they had little control in some instances, they developed a sense of perspective about their experiences in school. It may be that, participating in this study has, as one interviewee observed, sharpened their critical thinking about what actually takes place in school and the part that they play in that process. It was certainly the case that, being asked about the process and their reactions to it, made some pupils more ready to question and reflect seriously on the experience. Of course, this may have happened anyway; it would be far better to believe that, rather than being prompted by the actions of a practitioner researcher, it was the pupils' exposure to the education process itself that produced an enquiring mind.

Perceptions of the enjoyment of school

Pupils in the research group enjoyed school a great deal throughout the whole period of the research; there was generally a very positive reaction to the experience of going to school, a perception that supports other research findings (Keys, 2006; Keys and Fernandes, 1993). The main factors viewed most positively by pupils were friendship and the social aspects of attending school, and this did not change markedly over the research period. Sports and games played a large part in the enjoyment of school and proved to be another consistently valued factor over the four-year period but (as found in research by Lightbody et. al. (1996)) it was the case that sports and outdoor activities were more valued by boys than they were by girls, who saw socialising as a principal factor in their enjoyment of

school. This gender difference was not confined to school; evidence from the questionnaire showed that, away from school, boys were more inclined to participate in sporting and outdoor activities, than were girls, who preferred to spend time with friends, socialising. Elements that had anything to do with education *per se* (teachers, lessons and homework) were not accorded high status in the enjoyment of school, remaining consistently low over the whole period. Although the enjoyment of sports and games was particularly marked in the early years of the research, there was evidence that it declined in value over time. Conversely, the enjoyment of the more conventional lessons (something that was not particularly the case in the junior years) became more valued as time passed; there was seen to be value, certainly by Year 10, in pursuing a subject for enjoyment, as well as for some extrinsically determined reason.

Perceptions of the importance of school

Although socialising was generally perceived by pupils as highly valued when the enjoyment of school was discussed, it seemed to be less so when the importance of school was looked at. The notion of friendship though, remained an important factor in the minds of pupils; they seemed to see friendship as important in their being at school, almost as much, or more, than the lessons or subjects. In terms of importance, there was certainly a clear difference in perception between friendship and socialising; pupils saw friendship as a more noteworthy factor. Boys and girls felt differently about the various factors impinging on their judgement of school's importance: the significance of learning skills gave a greater impetus to boys than it did to girls, but, in all other respects, girls seemed to see a greater significance in the various factors than did the boys. There seemed to be an increasing emphasis, too, on getting on with people being a necessary and important facet of being at school; social networking and social skills were recognised, by both boys and girls, as being important tools in their armoury.

Although it was acknowledged that the relationships with teachers were key, liking teachers was consistently low in importance; a reflection perhaps of the difference between liking one's peer group and liking the (other) adult world. Certainly the link between going to school and succeeding in life later on was set early on; school was seen as important because it provided the opportunity to gain some tangible reward that benefited pupils when they entered the world of work: a motivation to do well, as suggested in other research (McNess, 2006) was

engendered by the need for qualifications and good jobs. For the majority of pupils, school, as a concept, was certainly not seen as something to be resisted or challenged. The role played by each of the two research schools was seen by pupils as part of a larger picture, where not only GCSEs, but A levels and university were factored into the equation, however vaguely, even as early as Years 7 and 8. This should, perhaps, have been no real surprise; socio-economic indicators suggested that most pupils in the research group came from a background where higher education was the rule rather than the exception.

The enjoyment of subjects

Research by Pollard and Triggs (2000) found that what were perceived as the practical and low-stress subjects were enjoyed more than those subjects considered to be the important ones (principally the core subjects). In the research school, Games (as a curricular activity) and sports (both as a scheduled activity and as an extra-curricular pastime) were most enjoyed, as were subjects such as Design Technology and Art. In their general enjoyment of these highlighted subjects, boys tended to enjoy Games, Physical Education and Design Technology more than did the girls, whilst girls tended to enjoy Art more than did the boys. The other subjects tended to split along perhaps predictable lines, with boys expressing a greater affinity for subjects like Maths, Science and Information Technology, whilst girls expressed a greater liking for subjects like English, Drama, Geography, History and Religious Education. The election of a single, favourite subject perhaps served to highlight the gender split more clearly: Design Technology and Maths were chosen by more boys than girls, and English and Art were chosen by more girls than boys. The difference between boys and girls in the research group reflected findings by Lightbody et al. (1996), and Hendley et al. (1996), and saw the boys being more attuned to the 'hard' (Francis, 2000) subjects such as Games, Design Technology, Information Technology, Maths and Physics, and the girls being more keen on the 'soft' subjects such as Art, English, History, languages and Biology. Pupils saw enjoyment as being affected by low stress, practicality and fun, much of which they thought could be implemented by the teacher. It was the teacher, either in terms of personality, or as deliverer of the curriculum, that was a most influential factor in pupils' enjoyment of their subjects. The teacher being an interesting person was cited more by girls than by boys, who saw the teachers' methods of delivery as a more influential factor than did the

girls. Boys were also apt to see the fun element in a lesson as more essential to their enjoyment than were the girls, and they were also more ready to see their enjoyment being a product of their perceived talent for the subject. Enjoyable subjects caused little anxiety, and were those areas where pupils felt that they were not being faced with too much exertion; work meant writing and labouring under pressure, as well as participating in tests and having to do homework. There was some evidence to support Adey and Biddulph (2001), in their contention that a link existed between enjoyment and ability; Games, Physical Education, Maths and English were subjects that were cited both as most enjoyed, to some degree, and also as subjects where pupils saw themselves as most talented. As might be expected, a greater number of boys perceived themselves as both enjoying and being most talented at Games, Physical Education and Maths, whilst a greater number of girls perceived this to be the case in English. This perhaps lends some support to findings by Hendley et al. (1996), who found pupils favoured subjects such as Games, Art and English, and were motivated by enjoyment and interest in the subjects.

Subjects which were enjoyed were often, particularly in the early years of the research, classified by pupils as 'doss' subjects, which was fine until the GCSE options had been taken; the 'doss' subjects then disappeared for some pupils, who felt that they then had to elect other subjects from their collection to serve as such. Although pupils lower down the school were apt to see a clear distinction between the less important subjects being more enjoyable and the important subjects being hard work, and consequently not enjoyable (the two states being mutually exclusive), it was the case that, as pupils moved higher up the school, they enjoyed subjects in different measure due to intrinsic (interest) as well as extrinsic (GCSE outcomes) motivation. Evidence in the research showed, for instance, that sport, seen as quite a stalwart subject in the enjoyment stakes, reduced over time as a factor, being elected by half the children in Year 8, but only one third in Year 10.

Although not always clear about what was least enjoyable in school generally, pupils were clear about what they least enjoyed in their subjects; Religious Education was regarded as the least enjoyable subject by far (as well as a least important subject); it was very unpopular, and disliked by twice as many boys as girls. English was also disliked by three times as many boys as girls and Maths and Physics were both disliked by twice as many girls as boys. It was

principally those subjects that were perceived as boring or pointless that were not enjoyed, and subjects that were seen as not relevant to the real world (certainly not relevant to the future and the world of work as pupils saw it) were also lambasted. The least enjoyable subjects were also those that were seen as difficult, or where there was perceived to be a lot of work, or where pupils saw that they did not have a talent for the subject. Certainly it was the case that boys were more apt than girls to cite both boredom and the repetitive nature of work as reasons for not enjoying a subject. Girls, on the other hand, were more inclined to see the way a subject was taught, or the relationship with the teacher, as being key factors in their lack of enjoyment of a subject.

The importance of subjects

As far as subjects were concerned, the three core subjects of Maths, English and the three sciences were by far the most important in the eyes of pupils. Rationalising the importance of these three core subjects did seem to follow a mantra, at least in the early part of the research. Maths, and to a slightly lesser degree, English, were both accorded importance for any number of extrinsic reasons to do with the world of work, or for simply 'getting on' in life. As Rudduck (1996) suggests, pupils find it easier to comprehend the need for subjects that have some link to what they see as the real world outside of school. In the case of the research group, Science was more difficult to rationalise; as suggested by Osborne and Collins (2001), it was less easy to associate it directly with the world of work, as had been the case with Maths and English, and in the extreme, the predicted value of science served only as a tool for helping one's own children to complete science homework. When electing a single important subject, Maths and English were more important to pupils than any other subjects (boys were most keen on Maths and girls on English) and these two subjects were each chosen by between 30% and 40% of pupils, and all other subjects were each chosen by less than 7% of pupils. Rationalising the reasons why a subject should be seen as most important showed that boys were more inclined to choose reasons that reflected extrinsic thinking, the subject being useful for work, specific jobs or life generally. Girls, on the other hand, seemed to be more driven by intrinsic thinking, and chose reasons that had more to do with enjoyment, being good at the subject and having friends in the class.

The subjects at the other end of the spectrum, that were regarded as least important, were those that were accorded little or no status in the minds of pupils, particularly with reference to the world of work, or what they saw as necessities for the adult world. There was no concept of education being useful or valuable for its own sake, akin to what McNess (2006) cites as the Danish concept of *folkesplusning*, or 'popular enlightenment' (p. 530) where education is regarded as an all-encompassing experience rather than as discrete linear episodes. Religious Education has been mentioned as being one of those subjects cited as least enjoyable and least important, it perhaps typified the reaction, particularly of the younger pupils, towards what were regarded as peripheral subjects, but its value was appreciated more as the pupils matured and the subject material was perceived as more relevant to real life (moral) issues, other than religion itself. The perceived value of subjects like Religious Education was clearly demonstrated in the questionnaire; over a third of pupils cited Religious Education as a least important subject, and a quarter cited Latin. Apart from Music (cited by a fifth) other subjects were not chosen to any great degree. Certainly, in terms of importance, pupils were apt to perceive a clearer distinction between the most important subjects and their favourites. Maths, English and Science were up to fifteen times more important than Design Technology, Art and Games, for instance. The differentiation viewed from the other direction, in terms of favourites and important subjects, was less pronounced, where Design Technology and Art were seen as perhaps two to three times more enjoyable than Maths, English and Science.

The perception of subject setting

Setting, for subjects, seemed to provoke reactions in different ways, depending on where one sat in the setting hierarchy. There was a perception, especially in the early years, that setting was a predetermination of ability or cleverness; all the pupils in set one were deemed to be much cleverer than pupils in set two, and so on. No-one wanted to be in the lower sets, as this implied a lack of ability. There was some evidence that pupils in lower sets regarded pupils in higher sets as 'boffins'. This perception did not generally infer a sense of dislike or approbation, but rather more one of acceptance that these pupils were simply better equipped to do the job. To some degree there was a sense of envy; there was an unspoken desire among pupils in lower sets to be quicker, better and

cleverer. Always though, pupils felt able to rationalise their perceived defects in one area, against their prowess in another.

In this respect, games and sports provided a useful alternative outlet for performance and success, perhaps because of the kudos gained from being seen as a successful games player. Musicians were seen as being separately successful, but were not accorded the same hierarchical position as sports players; being good at music implied an academic cleverness, as 'boffs' were often good musicians. Pupils in the research group were also very competitive by nature, and there was evidence that they were often aspirational, both in their marked work tasks and their periodic attainment tests, because this implied that they might certainly, with success, climb to a higher set, and this competitiveness seemed particularly keen between sets one and two. The corollary of this was that some pupils in the lower sets often saw no way up, and this was especially true in the junior school, where, because pupils perceived their attainment grades as being divided hierarchically over the whole year group (grade 1 to the top performing percentage, grade 5 to the bottom performing percentage, and so on), it followed that pupils in the higher sets gained the higher grades, whereas the lower set pupils could only gain moderate or low grades. It can be seen that the use of setting in those subjects (Maths, particularly) that pupils saw as being the most important, will have had the most profound effect on their attitudes to the subjects, and also on their feelings about their own abilities in those subjects.

It could be argued, for instance, that because they had rationalised that Maths was the most important subject, it mattered to pupils how good they were at Maths, and consequently, where they were in setting terms. Only later on, in the senior school, did a sense begin to emerge that subject setting implied some benefit for the practitioner. Evidence from the research showed that, as pupils matured, being in a slightly lower set was not deemed to be a reflection of one's ability, but rather a reflection of one's speed and agility. The competitive element of setting seemed more good-natured in the senior school, and there appeared to be a less judgemental stand taken by pupils, whatever their place in the hierarchy. In fact, it was the case that the once reviled 'boff' became a useful source of help and support as GCSEs drew nearer. It was also the case that, once GCSE choices had been made, the playing field became less level, as relative perceptions about subjects changed. Pupils had spent years being able to compare themselves to their peers in the comfortable knowledge that each was

performing against the same, known measure, so once pupils had elected to study different subjects to their peers there was no longer a sense of commonality; now it was perhaps more difficult to be as clever at a subject that was no longer studied.

The peripheral subjects: doss subjects and Noddy subjects

Although evidence from the research suggested a pretty whole-hearted support for the core subjects of Maths, English and Science (and this despite the profound dislike of elements of the work from some quarters), there was, as has been mentioned, something of an attitude apparent toward subjects that could not be rationalised as even remotely useful. To many pupils across the board, Religious Education was regarded as the most peripheral of all. It was widely perceived as the least enjoyed and the least important of the subjects and, in the pupils' rationalisation of subjects, was very difficult to place, because no-one saw themselves becoming a priest or a teacher of Religious Education. Similarly, Art was often rationalised as being only the preserve of those who wished to become artists or Art teachers. Only later on, in the senior years, did attitudes change, and this was particularly the case with Religious Education, where there was a growing realisation of the broader value of topic material, which was seen as more pertinent to everyday life.

Certainly there was evidence that, what had generally been seen as peripheral subjects, were viewed more subjectively once GCSE choices had been made, because subjects that had been elected had to be regarded as positive, rather than negative, choices. The perception of some subjects being a 'doss' persisted, however, particularly among those pupils who had not elected to study them. Those adherents of Art, Drama and Design Technology, for instance, illustrated this perception during interview discussions, where they felt compelled to justify their choices as 'solid' and expound on the weight and content of work schedules. Even this positive reinforcement did not always preclude these pupils from labelling their particular choices in this respect as relatively easy compared to other subjects; there was a tacit acknowledgement that different subjects had varying degrees of difficulty and work levels attached, and occupied different places in the subject hierarchy. Geography was, for some, a useful subject; they enjoyed the topics, saw the value of population and climate study and could easily relate the practicality of geographical knowledge and understanding to everyday

life –it connected. To others, the same subject (with, probably the same teachers, and certainly the same topics) was seen as a 'Noddy' subject, merely 'colouring in'. The difference in perception might be attributed to many aspects of schooling, such as a natural antipathy to the subject, or the relationship with the teacher, but there was also some evidence of parental influence in terms of pupil attitudes to these peripheral subjects. Perhaps this did not amount to overt discouragement, but certainly there was reportedly a tacit recognition that disdain or disregard for a subject (or, indeed its teacher) was sometimes acceptable. It might be the case that, in an environment where there was implicit pressure from home to perform to a high standard across the board, any parentally disliked subjects were likely to be seized upon as being areas where the pressure was perceived as being 'off'.

Transition

Transition from junior school to senior school at the end of Year 8 did seem to be relatively problem-free for the pupils in the research group, although much of the anxiety predicted at the end of Year 8 had to do with the prospect of a new school in the coming year (a factor cited by nearly a third of pupils). As suggested by Lucey and Reay (2000), some links between a junior and senior school are useful in assuaging feelings of anxiety about transfer; in the research school this certainly will have been a contributing factor, as pupils did have some knowledge and experience of the new school, not least through their relationship with older peers who had moved on. Additionally, those with siblings seemed less awed by the prospect than those without. Although this sense of familiarity did not completely assuage misgivings about the unknown (the geography of an unfamiliar site and the prospect of dealing with new teachers were certainly cited as areas of anxiety prior to transfer), once the move had taken place, pupils did not take long to feel completely at home, and although they reported feeling slightly anxious about the move, these misgivings were not as comprehensive as those suggested by Harris and Rudduck (1993), where pupils (transferring at Year 7) were commonly worried about such things as the size of the school, the discipline system, the work demands, bullying and losing friends. It may be that transferring at age twelve or thirteen provided little opportunity (as a transition at Year 7 might have done) for the regime to become, as suggested by Galton et al. (2000), stale, in the 'fallow' period in Years 7 and 8, prior to GCSE courses starting. After moving schools, the perception among the research group was

certainly that junior school was geared to treating pupils like older children, whereas senior school treated them like young adults. The situation felt very much as if a typical pupil might be seen to behave like a cork popping from a bottle; some pressure beforehand, with anxiety in Year 8 (around issues of tests, setting and the impending move) followed (after the pop of transition) by relief at the reality of what came next, together with enjoyment of the freedom and responsibility that came with it.

Looking back, from senior school, at their experiences in junior school, pupils were, initially at least, of the opinion that the junior regime was more rigid and repressive, in terms of pupils' freedom and responsibility. As time passed, and pupils grew older, and their experience of schoolwork became more serious and the tasks more onerous, some pupils seemed almost wistful in their recollections of junior school, where hindsight now dictated that the junior school workload was almost non-existent, and life was centred on playing rather than working.

As they moved from one year to the next, certainly in the senior school, pupils reported a perception that the year that they were in currently was the best year in the school. Nevertheless, pupils in the third form (Year 9) reported that it was (perhaps reflecting some of the findings of Rudduck et al. (1986)) perceived as a 'doss' year, as subjects were rationalised ready for GCSEs; pupils reported that Year 10 was seen as quite hard work but still represented the calm before the storm, and pupils in Year 11 reported that there seemed to be plenty of reassurance over GCSEs, with perhaps sights set on sixth form (Years 12 and 13) and the prospect of harder work there.

Teachers

Although liking teachers was not implicitly recognised as being a necessity in pupils' enjoyment of their subjects, the relationship with the teacher was highly valued by both boys and girls, and throughout the years of the research it remained consistently so. There was a sense that younger pupils, lower down in the school, regarded themselves as being relatively powerless in the relationship with teachers and that, as they moved higher up the school, they were more inclined to take some of the responsibility for making the relationship work. As far as pupils were concerned, their expectations (similar to those suggested by

McNess (2006)) were that teachers should be fair in their dealings with pupils and be able to explain the subject clearly.

Good humour, tolerance, fairness and expertise were all characteristics of a successful teacher, as was the ability to make lessons interesting and, particularly for the younger pupils, the ability to inject fun and practicality; this perception certainly goes some way to supporting work by Morgan and Morris (1999) and Wallace (1996b), who saw positive teaching methods and social relationships in the classroom as being most essential in ensuring pupils' success.

The questionnaire enquiry about enjoyment of subjects strongly reflected pupils' perceptions that the teacher, either by dint of their personality, or their method of delivery, was a vital factor in pupils' minds when rationalising reasons why a subject was enjoyed. Conversely, pupils cited boredom and the way a subject was taught as being central reasons for not enjoying a subject. Older pupils accepted some straightforward hard work was unavoidable, and respected teachers who delivered subjects with obvious expertise, recognising too, when the delivery and material went way beyond what they saw as the minimum demands of the curriculum. There was a sense from older pupils that relationships with teachers became easier as they grew older. For some, there was an implicit recognition that pupils and teachers were sharing the experience more equitably, as both had a vested interest in gaining the most positive outcome possible; they had become more interdependent.

It was certainly the case that the research group's experience of teachers lends support to research by Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1997), which found that those teachers that transcended what might be seen as the rather narrow confines dictated by institutional information dissemination practices, and who were interested and motivated about their subjects, were much more likely to motivate their pupils. For the research group certainly, being boring, or inept, or lacking expertise, or being unfair, were all characteristics that defined a bad teacher, and pupils were very astute in their assessment of teachers and their teaching ability; even in Year 8 pupils reported that they were able to gauge who could, and who could not, teach effectively. What was perceived as poor, wretched, or simply bad teaching, or inadequate teachers as individuals, certainly invited passionate comments in the questionnaires.

Bad teaching was severely disliked; it was the case that, for younger pupils at least, teaching and teachers were indivisible; if you did not get on with a

teacher, then the subject was likely to become a closed book very quickly and this perception goes some way to supporting the findings of Beresford (2000), where teacher personality traits, rather than teaching ability, are regarded by pupils as key characteristics.

Pupils perceived a stark difference in the regimes in the junior and senior schools. Junior school teachers were perceived as more regimented and repressive than were senior school teachers, where pupils were given much more responsibility for their actions and were expected to make much more adult judgements and to face the consequences of their decisions. There was evidence in the questionnaire that pupil anxiety over a specific subject or teacher lessened as they grew older and that they were able, perhaps, to divorce the practitioner from the practice. There was, however, no great sense that pupils in senior school looked back at their immature selves in junior school with any objectivity, nor did they rationalise that younger pupils needed a more structured regime; it was simply regarded as being run by different sorts of teachers.

When reasoning why subjects were felt to be unimportant, teachers were cited as influential, but the proportion of pupils doing so reduced markedly (from 28% of pupils to 7% of pupils) over the period of the research. Similarly, in reasoning why they did not enjoy subjects, the proportion of pupils citing teachers as influential reduced from one third to a quarter over the period of the research. Having said that, there was evidence of some impact by teachers early on in pupils' careers; it was the case that some pupils (once in senior school) reported that their rejection of GCSE subject choices was based on negative experiences with teachers in junior school, in Years 7 and 8. Perhaps because older pupils were more able to differentiate between the teacher as a person and the teacher as deliverer of the subject, they were more able to understand a difference between being clever and being able to do the job of teaching; older pupils reported cases where several teachers, although acknowledged as being intellectually astute, were regarded as poor teachers (judgements cast, in some instances with a good deal of sympathy). As teachers came to be seen as having more to offer than subject knowledge, they were regarded as more rounded. For pupils later on in school, teaching, as a skill, was perceived more clearly as exactly that; consequently it was felt that, whilst good teachers would always be able to make headway in a boring subject, bad teachers would certainly be able to destroy a good subject.

By and large, teachers did set out, even in junior school, delivering a mantra that precluded failure and one where the bar was set deliberately high. Although this was reportedly the case in a good many peripheral subjects, it did not mean that they were necessarily regarded as more important. One might argue that, in these early years, an opportunity was missed to develop a better sense of the all-round value of education outside of the Maths, English and Science curricula. Pupils reported teachers' continuing proposition, especially in the early years of the senior school, that work could gain A star grades if the effort was put in; there was no acceptance of B or C grades as being the norm.

Parents

Family influence seemed to be very strong and very important to these pupils, who reported that parents took a serious interest in the well-being and the performance of their offspring; encouragement seemed endless and was perceived, at times, as almost overbearing. Of the two parents (and the vast majority of our research group were the product of a two-parent household) it seemed, from the perceptions of the pupils at least, that the mother was the most likely to take an active interest in the education process, and would be the parent with whom a research pupil had most discussion and arguments, and this reflected, to some degree, the work of Flouri (2006) where pupils' achievements and success were influenced by their mothers' interest in their education.

Although some pupils expressed disquiet about the level of control that parents had over their lives, there was little evidence of serious strife. The advantageous socio-economic position occupied by the research pupils seems to reflect the findings of researchers (McNiece et al., 2004; Demack et al., 2000) suggesting that pupils from higher socio-economic groups (and what Jacobs and Harvey (2005) label as 'intact' (p.432) families) have greater success than pupils from low-income groups. Even without the socio-economic advantage, parental support is thought (Hendley et al., 1995; Keys, 2006) to positively affect pupils' attitudes to school and schoolwork.

As well as these class capital issues, it was the case that parental attitudes were important in developing a positive (and, occasionally, negative) attitude to both subjects and teachers. Certainly pupils reported that parental encouragement early on was delivered in terms of doing your best and trying hard. There was evidence of influence on pupil perceptions about the value, or otherwise, of

subjects; not only the positive spin put on the core subjects, but also the opinions cast about the peripheral subjects, and, to a degree, the teachers. Interviews revealed received wisdom on both counts; that a pupil's mother could not stand teacher X, or felt that subject Y was rubbish, might be regarded as giving a green light for dissention, especially given the parental pressure to succeed in other areas.

Evidence from the questionnaire showed that the boys particularly were able to rationalise a subject's importance (or, more particularly, a lack of it) by reference to how it was regarded by parents. Parental pressure was perceived as ranging from the subtle 'do as you like –as long as it is something good' school of thought, to the more overt 'I am paying all this money to send you here' approach, implying that a return was expected on the investment. Obviously, as pupils grew and developed, they will have voiced opinions that were perhaps different from those of their parents, but the overwhelming sense was that parents were respected and listened to, and their judgement was broadly valued. Pupils reported discussions with parents over GCSE choices as being fairly muted on the whole, but there was evidence that parental influence sometimes subtly guided pupils in the direction of 'suitable' subjects and (sometimes overtly) away from 'doss' subjects. Even the end of compulsory education did not tempt pupils away from school at age sixteen; no-one in the research group voiced a desire to leave school after GCSEs and go to work. Although some talked about the possibility of taking up sixth form elsewhere, most were prepared, after weighing up the costs and benefits, to stay where they were. These decisions appeared to have been made by the pupils themselves, but again, there was sometimes evidence of subtle parental influence being brought to bear.

Siblings

Having older siblings at a school was for many pupils, a double-edged sword; on the one hand brothers or sisters provided useful advice and experience on which they could draw, on the other hand they were a yardstick by which eager parents could measure success. Watching the antics of older siblings had given the research pupils a great deal of evidence upon which to draw when making up their minds about courses, subjects and teachers. A good many of the pupils admitted that they took heed of what older siblings said to them and their choices were influenced to some extent by their experiences. The value of the research

pupils' older siblings extended to friends who had neither brothers nor sisters, and who saw these extended surrogate families as a useful source of information and experience nevertheless. During the interviews there were often references to sibling influences and particularly about the reality of studying a particular course, or working with a particular teacher.

The relationship that existed between a pupil, and a perceived clever older sibling, somehow marked that pupil out; in their minds at least, the existence of a successful older brother or sister meant that pupils felt (rightly or wrongly) that they were expected to perform to a given standard. There was certainly some evidence of teacher expectation in this regard. Parental attitudes to siblings were perceived in a similar way; pupils who had older siblings who had already performed well in public examinations felt that they had a target to aim for, and that they were expected to come up to scratch. It was the case too, that pupils who were themselves the older siblings, felt that they were going to set a standard by which the younger siblings might be measured. An under-performing older sibling might be perceived as implying a greater pressure to succeed; the pupils that saw themselves in this situation reported feeling some pressure to achieve higher grades when the time came.

In some cases, the sibling-effect was applied in the extended family (as far afield as cousins, in some instances) and there was a sense of competitiveness and hierarchy over where one ought to be in terms of GCSE grades. As well as their observations of the more formal milestones passed by older siblings, the research pupils also recalled their observations of particular stress points over time, such as family discussions with siblings about GCSE and A levels subject choices, the anxiety associated with high workload and meeting coursework deadlines, as well as the inevitable post-mortem and parental reaction to published exam results. It can be seen that the value of this was twofold: not only would this have given pupils some insight into what was likely to happen to them in school, but also some perception about the likely reactions and attitudes of parents over particular issues.

Peer group

The early part of the research saw the pupils enjoying the majority of their relationships within a horizontal grouping, that is, with peers in their own year, and this was despite the fact that the junior school was also divided vertically into

Houses in the same way as the senior school. Although friendships were very important, the pupils did stress their independence from one another; they reported that they would always listen to, but not necessarily act on, peer advice. Given that pupils in the research group seemed to be confident and competitive individuals, this seems to support the findings of Connor (1994), in that peer influence is resisted if inner controls based on positive self-image and high self-esteem are in operation.

That said, there was evidence that boys in the research population put a lot of store by social groups, particularly those that were constructed around sporting activities; they saw a good deal of credence attached to belonging to a team. There was plenty of evidence that social groups existed alongside sports and teams, but there was certainly some perceived hierarchy apparent, where sports groups were often referred to, particularly in the early years of the research, as the 'top' group, implying that sporting prowess provided some sort of credibility that other social groups could not. This perhaps supports the notion put forward by Durkin (1997) that younger adolescents were more negative towards peers who did not conform to group norms. Even those pupils who were skilled in areas other than sport (i.e., musicians) and who expressed disquiet about the social separateness of teams and group members, acknowledged a sense of hierarchy in the set up. As suggested by van Houtte (2004), boys attached more importance to how they were seen by the group, whereas girls had less reliance on the 'tribal' element of school socialisation; in the research group, girls saw relations with peers as more social and equitable. Both boys and girls acknowledged the differences between their social sets and the different ways in which each gender behaved with, and around, each other.

Higher up the school, after transition, the vertical House system caused this horizontal relationship to break down somewhat. That Pupils found themselves in different sets for subjects exacerbated the situation, and after GCSE options, some pupils found that they were not in the same sets as their friends for anything at all. As a result, at the same time as relationships were formed vertically within the House system, new relationships were forged with other contemporaries, or pupils new to the school. Although it appeared to be the case that established relationships changed, and new ones were created, pupils seemed to put more, rather than less, emphasis on the value of friendships. As they grew older, it was the case that the value of friendships increased; although highly valued by half of

pupils in Year 8, it was seen as significant to nearly three-quarters of pupils in later years.

Older peers

It is the case that many senior schools (in particular those in the maintained sector, but also the case with many independent senior schools) bring in juniors from a variety of feeder schools. This results in hierarchical relationships between the junior and senior members of the school that do not always have the benefit of being long-established. In the research school, the vast majority of juniors moved up to the senior school together (forming about 80% of the senior intake year) and will have had established and longitudinal relationships of some sort with a number of pupils in each of the four years above (and below) them. When these pupils moved into senior school, the same characters that they had known when aged eight or nine, were still there, but had grown up, and were doing things that they themselves would soon be doing.

Evidence from the research showed that pupils often used this relationship in their rationalisation of a situation; for instance, to the research pupils in Year 9, their contemporaries in sixth form (who were seen, writing personal statements for university applications) were remembered as occupying one end of junior school, as Year 8 seniors, when the research group were Year 4 newcomers. Although the relative position of the research group and their older peers was constant (in terms of chronological age and school year) their perception was, as they grew older, that they had a closer affinity with their older peers than they did with their younger peers. This may have been due to a proportional decrease in the difference between the ages of the two groups, as each grew older. Whatever the cause, such a relationship probably provided much more reassurance about the actuality of what was demanded of them in the school environment than anything offered by members of the adult world.

The familiarity of this relationship provided more evidence of the inevitability of progress and change during a school career, as well as a reassurance about the positive outcomes that, although not inevitable, were certainly anticipated. In the same way that older siblings provided useful insights into the vagaries of teachers and courses, so did older peers in the school. Much of the advantage seemed to be as a result of the vertical relationship formed within the school Houses. Rather like older siblings, older non-related pupils had already

experienced those workload and pressure points that faced the research group pupils during a given year. It seemed that, whilst a good deal of reassurance was provided to the pupils in the research group, from these older mentors who had been through the process themselves, always the reassurance over what an easy time they were having at the moment was laced with ominous hints about the real work coming later. Certainly the effect of rubbing shoulders with older peers seemed to have the effect of assuaging most misgivings about the difficulties those pupils in the research group faced.

Social groupings

Although not as pervasive as might have been the case in an independent school in the past, there was evidence in the research that indicated the significance of social groupings, either through the vertical House system, or through a loose alliance of interests and characteristics. Certainly the findings in this research have gone some way to support the work of Bourke (2001), where it is suggested that boys prefer teams and groups, and girls prefer socialising. The more competitive and structured hierarchical nature of team sports seemed to satisfy the boys' requirements for a known place in the pecking order, where, to some extent, status was endorsed by one's position in the sporting hierarchy. Although much store was put by the place of sports team membership, it did not seem to be as all pervading as suggested by Tovey (1993), where the influence of high-achieving sports players dominates the social hierarchy to the exclusion of all else.

Although evidence from both boys and girls attested to the prominence of games and sports at school (much of it engendered by the high enjoyment and low stress factor), it certainly was the case that sports and games were regarded as a welcome release from the rigours of the more academic subjects. Evidence from the later years of the research suggested a split between boys' and girls' attitudes to the place of games and sports; whilst boys regarded sports and fitness as increasingly important (perhaps, more important than enjoyable, in some cases), girls saw games as incrementally less important, preferring rather to rely on their social structures and interpersonal relationships to meet their needs. From their perspective, girls observed the social effect that sport and team membership had on the boys; they saw that social positioning within the research group, whilst not

conditional on membership of a team was, in some quarters, subtly influenced by it.

Like most adolescents, the pupils in the research group saw themselves, and their peers, as part of a discrete social group. The official structure imposed, both by the horizontal year group, and the vertical House system, offered some form of boundary, but within this, for most pupils in the research group, there was a tendency to pigeonhole peers into readily recognisable cliques; there seemed to be a need to put people into groups, so that everything might be more easily understood and rationalised. The junior school saw pupils (and here, it was principally boy-centred groups) in groups that had some perceived hierarchy; the boys who played rugby or 'bulldog', for instance, were deemed the 'top' group, whilst musicians and 'boffs' were considered to occupy a position at the other extreme. Filling the space in between were various diverse cliques that followed interests such as playing 'tig' or 'handball'. Girls were more content with belonging to groups that were socially based.

This tendency toward typecasting seemed to be applied to the groupings where relationships were either more important, or more strongly felt. It was the case that, in the junior school, the groups were seen as predominantly being within the horizontal year group, whereas in the senior school, these groups were identified more within the vertical House system, where, for instance, boy 'A' might be in House 'A', because he was a nerd; it was natural, because 'A' House was where all the nerds went. House 'B' was very sporty, so boy 'B' had obviously gone there *because* he was sporty. The link between House-attributes reported by different members of the research group suggested that much of this pigeonholing was received wisdom; it was the case that a good deal of store was put by the reputation of the House, and its good and loyal supporters would have wanted to explain their successes and failures in the various inter-House activities that took place over the year. What better way than by seeing the winning or losing House as predisposed to that condition by the qualities of its members?

The school

The school itself had a very important part to play in the pupils' perceptions of themselves and their prospects for success. As a system of education, the school did provide a clear and fairly unambiguous structure that had to be followed. Pupils were kept busy and knew it; some relished the hard work and the

challenge it provided, and some struggled with it, and complained about it, but accepted it nevertheless. Although there was criticism of some aspects of school, such as the perceived limited GCSE and A level curricula, the research pupils seemed more than happy to put up with whatever shortcomings they saw, because the benefits were seen as greater. The school had, as a selective establishment, been able to offer a tried and tested route to success at both GCSE and A level. It almost had the air of a perpetual motion machine, in that pupils witnessed the historic examination successes of the school, believed in those successes and consequently in themselves, and went on to contribute to that record of success. For the majority who bought into the philosophy (both intellectually and it has to be said, financially), failure was not an option; success and hard work were perceived as being the natural state. Academic success (and, perhaps, the anxiety associated with it) as a major aspect of independent schools is not new; such a facet was recognised by Lambert (1968), long ago, as pupils worried about how they were likely to fare in their public examinations.

The promotional literature produced by each independent school generally makes much of the particular values imbued by its own tradition and ethos; research (Gorard, 1996; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003) has shown that, for both parents and pupils, there is a sense that they are buying into that practice, and pupils will, by virtue of their immersion in that tradition and ethos, become fully developed and well-educated characters. It may be that fitting into such a regime was more natural than the research pupils perhaps supposed; both Kuriloff and Reichart (2003) and Bourke (2001) suggest that, although a school may promote an ethos, it is the characteristics of those pupils attending schools that contribute to that ethos; it is their personalities that are instrumental in shaping the school, rather than the other way round. Certainly, this research illustrated those characteristics that made the school unique: the strong work ethic, the positive attitude to school and education, the competitive nature of the pupils, and the various horizontal and vertical idiosyncrasies that made up the institutional character of the place; all of these would be nothing without the pupils who, after all, formed the engine of the establishment.

Motivation

What came across, strongly, was a sense of purpose; there appeared to be a pretty straightforward understanding that a good solid work ethic was essential

for success and survival. Even for those who saw themselves as perhaps less than academic, the judgement was made that, if the necessary hours were put in, then the results would be accrued. The concept of 'doing your best', which was acknowledged to be the principal axiom delivered by parents (certainly in the early years), seemed to be consistently in the forefront of pupils' minds through the period of study. The background data on the research group pupils suggested that, typically, they were the product of a fairly advantaged socio-economic group; most parents were in a professional occupation (being either modern or traditional professionals) and a good proportion had one parent who chose not to, or did not need to work; this was a group where social and cultural capital was used to good effect.

The evidence from this research, in terms of pupils' perceptions seems to support the findings of both Connolly (2006), and Flouri (2006), where it is suggested that children in higher socio-economic groups are more likely to achieve than are children in lower socio-economic groups. Additionally, it supports the work of Ahmavarra and Houston (2007), where it is suggested that selective school pupils have higher perceptions of performance and confidence in their own intelligence, both of which are important factors in aspiration and success. The natural predisposition of the research group to be competitive and aspirational was also evident in their day-to-day relationships with each other, and this was an element of the research that supports the findings of Bourke (2001), in terms of personality traits thought to be typical of independent school children. It was the case that, throughout this research, pupils reported their desire to improve, to compete and not to settle for second best. They enjoyed the competitive side of being at school, both inside the classroom and in the sports teams. If all else failed, these pupils could console themselves with the fact that, being part of a selective school, they were, in any event, likely to achieve better than the national norm; to them, it was a win-win situation. Even without taking into account external factors such as a supportive home situation or advantageous socio-economic status, this seems to lend support to research by Samdal et al. (1999), where it is suggested that important predictors of academic achievement are satisfaction with school, supportive teachers and positive peer relations, all of which were factors that pupils reported in the research.

Grades

Even before they started GCSE courses, the research pupils' perception of grade value indicated that a C grade was considered a failure, a rationale not confined to pupils here; the perception seems to be more widely held, as research by Bishop et al. (1999) suggests that it is not only among pupils, but also parents and employers that a C grade is regarded as mediocre. Certainly in this research, evidence throughout the whole period reflected pupil perceptions of high grades as the norm; an A grade was the benchmark and an A star was considered quite attainable. Pupils reported that teachers consistently talked up their prospects for GCSEs, rationalising the high graded success as a product of application and intellect. Pupils continually felt reassured by both the positive spin put on their prospects by teachers, and the evidence of success that they saw each summer as that year's GCSE (and A level) marks were published. This was particularly the case for those with older siblings, or those who had friends with older siblings going through the process.

This perhaps sheds some light on one of the symptoms of independent education's successes. It could be argued that, whatever the eventual outcome for the children involved, whether they are opting out at sixteen, or staying on to eighteen, the education system as a whole puts all children through the same GCSE examinations, with the same choice of subjects. A cynic might say that many schools see their statistical positioning in some form of hierarchical league table being satisfied by attaining the highest possible percentage of A-C grades at GCSE. One might argue that, if this is the case, once pupils are assured of a C grade, why push them harder? If the GCSE is regarded as the last step (rather than the first) in proper education, then there is little incentive to push pupils further than required to get them through the requisite hoops, and tick all the boxes. Those pupils capable and desirous of higher grades will acquire them anyway. The independent system, as evidenced at least by this research, sets the bar higher from the outset, and encourages pupils to aim for the very best; the fact that, for these pupils at least, both A levels and university were seen as an integral part of the bigger picture meant that gaining (probably) six B grades to enter sixth form was seen as crucial. From the perspective of those pupils in the research school, approaching their GCSEs, there was certainly a perception that there was not much room for manoeuvre if one decided not to work too hard; aiming high was seen as more of a necessity than an option.

The place of A levels and university

The fact that the research school was not an institution that saw education draw to a close at sixteen will have had a profound effect on the pupils within it. The research showed that, for the research group at least, the experience offered by GCSEs, whilst being very important in their educational experience, was only a part of the larger picture. These pupils perceived education to be a long route, comprising A levels and university as a matter of course. Even during discussions at the start of Year 8, pupils voiced their intentions to attend university. Although they did not always understand the detail of the higher education process, and indeed, some did not even see their GCSE subject choice as something that they needed to grapple with yet, there was little doubt that, for most of these pupils, their intended course through to higher education was set. Admittedly, the natural anxieties about GCSE exams and grades was seen early on, right at the outset of the research and pupils attested to their feelings about the enormity of the task ahead. Having said that, the anxiety seemed to dissipate early on in senior school, perhaps partly because it began to fit into a better perspective in the bigger picture. As mentioned elsewhere, the influence of older peers and siblings will have had some part to play in rationalising the experience. Added to which, a high proportion of the research pupils' parents will have been through university, and it would only be natural for the aspirations of pupils to reflect those of the family and the peer group.

After university

Evidence from the questionnaire showed that, for most pupils in the research group, a career in some form of profession seemed to be the norm. Boys in the research group were more inclined to aim for careers involving sports and outdoor pursuits, medicine or veterinary practice, or science and engineering. Girls, on the other hand, were more disposed towards careers in art and design, medicine or veterinary practice, or media and journalism or the law. It was the case that the male parents in the research group were mostly engaged in careers in medicine, accountancy or the armed services, whereas female parents were mainly occupied as a homemaker, working in medicine, or in education.

Pupils reported seeing parental advice on career matters in extremes; from its rejection as completely unwanted interference, to its acceptance as highly

valued guidance. It was the case that having parents who were in the professions will have had some influence over pupils ideas about likely career choices; certainly some reported having been dissuaded from following their parents' example by virtue of having seeing the reality, rather than the glamour, associated with a particular career (there were instances of this being the case for pupils with a parent working in, for example, medicine, the law, and the armed forces). A familial desire for the replication of social and cultural capital by succeeding generations is certainly a facet of educational advancement put forward by van der Werfhorst (2002); it could be argued that the link between parents' and pupils' career choices goes some way to supporting this. Certainly, as has been mentioned, there was sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, parental pressure to study for a 'proper' job, with a secure income.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

It is acknowledged that the data collected during the research was very broad-based, and there still exists an opportunity to evaluate data further. That the scope of the research was so broad might be a valid criticism; as such it may have lacked the depth that a more narrowly focussed piece of research might have otherwise provided, although it has to be said that a finer focus might have missed some of the nuances laid bare by this study. Certainly the work has followed its remit, and by seeking their views, has provided an insight into pupils' perceptions of their educational experiences at a particular independent school. Perhaps it does not answer all the questions, but at least it provides some evidence that may help answer some in a more balanced way.

This research has thrown light on many aspects of independent education, in one particular school, from the perspective of those at the cutting edge of the education exercise. Although the picture painted by the research may not be representative of all independent schools, it would be fair to say that some of the myths attached to the 'public school' experience have been exposed. Granted, there may be examples of institutions in the independent sector where money and privilege mean that the incumbents can make their way through to a working life without a formally recognised education, relying on networking and nepotism to further their careers, but this was certainly not the case here. Pupils in the research school certainly took the business of going to school seriously. They still had fun and enjoyed the peripheral activities such as sports and break times, but the essential and fundamental activity of being at school to learn was quite clearly understood. In terms of their perceptions of school, the research showed that these pupils in the research school were a well-motivated, hard-working group, who enjoyed the experience and appreciated the benefits that they enjoyed, and despite the lack of experience of, and naivety about, the educational experiences of their wider contemporaries, there was little serious evidence of what might be termed public school elitism or snobbery. Certainly the pupils themselves deserved to be congratulated for their hard work and their realistic approach to the business of gaining benefits from the education process; it is a moot point as to who might share the laurels for this -the parents or the teachers. To the research

group, both were seen as very important constituents in the mix. It is fair to say that the teachers were given much more overt criticism and praise, for their role in the process. Time and again, pupils were apt to lay the responsibility for both the good and the bad experiences at the foot of the teachers. And why not? In the eyes of their charges, they were, after all, being paid to deliver the goods. The effective contract struck between the families and the school appeared to be a delicate one; the (paid) expertise of the school on the one hand, and the expectant (paying) family on the other –it is difficult to gauge which side, ultimately, held the whip hand. And yet, pupils reported excellent relationships with good teachers, and did not allude to 'wasted money' when complaining about bad ones. Because the relationship with teachers was generally good, this made it easier for pupils to look positively on the experience, even if it were perhaps mediocre at times. There was acknowledgement too, of the long-term influence of teachers on pupils' attitudes toward their subjects; both a positive and a negative relationship with a subject teacher in the early years would impact on decisions about that subject's desirability as a GCSE choice.

However reassured they might have felt about their talents and abilities, it was the case that GCSEs, and A levels, and almost certainly university, formed part of a long journey toward success and these pupils felt that they had to put in the necessary effort in order to reap those benefits. For them there was no sense that education stopped at sixteen, or even eighteen –higher education seemed to be factored in to their understanding of the process right from the beginning of the research.

The research indicated that pupils' perceptions of subject importance were defined largely by their reading of the subject's usefulness and relevance. The primacy, in the minds of these pupils, of Maths, English and Science, and their rationalisation as important for life, work and jobs spoke volumes about the pupils' assiduity when it came to applying themselves. Even the difference apparent between boys and girls, where boys were wont to appear reassured by the schools past successes, and the girls' repeated belief that, through hard work and long hours, success would ultimately be achieved, failed to mask the fact that in general these pupils were there to work hard in order to gain the rewards. There was an acceptance that good grades were required, and these were gained, largely, by expended effort -'getting on' was a key component of being at school.

It could be argued that viewing such a narrow band of subjects (Maths, English and Science) as so much more important than any of the others was a positive; clearly a good deal of time and effort was being put into studying these subjects in some depth. However, there is clearly an opportunity (particularly in the early years) to raise the profile and value of other subjects, particularly those regarded as more peripheral (or a 'doss') by reinforcing their relevance and value as contributory subjects in the curriculum.

The research showed that movement from one school to another could be a relatively positive and fruitful affair. From the pupils' perspectives, the benefits of beginning senior school in Year 9 were many. There was some advantage in losing what Galton et al. (2000) saw (after transition at the end of year 6) as the 'fallow' period in Years 7 and 8, and what Rudduck et al. (1986) saw as a period of abandonment. There was also an opportunity to make a fresh start, with different teachers, in a different environment. This was especially poignant given the significance attached to the pupil-teacher relationship in the development and furtherance of learning.

Given that youngsters develop many of their maturing characteristics earlier, it might be agued that the environment provided by a middle school is perhaps one where these processes can be nurtured and tested more successfully, particularly given that, as suggested by Beresford (2000), boys in Year 8 are the most discontented, have the poorest relationship with teachers and the poorest self-perception of behaviour. It could be argued that being a Year 7 or Year 8 pupil in a middle school provides an opportunity for pupils to experience life at the top, rather than at the bottom, where disillusionment can settle in rather quickly.

It is almost received wisdom that independent schools (as well as Direct grant and Grammar schools) are successful at producing well-educated and useful citizens but, despite careful analysis of data there is, according to Sullivan and Heath (2003), still some uncertainty as to why. This research does, I think, provide a little more evidence that helps tell the story. The pupils' perceptions of their experiences show that it is not simply a function of the school, and it is not simply a function of the family environment, of the parents, or the children themselves. There are some facets of each that appear to be linked and interdependent. There is no doubting that a stable and well-resourced family can provide a secure

platform from which to operate. There is no doubt either, that well-educated parents can provide a supportive role model for children to follow. A school that provides wide opportunities for both education and sport, with small class sizes can also be beneficial, as can the experience of being taught by well-resourced and motivated teachers. Add to this, pupils who are naturally predisposed toward hard work and success, and who are keen to achieve, and one might argue that success is guaranteed. Although this research did not provide evidence of unequivocal pupil success in all respects, it did perhaps indicate that having as many of these features as possible in place was the surest way to create the conditions in which pupils could flourish and succeed.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

This is an example of the Excel data collection instrument (used in the third year of the research) developed for use on the school computer system. Because the questionnaire is run in Excel, the spaces for responses to open questions are expandable to accommodate a response of any size, which is not the case with a paper-based questionnaire.

The format is similar except that there are no breaks for separate pages as in this paper representation; the questionnaire is in essence a single workbook page, which is scrolled down from beginning to end.

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE
SUMMER 2005

THE FOLLOWING TOPICS ARE COVERED IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE:

What you would like to be

Your interests outside school

Your parents' or carers' occupations

Your enjoyment of school in general

The importance of school in general

Your talent and ability in subjects

Your enjoyment of subjects

The importance of subjects

The reasons for enjoyment and non-enjoyment of subjects

The reasons for importance and non-importance of subjects

Changes over time –this year and next year

The causes of anxiety –this year and next year

GCSE choices

Additional comments

PLEASE THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT YOUR RESPONSES.
BE AS HONEST AS YOU CAN –
THIS IS CONFIDENTIAL AND YOUR ANONYMITY IS ASSURED!
THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH.
YOUR RESPONSES WILL FORM A
VALUABLE PART OF THE PROGRAMME
AC.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

USE YOUR UP/DOWN KEYS AS WELL AS THE MOUSE

ABOUT YOU

1. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE?

WHAT SORT OF WORK DO YOU THINK THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO WHEN YOU LEAVE SCHOOL?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

ABOUT YOU

2.YOUR OWN AREAS OF INTEREST OUTSIDE SCHOOL

WHAT DO YOU GET UP TO AWAY FROM SCHOOL?

LOOK AT EACH ACTIVITY ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' IN THE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS MOST ACCURATELY HOW MUCH TIME YOU SPEND ON THAT ACTIVITY.

	LEAST OF ALL	A LITTLE	MODERATELY	A LOT	MOST OF ALL
COMPUTER GAMES					
WATCHING TV					
INTERNET					
HOMEWORK					
CONSTRUCTION/MODELS					
PAINTING/DRAWING					
OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES/SPORT					
BEING WITH FRIENDS					
ANY OTHER ACTIVITY? (PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)					

ABOUT YOU

3. YOUR PARENTS' OR CARERS' OCCUPATIONS

WHAT SORT OF WORK DO THEY DO?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

(FEMALE)

(MALE)

SCHOOL IN GENERAL

4.YOUR ENJOYMENT OF SCHOOL IN GENERAL

HOW MUCH DO YOU LIKE SCHOOL?

LOOK AT THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SCHOOL LIFE IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' INTHE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS MOST ACCURATELY HOW MUCH YOU ENJOY THAT ASPECT OF SCHOOL LIFE IN GENERAL.

	LEAST OF ALL	A LITTLE	MODERATELY	A LOT	MOST OF ALL
FRIENDSHIPS					
LESSONS					
HOMEWORK					
CLUBS/ACTIVITIES					
SPORTS					
TEACHERS					
BREAKS/SOCIALISING					
OUTINGS/TRIPS					

ANY OTHER ASPECT?
(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

SCHOOL IN GENERAL

5.THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL IN GENERAL

HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK SCHOOL IS?

LOOK AT THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SCHOOL LIFE IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' INTHE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS MOST ACCURATELY HOW IMPORTANT YOU THINK THAT ASPECT OF GENERAL SCHOOL LIFE IS

	LEAST OF ALL	A LITTLE	MODERATELY	A LOT	MOST OF ALL
FRIENDSHIPS					
LESSONS					
SOCIALISING					
DOING YOUR BEST					
LEARNING SKILLS					
LIKING TEACHERS					

ANY OTHER ASPECT?
(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

6. YOUR TALENT AND ABILITY

HOW TALENTED ARE YOU?

LOOK AT THE SUBJECTS IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' IN THE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS MOST ACCURATELY YOUR LEVEL OF TALENT IN EACH SUBJECT.

	I AM VERY TALENTED AT THIS	I AM QUITE TALENTED AT THIS	I AM MODERATELY TALENTED AT THIS	I AM NOT VERY TALENTED AT THIS	I AM LEAST TALENTED AT THIS
ART					
CLASSICS					
DT					
ENGLISH					
FRENCH					
GAMES					
GERMAN					
GEOGRAPHY					
HISTORY					
IT					
LATIN					
MATHS					
MUSIC					
PE					
PSHE					
RE					
SCIENCE -BIOLOGY					
SCIENCE -CHEMISTRY					
SCIENCE PHYSICS					
SPANISH					

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

7. YOUR ENJOYMENT OF SUBJECTS

HOW MUCH DO YOU ENJOY YOUR WORK?

LOOK AT THE SUBJECTS IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' IN THE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS MOST ACCURATELY YOUR LEVEL OF ENJOYMENT IN EACH SUBJECT.

	I ENJOY THIS LEAST OF ALL	I DO NOT ENJOY THIS VERY MUCH	I ENJOY THIS MODERATELY	I ENJOY THIS QUITE A LOT	I ENJOY THIS MOST OF ALL
ART					
CLASSICS					
DT					
ENGLISH					
FRENCH					
GAMES					
GERMAN					
GEOGRAPHY					
HISTORY					
IT					
LATIN					
MATHS					
MUSIC					
PE					
PSHE					
RE					
SCIENCE -BIOLOGY					
SCIENCE -CHEMISTRY					
SCIENCE -PHYSICS					
SPANISH					

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

8.THE IMPORTANCE OF SUBJECTS

HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK SCHOOL SUBJECTS ARE?

LOOK AT THE SUBJECTS IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' IN THE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS HOW IMPORTANT YOU THINK EACH SUBJECT IS.

	LEAST IMPORTANT	NOT VERY IMPORTANT	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	QUITE IMPORTANT	MOST IMPORTANT
ART					
CLASSICS					
DT					
ENGLISH					
FRENCH					
GAMES					
GERMAN					
GEOGRAPHY					
HISTORY					
IT					
LATIN					
MATHS					
MUSIC					
PE					
PSHE					
RE					
SCIENCE -BIOLOGY					
SCIENCE -CHEMISTRY					
SCIENCE -PHYSICS					
SPANISH					

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

9. REASONS WHY YOU ENJOY SUBJECTS.

YOUR FAVOURITE SUBJECT IS?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

10. REASONS WHY YOU ENJOY SUBJECTS AND HOW MUCH THE REASONS MATTER

THINK ABOUT YOUR CHOICE OF FAVOURITE SUBJECT.

LOOK AT THE REASONS FOR ENJOYING IT IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' INTHE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS HOW MUCH THE REASON MATTERS.

	LEAST OF ALL	A LITTLE	MODERATELY	A LOT	MOST OF ALL
IT IS FUN					
THE ATMOSPHERE IS GOOD					
IT IS PRACTICAL/ ACTIVITY BASED					
THERE ARE MORE THINGS TO DO					
THE WAY IT IS TAUGHT IS INTERESTING					
IT IS EASY					
I HAVE A TALENT FOR IT					
THE PERSON TEACHING IT IS INTERESTING					

ANY OTHER REASON?
(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

11. REASONS WHY YOU FIND A SUBJECT UNENJOYABLE.

YOUR LEAST ENJOYABLE SUBJECT IS?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

12. REASONS WHY YOU FIND A SUBJECT UNENJOYABLE AND HOW MUCH THE REASONS MATTER

THINK ABOUT YOUR CHOICE OF LEAST ENJOYABLE SUBJECT.

LOOK AT THE REASONS FOR DISLIKING IT IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' INTHE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS HOW MUCH THE REASON MATTERS.

	MATTERS LEAST OF ALL	MATTERS A LITTLE	MATTERS MODERATELY	MATTERS A LOT	MATTERS MOST OF ALL
IT IS BORING					
THE WORK IS REPETITIVE					
THE WORK IS TOO HARD					
I HAVE NO TALENT FOR IT					
THE WAY IT IS TAUGHT IS NOT GOOD					
THERE IS TOO MUCH WORK					
I FEEL STRESSED					
I DONT GET ON WITH THE TEACHER					

ANY OTHER REASON?
(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

13. REASONS WHY YOU FIND A SUBJECT IMPORTANT.

YOUR MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT IS?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

14. REASONS WHY YOU FIND A SUBJECT IMPORTANT AND HOW MUCH THE REASONS MATTER

THINK ABOUT YOUR CHOICE OF MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT.

LOOK AT THE REASONS FOR IT BEING IMPORTANT IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' INTHE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS HOW MUCH THE REASON MATTERS.

	MATTERS LEAST OF ALL	MATTERS A LITTLE	MATTERS MODERATELY	MATTERS A LOT	MATTERS MOST OF ALL
THE KNOWLEDGE WILL BE IMPORTANT LATER IN MY LIFE					
I'LL NEED THE KNOWLEDGE FOR WORK					
I'LL NEED THE KNOWLEDGE FOR A PARTICULAR JOB					
I ENJOY DOING THE SUBJECT					
I FIND THE SUBJECT EASY					
I AM GOOD AT THE SUBJECT					
MY PARENTS THINK THE SUBJECT IMPORTANT					
I GET ON WELL WITH THE TEACHER					
I HAVE FRIENDS IN THE CLASS					

ANY OTHER REASON?
(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

15. REASONS WHY YOU FIND A SUBJECT UNIMPORTANT.

YOUR LEAST IMPORTANT SUBJECT IS?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

16. REASONS WHY YOU FIND A SUBJECT UNIMPORTANT AND HOW MUCH THE REASONS MATTER

THINK ABOUT YOUR CHOICE OF LEAST IMPORTANT SUBJECT.

LOOK AT THE REASONS FOR IT BEING UNIMPORTANT IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN '**X**' INTHE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS HOW MUCH THE REASON MATTERS.

	MATTERS LEAST OF ALL	MATTERS A LITTLE	MATTERS MODERATELY	MATTERS A LOT	MATTERS MOST OF ALL
I CANNOT SEE THE RELEVANCE OF IT					
I WILL NOT NEED THE KNOWLEDGE LATER IN LIFE					
I HAVE NO TALENT FOR THE SUBJECT					
I DONT LIKE THE TEACHER					
MY PARENTS DONT FIND THE SUBJECT IMPORTANT					
THE WORK IS TOO HARD					
I FIND THE SUBJECT STRESSFUL					
OTHER TEACHERS FIND THE SUBJECT UNIMPORTANT					
I FIND THE WORK BORING					

ANY OTHER REASON?
(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

CHANGES OVER TIME

17. CHANGES OVER TIME –THIS YEAR.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE FAVOURITE SUBJECTS THIS YEAR?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

1

2

3

CHANGES OVER TIME

18.CHANGES OVER TIME- THIS YEAR.
CHANGING YOUR TOP THREE FAVOURITE SUBJECTS.

HAVE THESE CHANGED SINCE LAST YEAR?
(PLEASE PUT AN 'X' INTHE APPROPRIATE BOX)

HAVE THESE CHANGED SINCE LAST YEAR?	YES		NO	

IF THERE HAVE BEEN CHANGES, CAN YOU GIVE REASONS?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

CHANGES OVER TIME

19. CHANGES OVER TIME –THIS YEAR.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE IMPORTANT SUBJECTS THIS YEAR?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

1

2

3

CHANGES OVER TIME

20.CHANGES OVER TIME- THIS YEAR.
CHANGING YOUR TOP THREE IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

HAVE THESE CHANGED SINCE LAST YEAR?
(PLEASE PUT AN '**X**' INTHE APPROPRIATE BOX)

HAVE THESE CHANGED SINCE LAST YEAR?	YES		NO	

IF THERE HAVE BEEN CHANGES, CAN YOU GIVE REASONS?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

CHANGES OVER TIME

21. CHANGES OVER TIME –NEXT YEAR.

WHAT ARE LIKELY TO BE YOUR TOP THREE FAVOURITE SUBJECTS NEXT YEAR?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

1

2

3

CHANGES OVER TIME

22.CHANGES OVER TIME- NEXT YEAR.
CHANGING YOUR TOP THREE FAVOURITE SUBJECTS.

WILL THESE HAVE CHANGED SINCE THIS YEAR?
(PLEASE PUT AN 'X' INTHE APPROPRIATE BOX)

HAVE THESE CHANGED SINCE LAST YEAR?	YES		NO	

IF THERE HAVE BEEN CHANGES, CAN YOU GIVE REASONS?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

CHANGES OVER TIME

23. CHANGES OVER TIME –NEXT YEAR.

WHAT ARE LIKELY TO BE YOUR TOP THREE IMPORTANT SUBJECTS NEXT YEAR?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

1

2

3

CHANGES OVER TIME

24.CHANGES OVER TIME- NEXT YEAR.
CHANGING YOUR TOP THREE IMPORTANT SUBJECTS.

WILL THESE HAVE CHANGED SINCE THIS YEAR?
(PLEASE PUT AN 'X' INTHE APPROPRIATE BOX)

HAVE THESE CHANGED SINCE LAST YEAR?	YES		NO	

IF THERE HAVE BEEN CHANGES, CAN YOU GIVE REASONS?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

CHANGES OVER TIME

25. ANXIETY OR STRESS -THIS YEAR.

WHAT HAS MADE YOU MOST ANXIOUS OR STRESSED THIS YEAR?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

CHANGES OVER TIME

26. ANXIETY OR STRESS -NEXT YEAR.

WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL CAUSE YOU MOST ANXIETY OR STRESS NEXT YEAR?

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

CHANGES OVER TIME

27.SUBJECTS AND GCSE CHOICES

YOU HAVE MADE A CHOICE OF GCSE SUBJECTS,
THINK ABOUT THE SUBJECTS THAT YOU **ARE** STUDYING
THINK ABOUT THE SUBJECTS THAT YOU **ARE NOT** STUDYING

LOOK AT THE SUBJECTS IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN 'X' IN EACH ROW WHERE THE COLUMN REFLECTS YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

	I AM **STUDYING** THIS SUBJECT **FOR GCSE**		I AM NOT **STUDYING** THIS SUBJECT **FOR GCSE**	
	AND AM **HAPPY** TO BE DOING SO	BUT WOULD **HAVE LIKED NOT** TO	AND AM **HAPPY NOT** TO BE DOING SO	BUT WOULD **HAVE LIKED** TO
ART				
CLASSICS				
DT				
ENGLISH				
FRENCH				
GAMES				
GERMAN				
GEOGRAPHY				
HISTORY				
IT				
LATIN				
MATHS				
MUSIC				
PE				
PSHE				
RE				
SCIENCE -BIOLOGY				
SCIENCE - CHEMISTRY				
SCIENCE -PHYSICS				
SPANISH				

FINALLY!

28. PLEASE ADD ANY COMMENTS OR ADDITIONS THAT YOU THINK ARE IMPORTANT

(PLEASE WRITE IN THE RED BOX)

THANKYOU FOR TAKING PART IN THE THIRD YEAR OF THE STUDY

This is the version of Question 27, dealing with GCSE choices, which was used in Years 7 and 8, before pupils had made their GCSE option choices.

CHANGES OVER TIME

27.THINKING AHEAD - SUBJECTS AND GCSE CHOICES

IF YOU HAD A COMPLETELY FREE CHOICE OF GCSE SUBJECTS, WHAT WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

LOOK AT THE SUBJECTS IN EACH ROW.

PUT AN 'X' INTHE COLUMN THAT REFLECTS YOUR LEVEL OF CHOICE.

	I DON'T KNOW	I WILL DEFINITELY CHOOSE THIS	I THINK I WOULD CHOOSE THIS	I MIGHT CONSIDER THIS	I DO NOT THINK I WOULD CHOOSE THIS	I WILL DEFINITELY NOT CHOOSE THIS
ART						
CLASSICS						
DT						
ENGLISH						
FRENCH						
GAMES						
GERMAN						
HISTORY						
IT						
LATIN						
MATHS						
MUSIC						
PE						
PSHE						
RE						
SCIENCE						
SPANISH						

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

This schedule was used for interviews conducted at the beginning of each academic year over the period of the research (Years 8, 9, 10 and 11).

Research interview questions	Year 2 – November 2004
With:	
Date:	
At:	Comments
Enjoyment Why do you think some things about school are more enjoyable than others? What do you think is most and least enjoyable about school? Why do you think there are some subjects that are more or less enjoyable than others?	
Importance Why do you think some things about school are more important than others? What do you think is most and least important about school? Why do you think there are some subjects that are more or less important than others?	

Changed views How have you changed your views or opinions this year on: Friends, Subjects, Teachers, This school, The next school, The future, How you work and play, What you try hard at, What is important GCSEs.	
Influences Who and what has had any influence on your views or opinions on: Friends, Subjects, Teachers, This school, The next school, The future, How you work and play, What you try hard at, What is important GCSEs.	

Appendix C

Graphical Presentation Of Quantitative Data From Questionnaires

This Appendix contains graphical data derived from questionnaires conducted at the end of each academic year during the period of the research (Years 7, 8, 9 and 10).

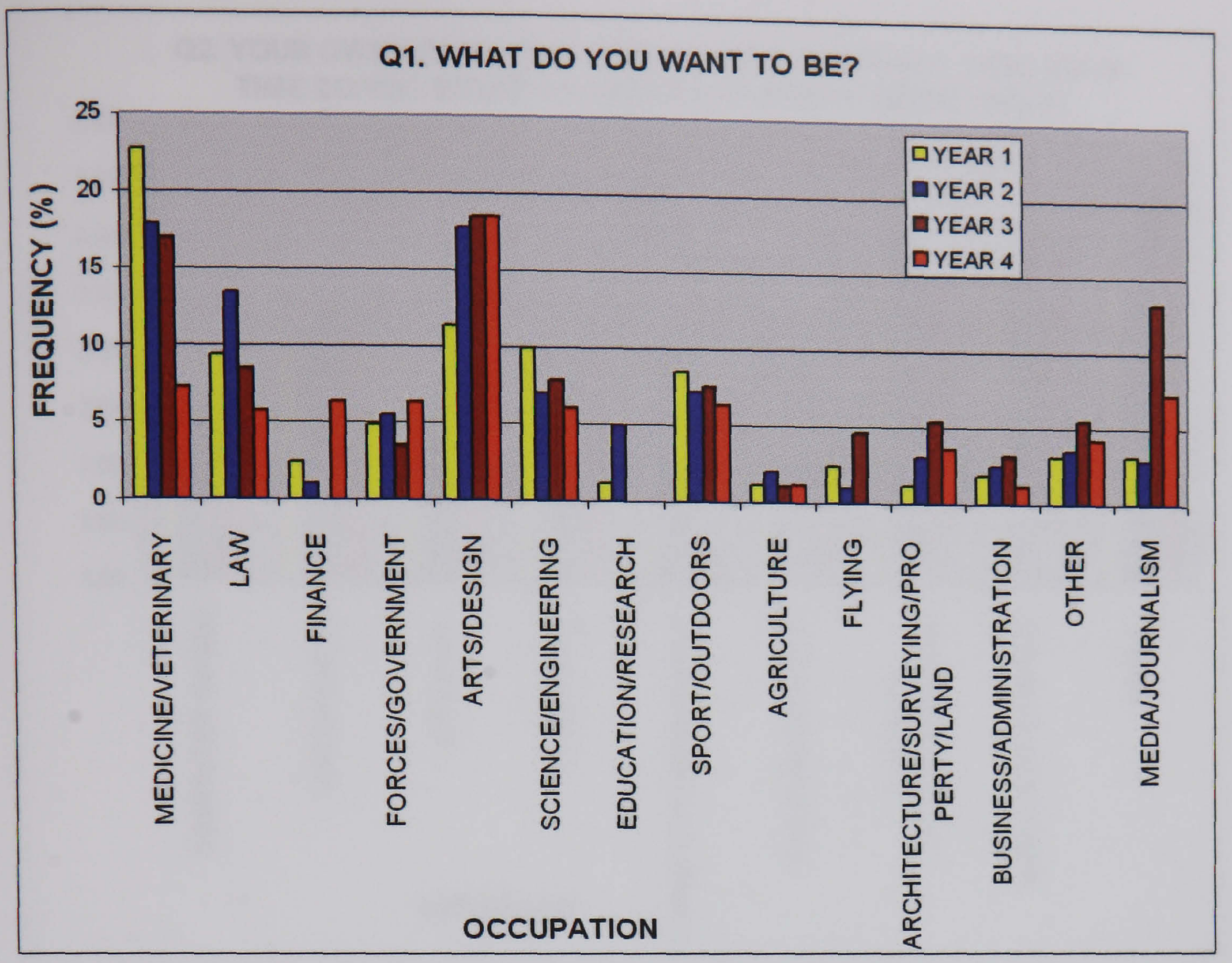

Fig. 1 Pupil career aspirations

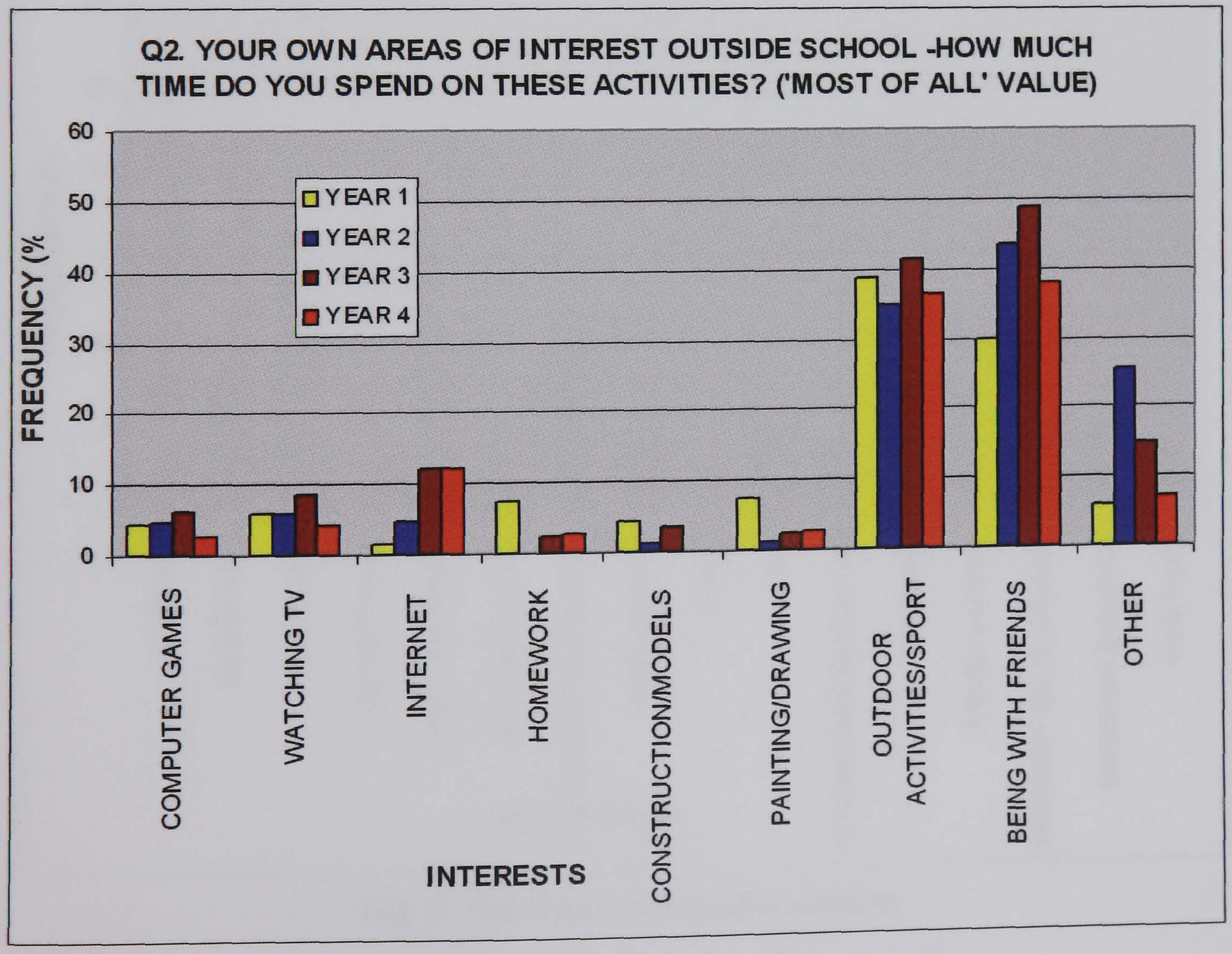

Fig. 2a Activities outside school (most)

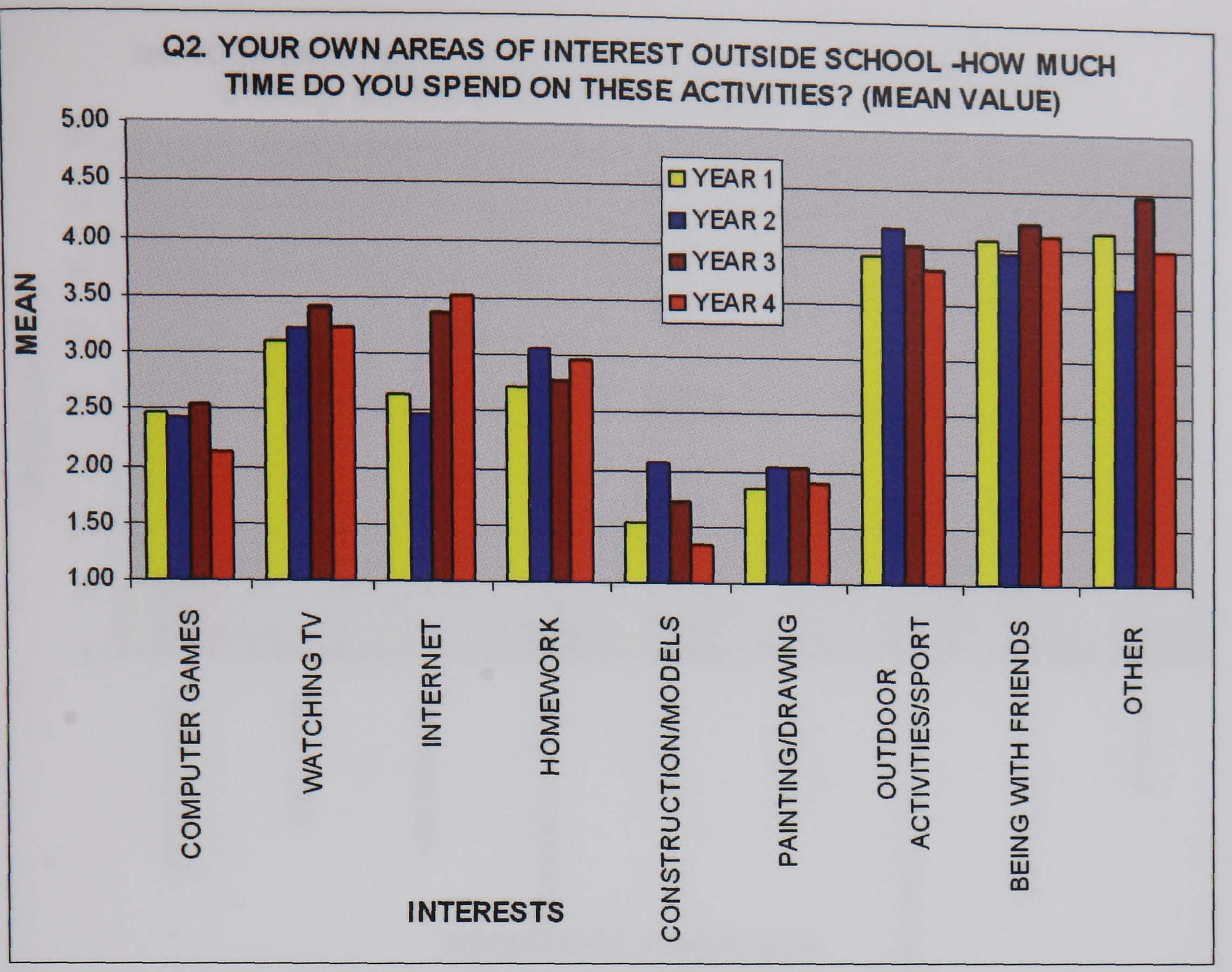

Fig. 2b Activities outside school (mean)

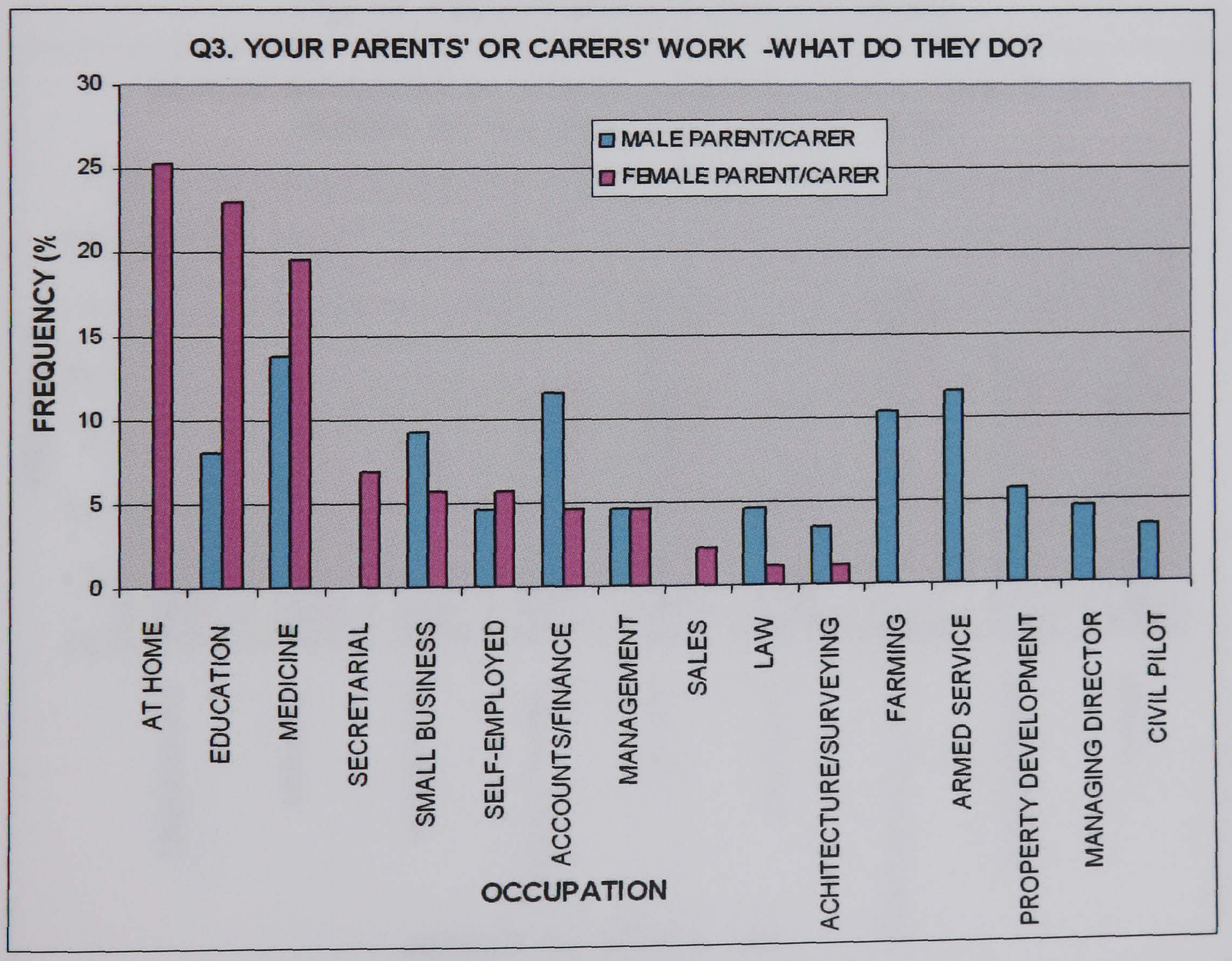

Fig. 3 Parents'/carers' occupations

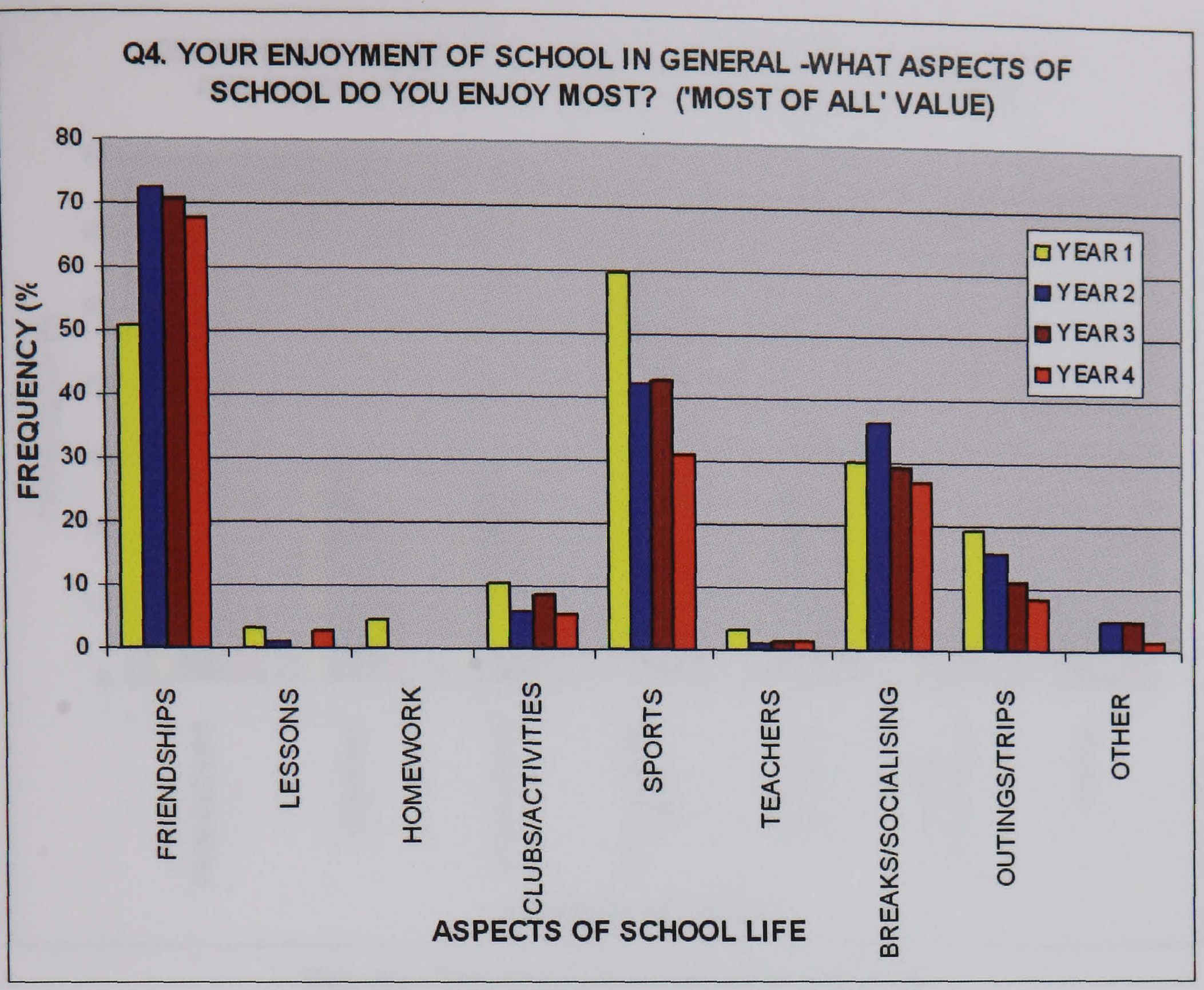

Fig. 4a Pupils enjoyment of school (most)

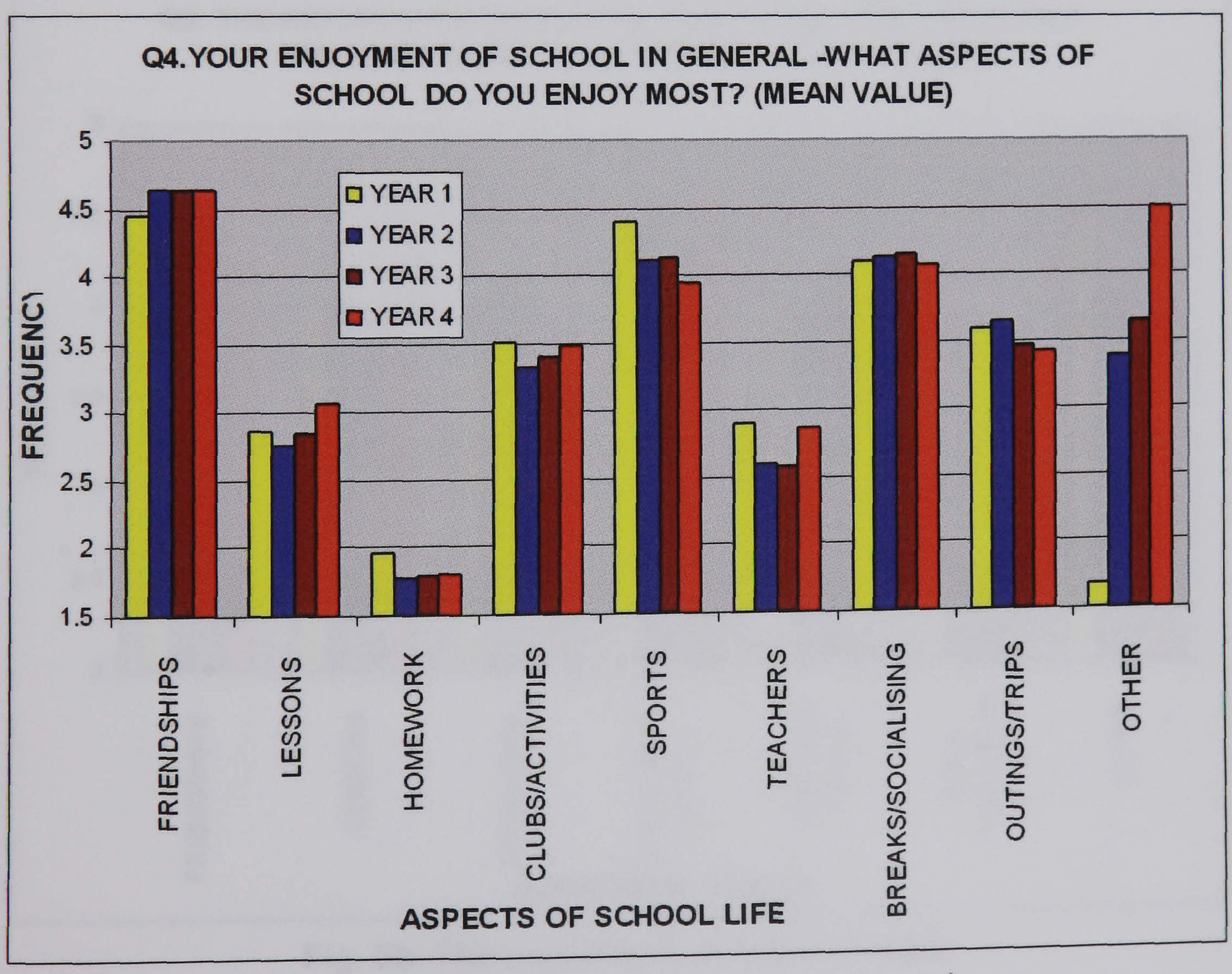

Fig. 4b Pupils enjoyment of school (mean)

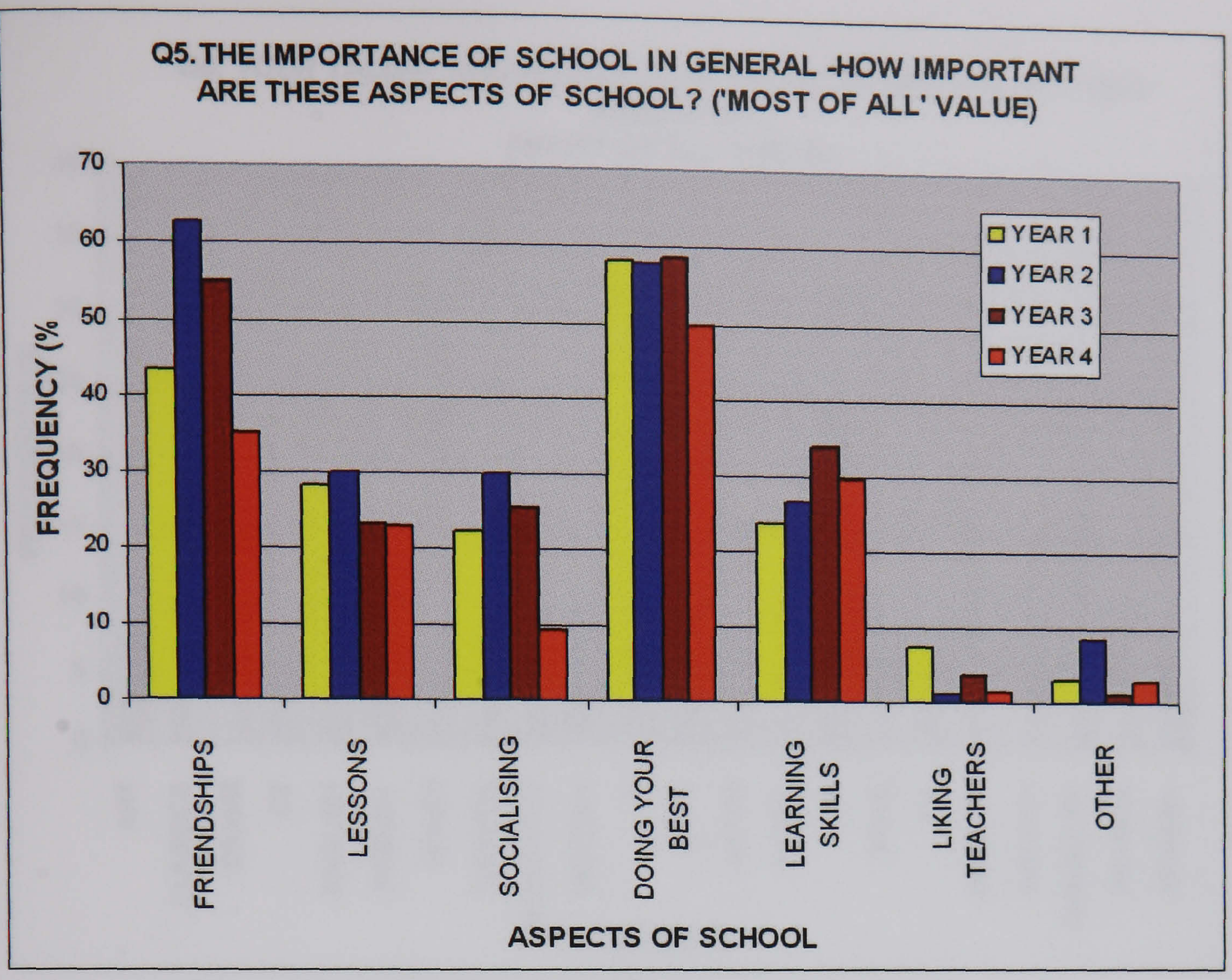

Fig. 5a The importance of school (most)

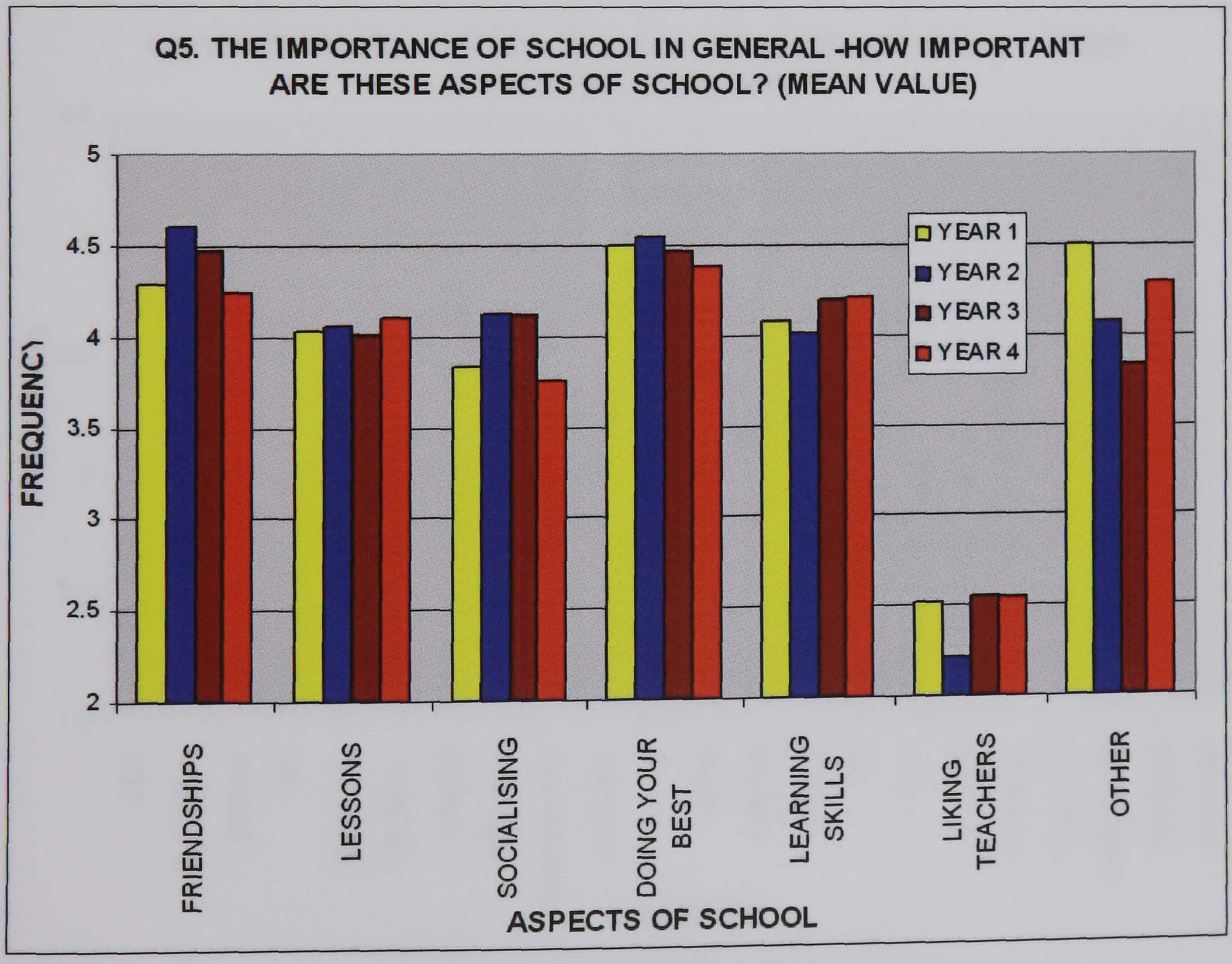

Fig. 5b The importance of school (mean)

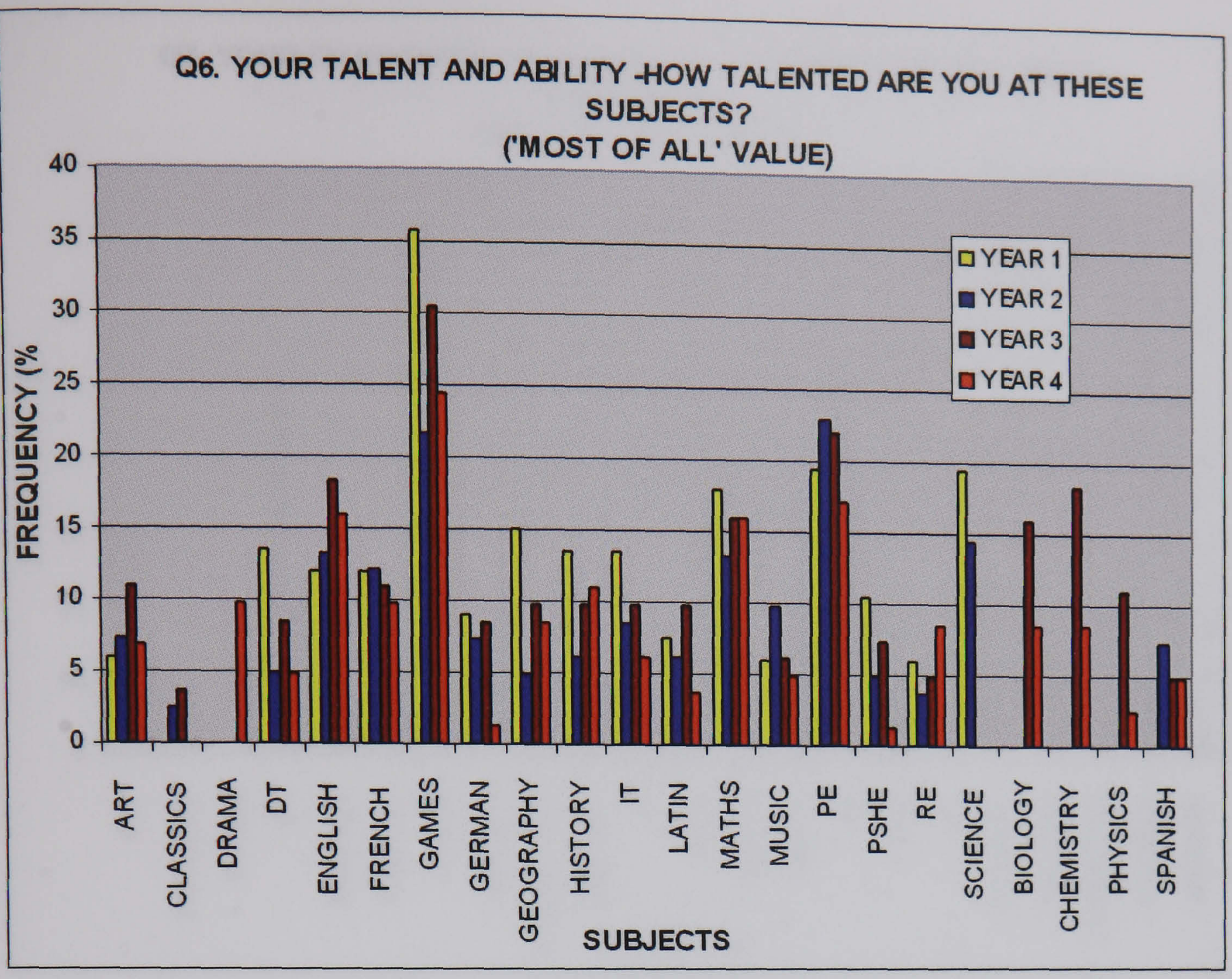

Fig. 6a Talent or ability at subjects (most)

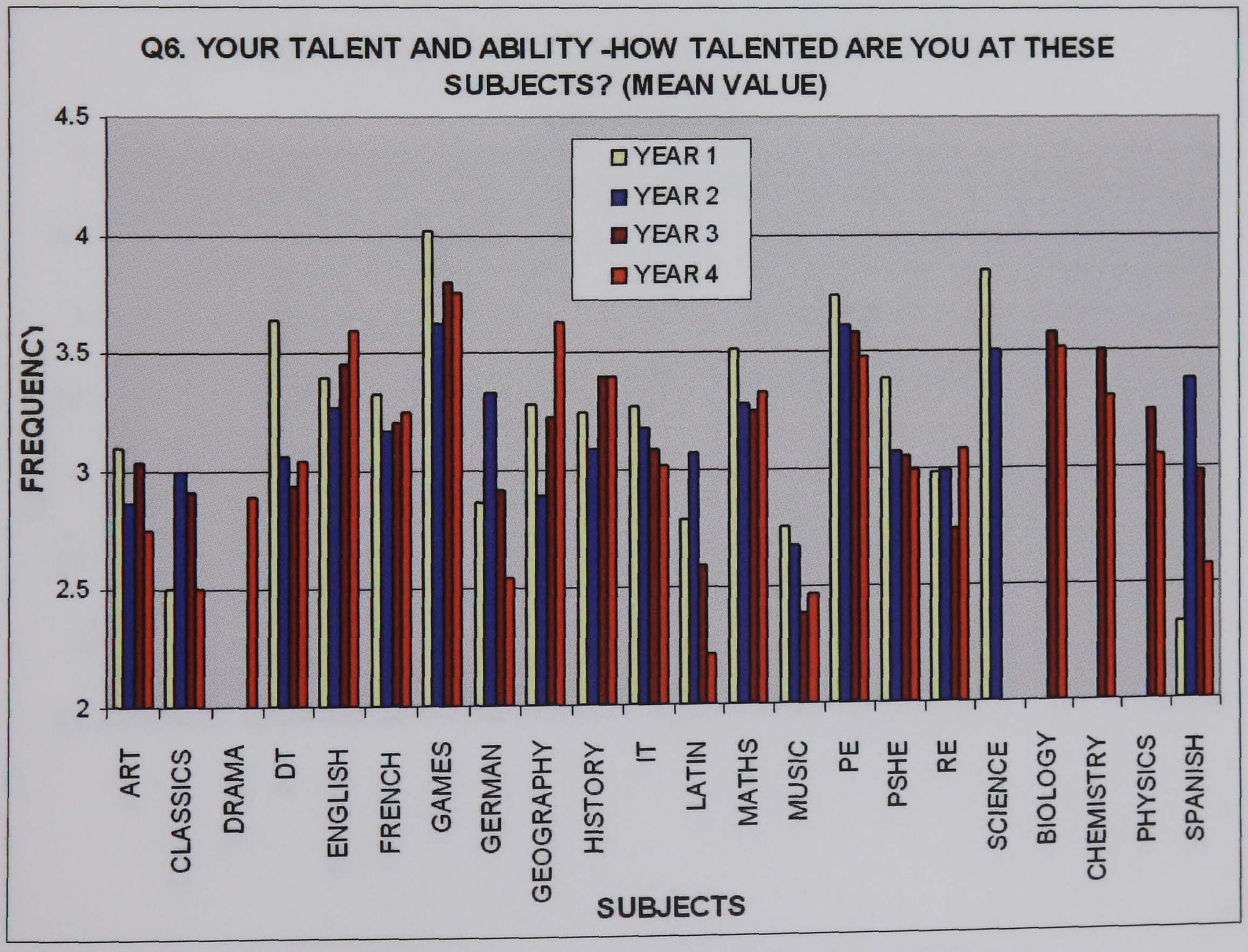

Fig. 6b Talent or ability at subjects (mean)

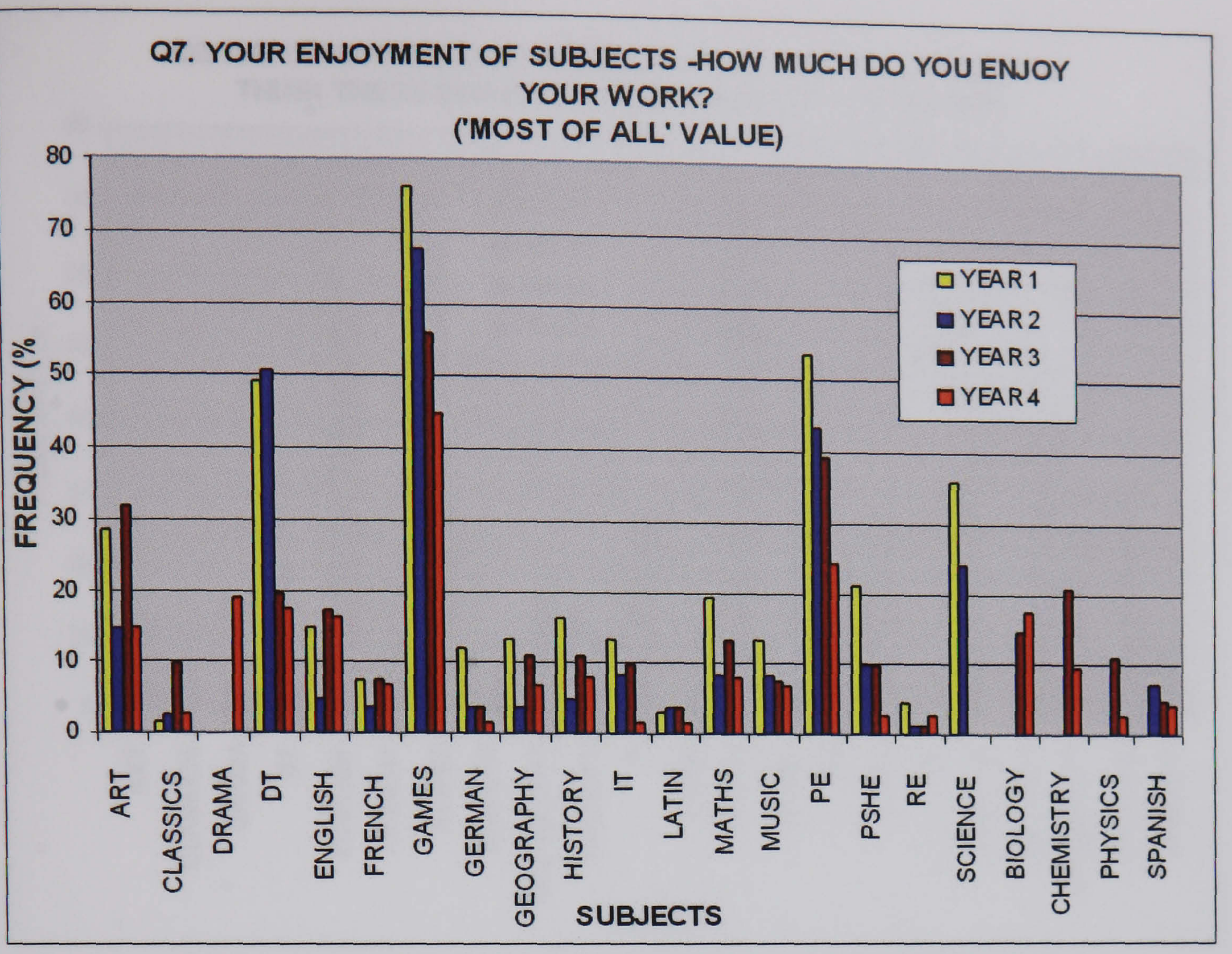

Fig. 7a The degree to which subjects were enjoyed (most)

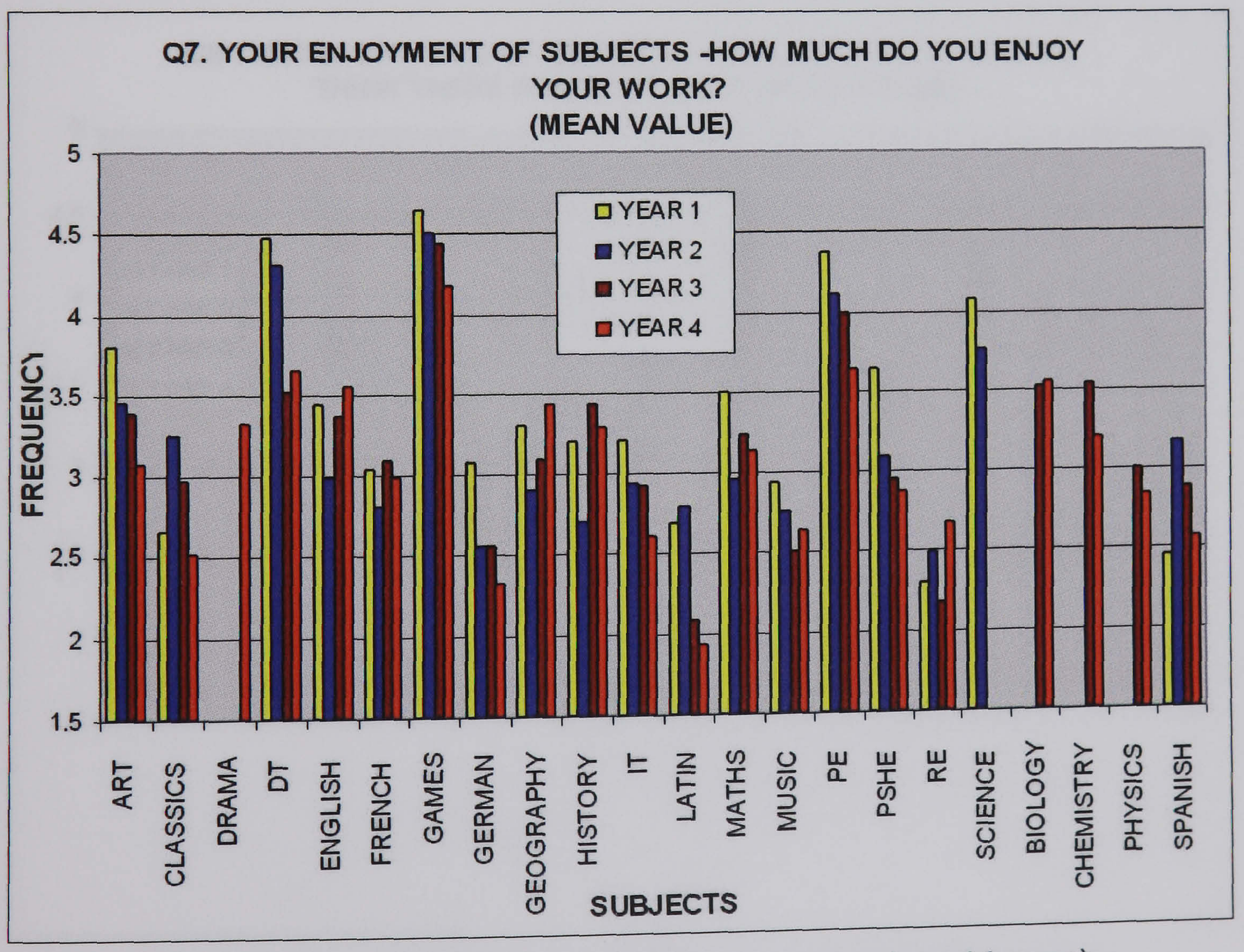

Fig. 7b The degree to which subjects were enjoyed (mean)

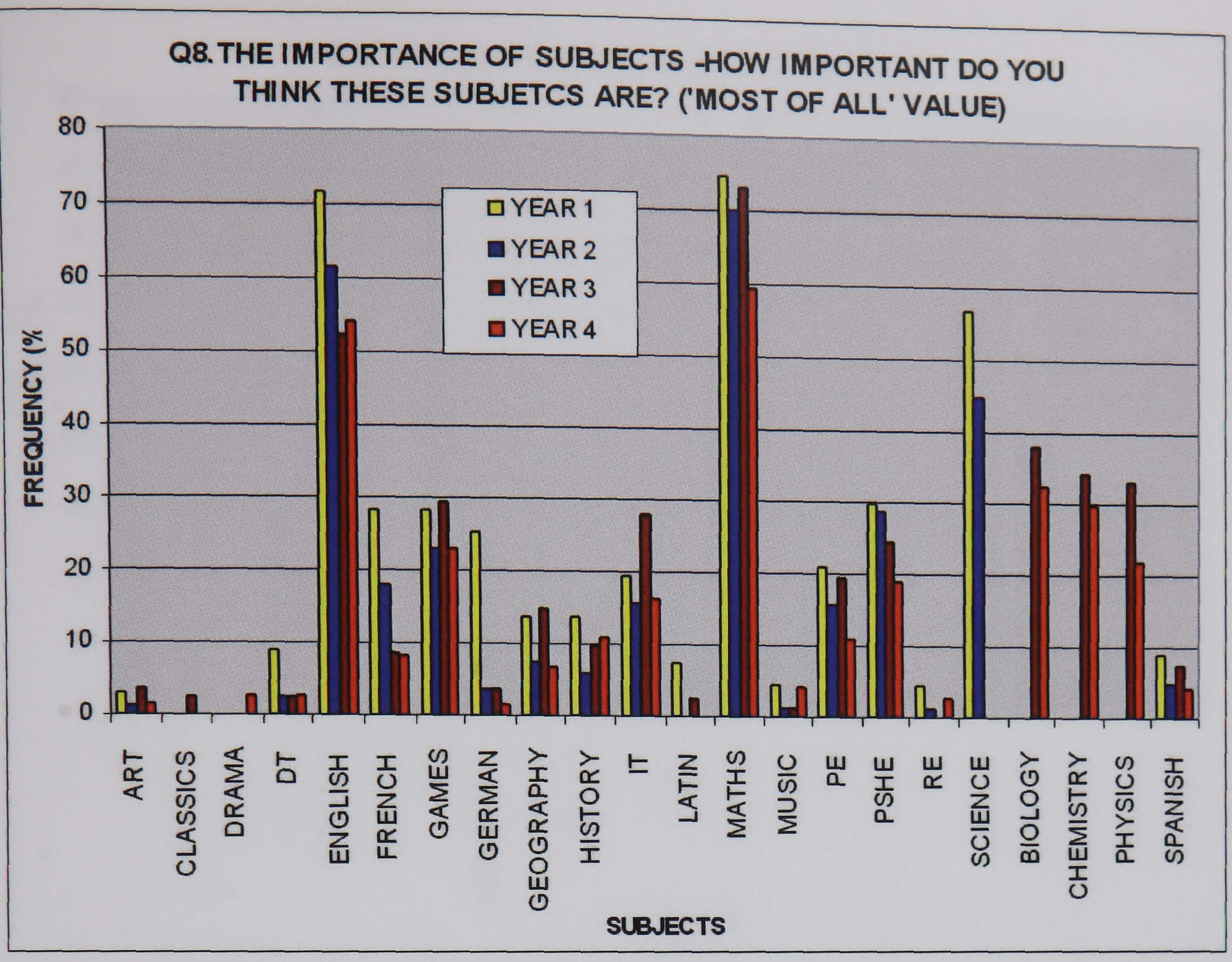

Fig. 8a The degree to which subjects were important (most)

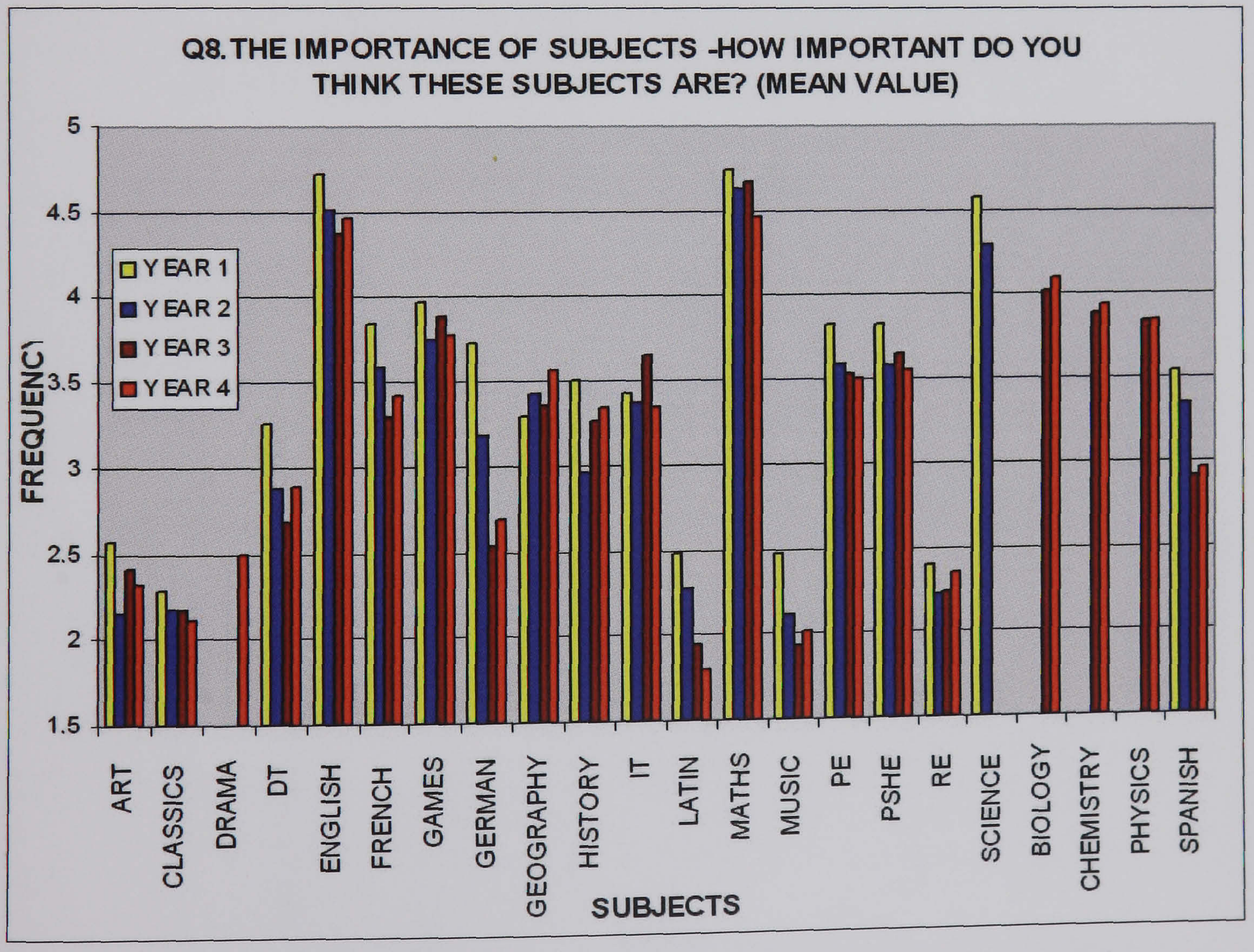

Fig. 8b The degree to which subjects were important (mean)

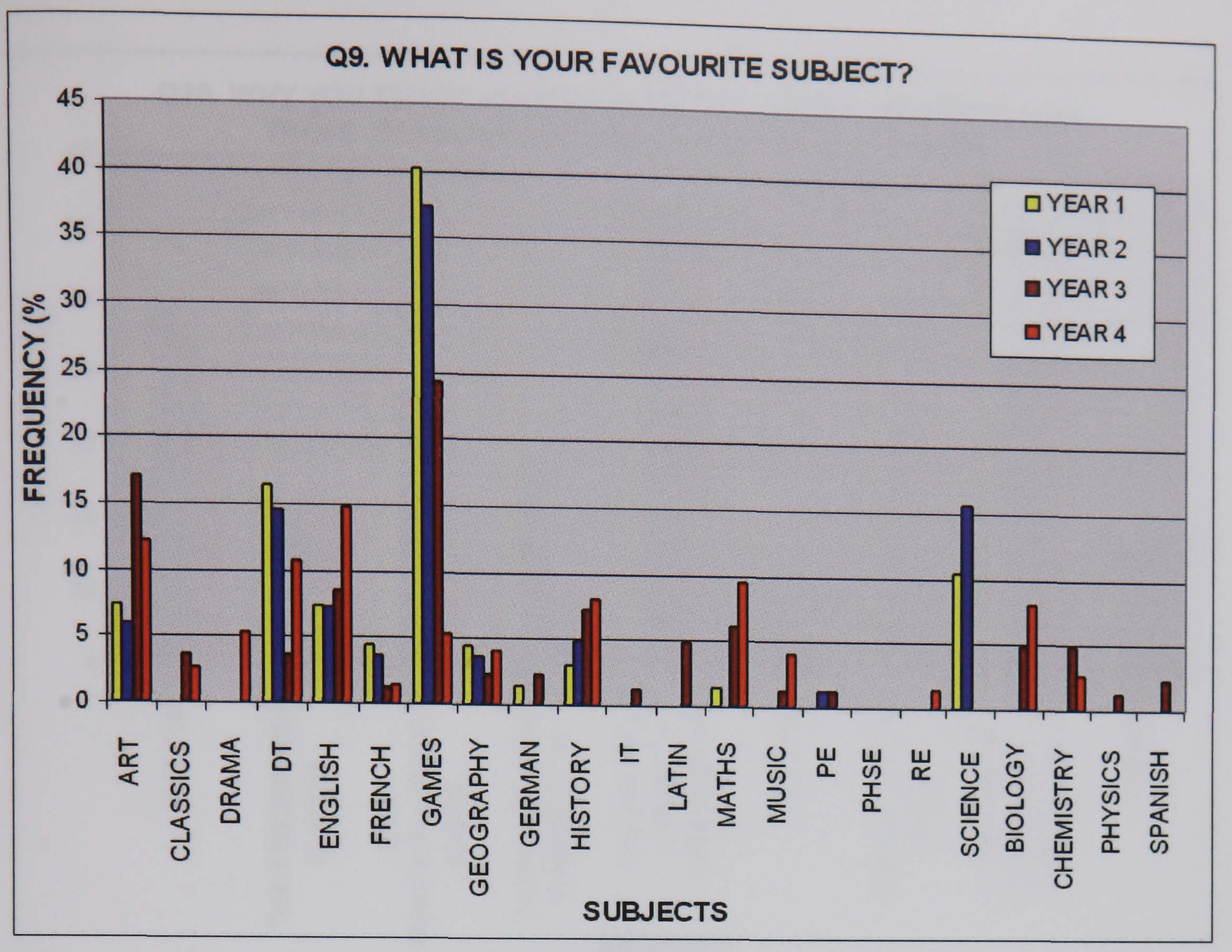

Fig. 9 The single, most favourite subject

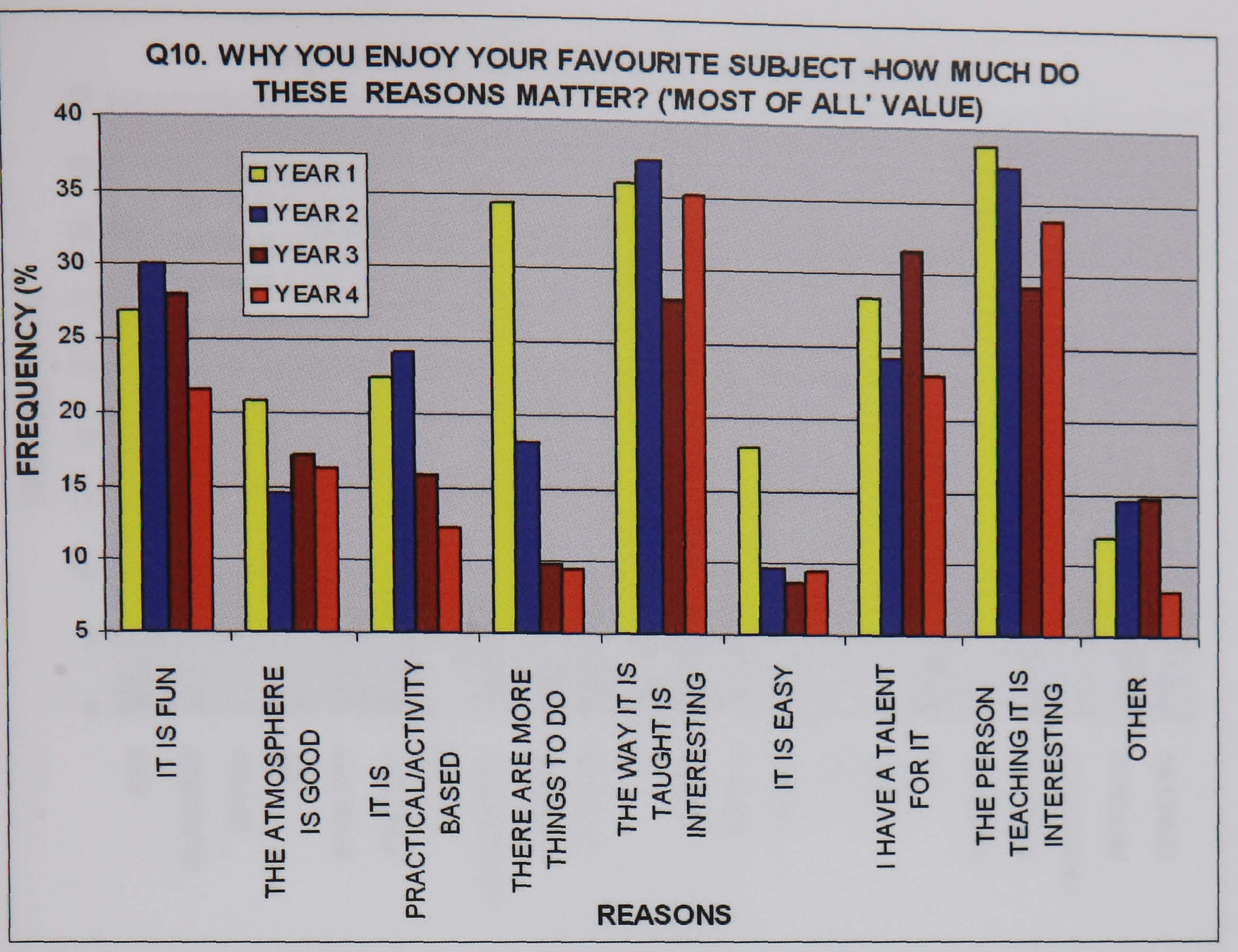

Fig. 10a Reasons why a subject is enjoyed (most)

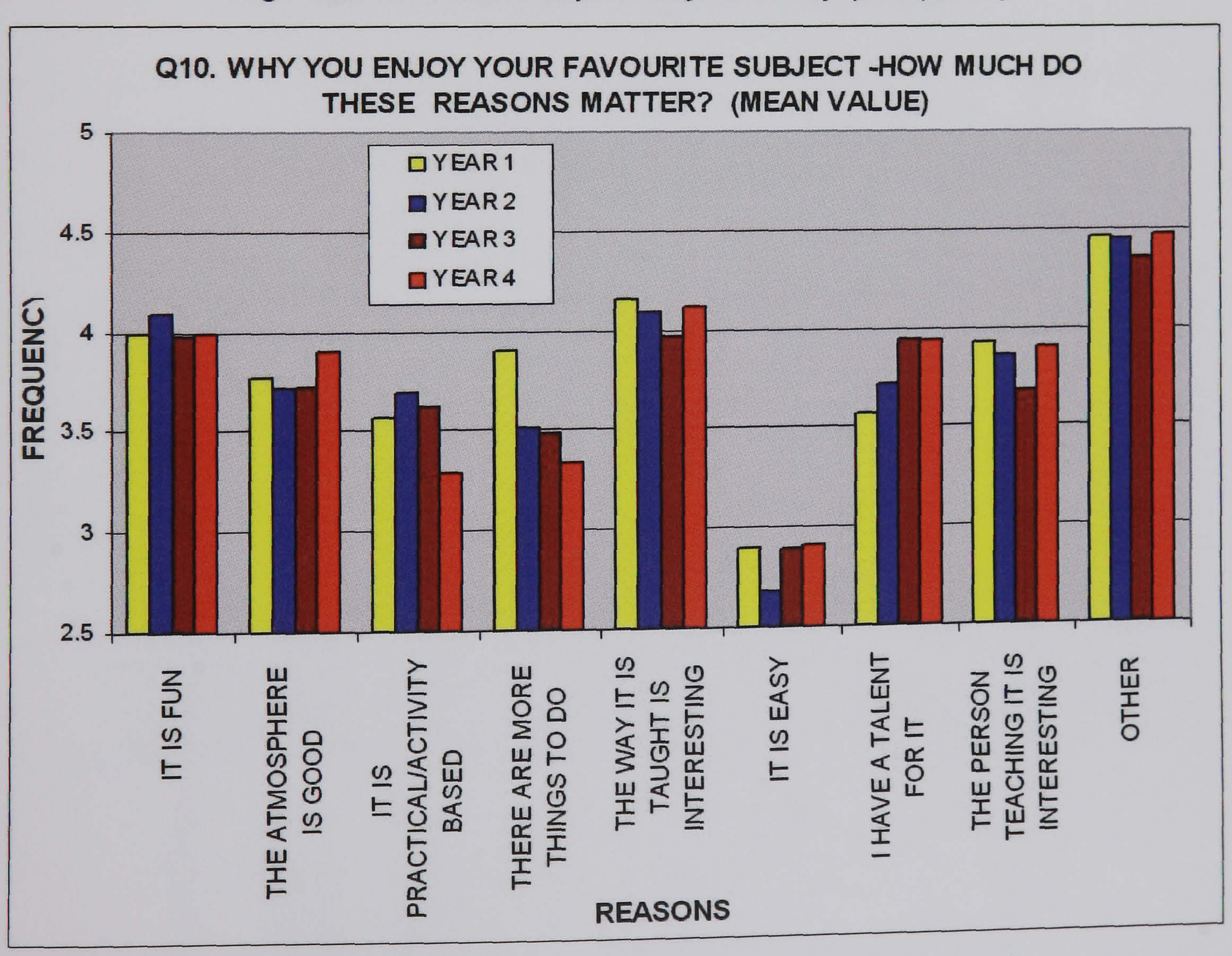

Fig. 10b Reasons why a subject is enjoyed (mean)

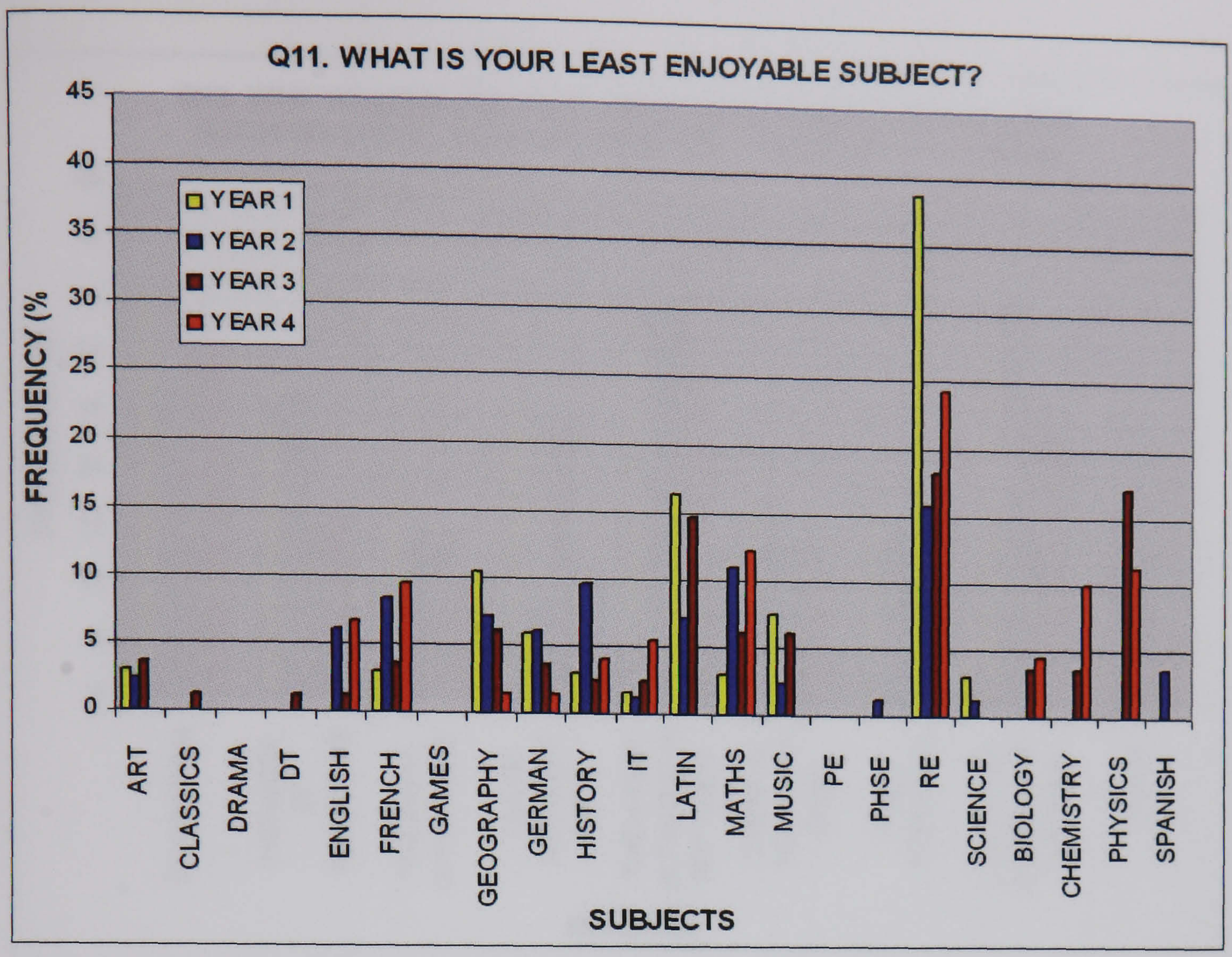

Fig. 11 The single, least enjoyable subject

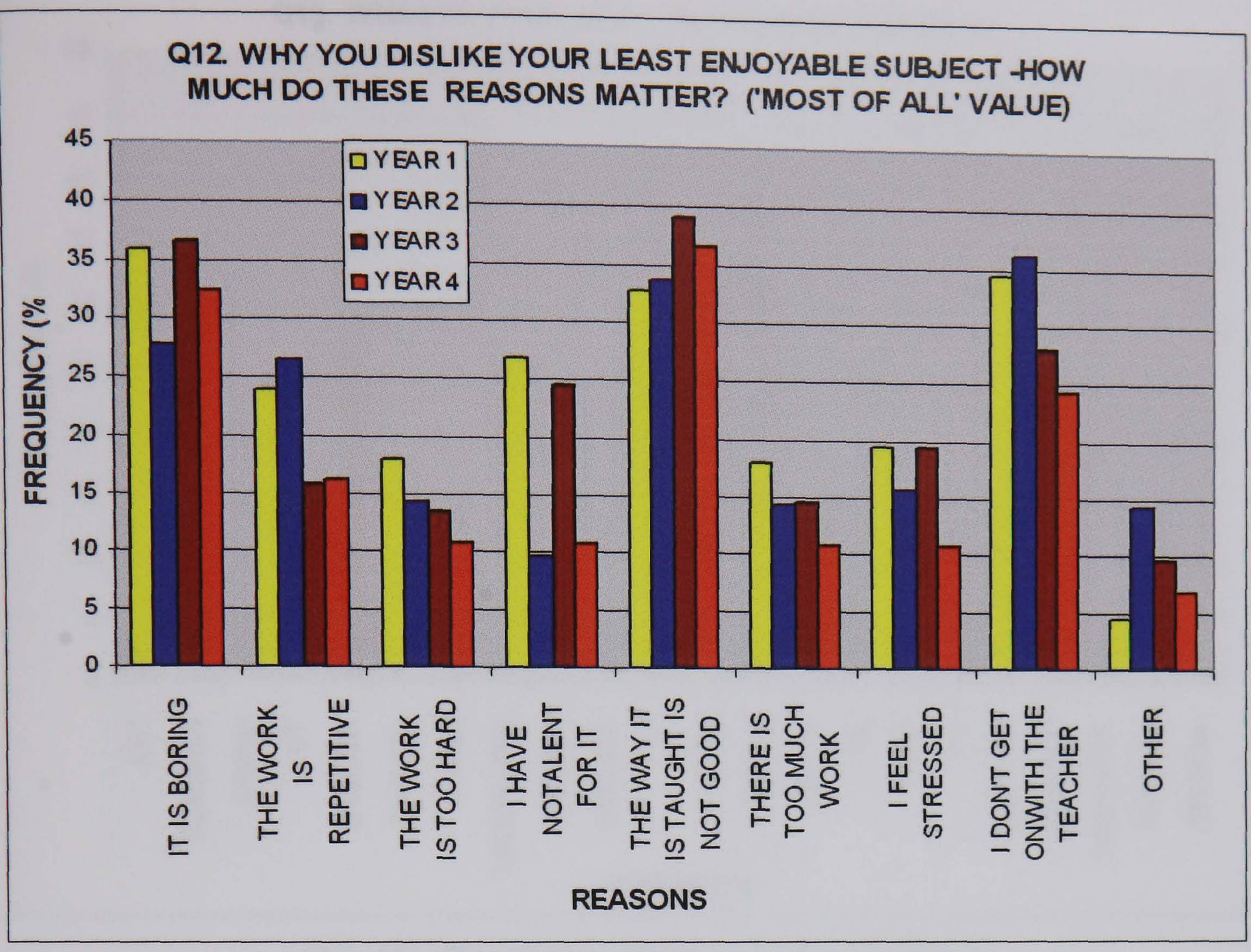

Fig. 12a Reasons why a subject is enjoyed (most)

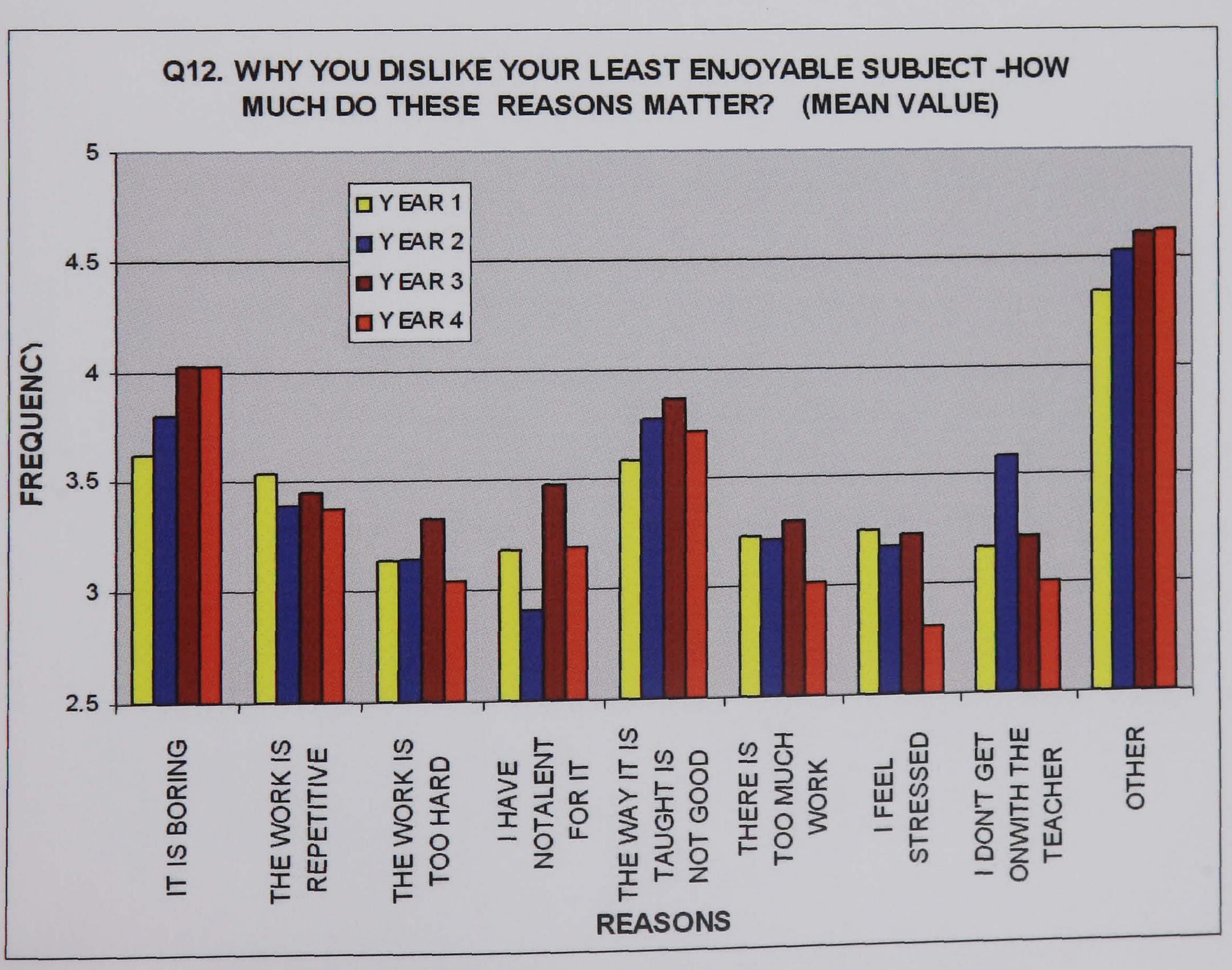

Fig. 12b Reasons why a subject is enjoyed (mean)

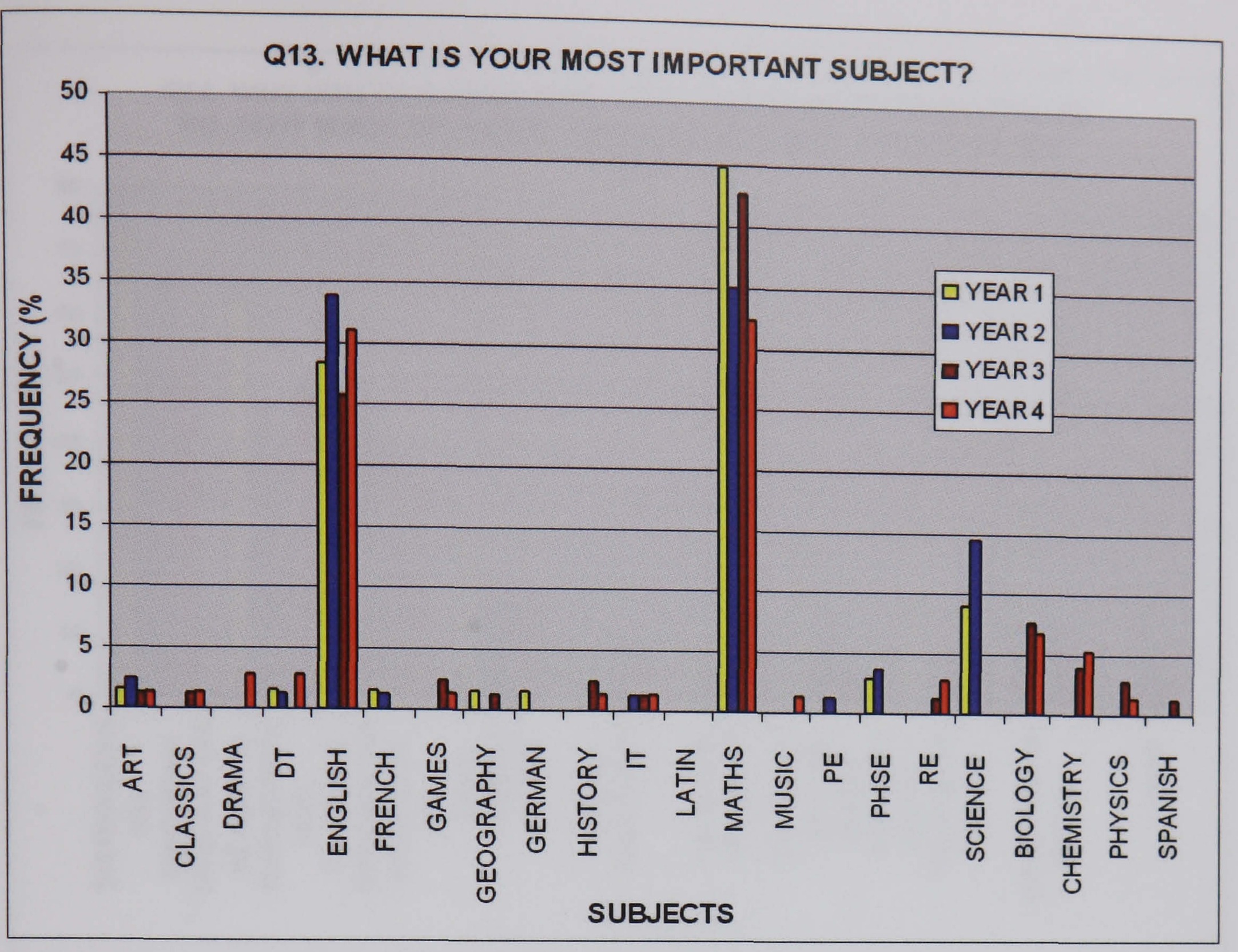

Fig. 13 The single, most important subject

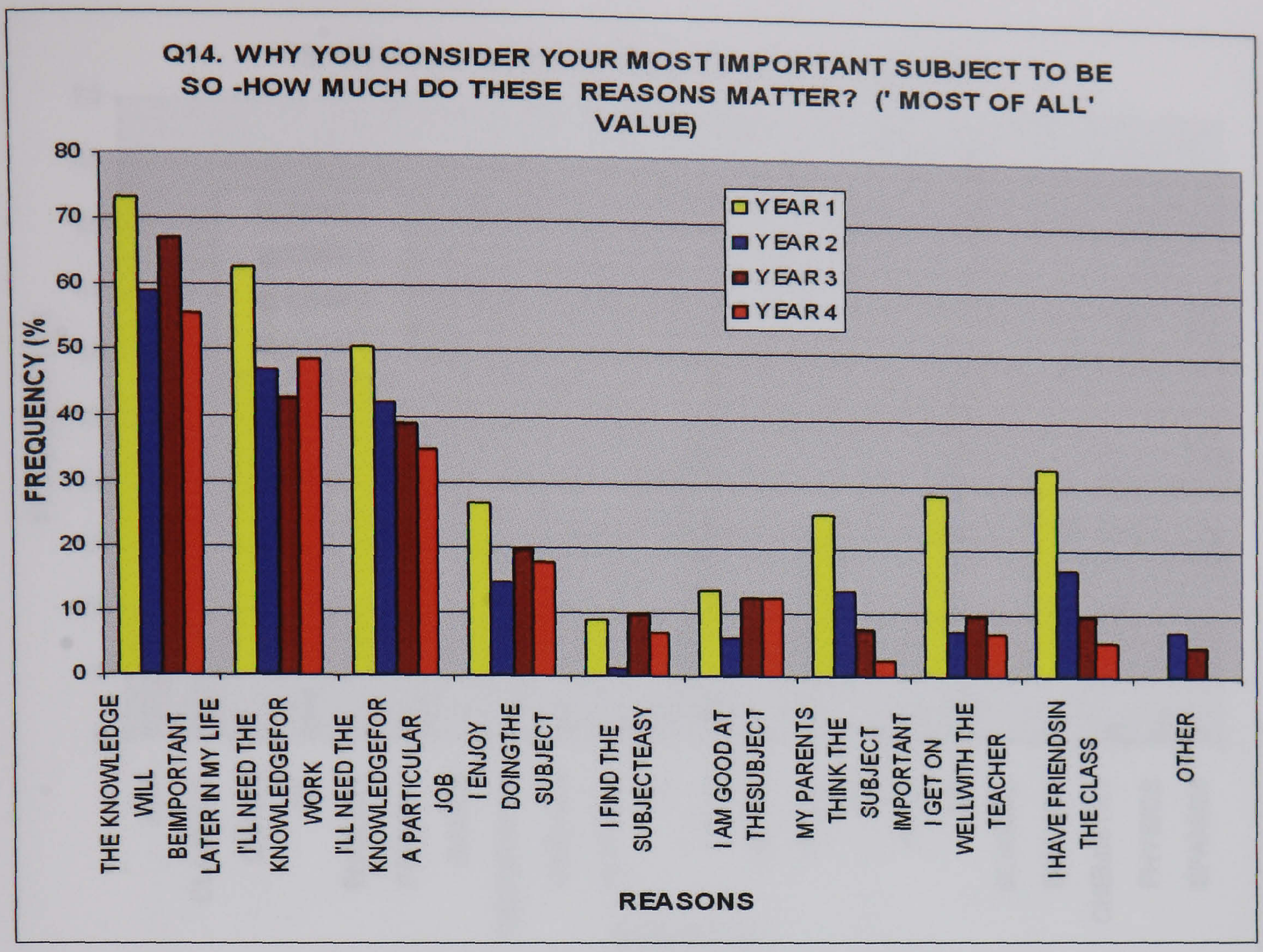

Fig. 14a Reasons why a subject is important (most)

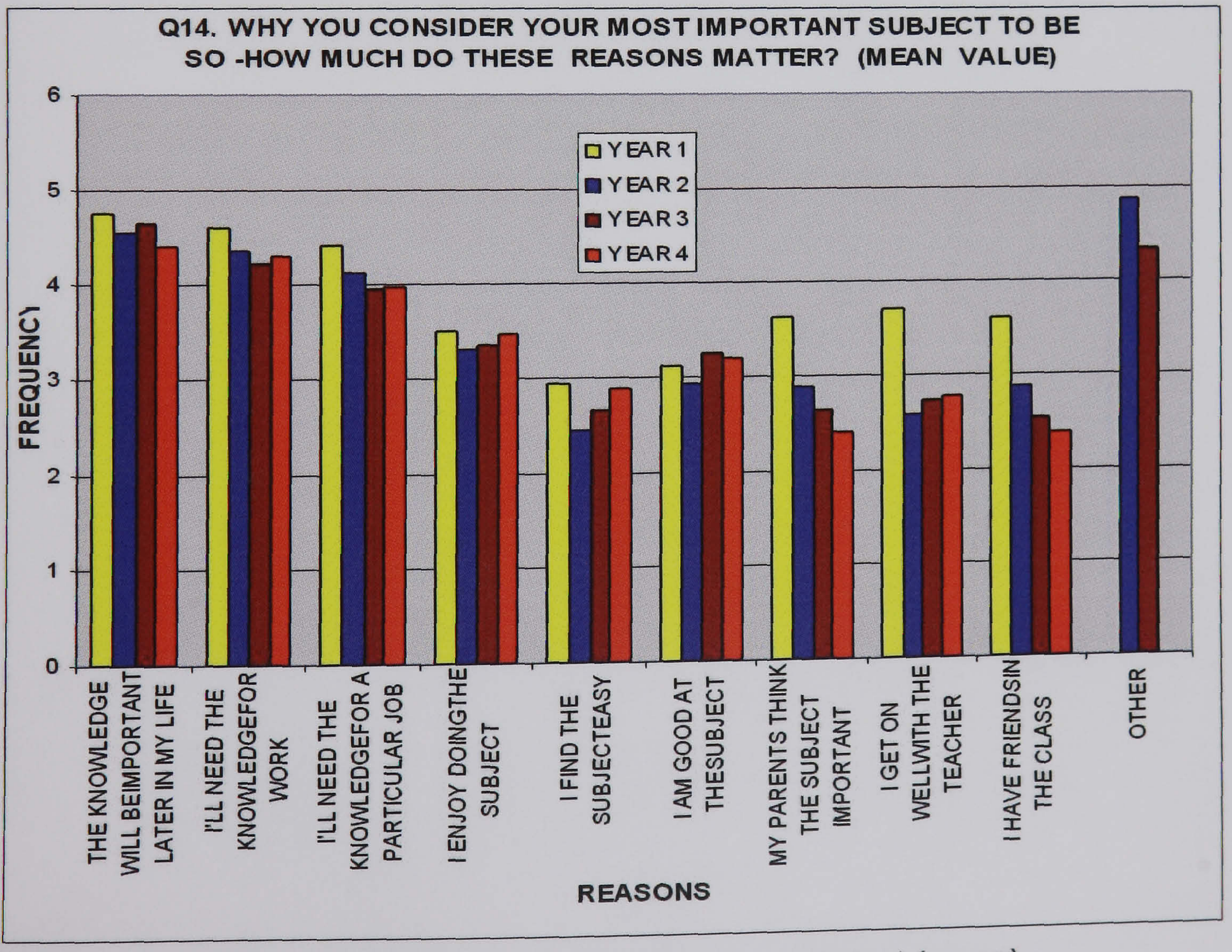

Fig. 14b Reasons why a subject is important (mean)

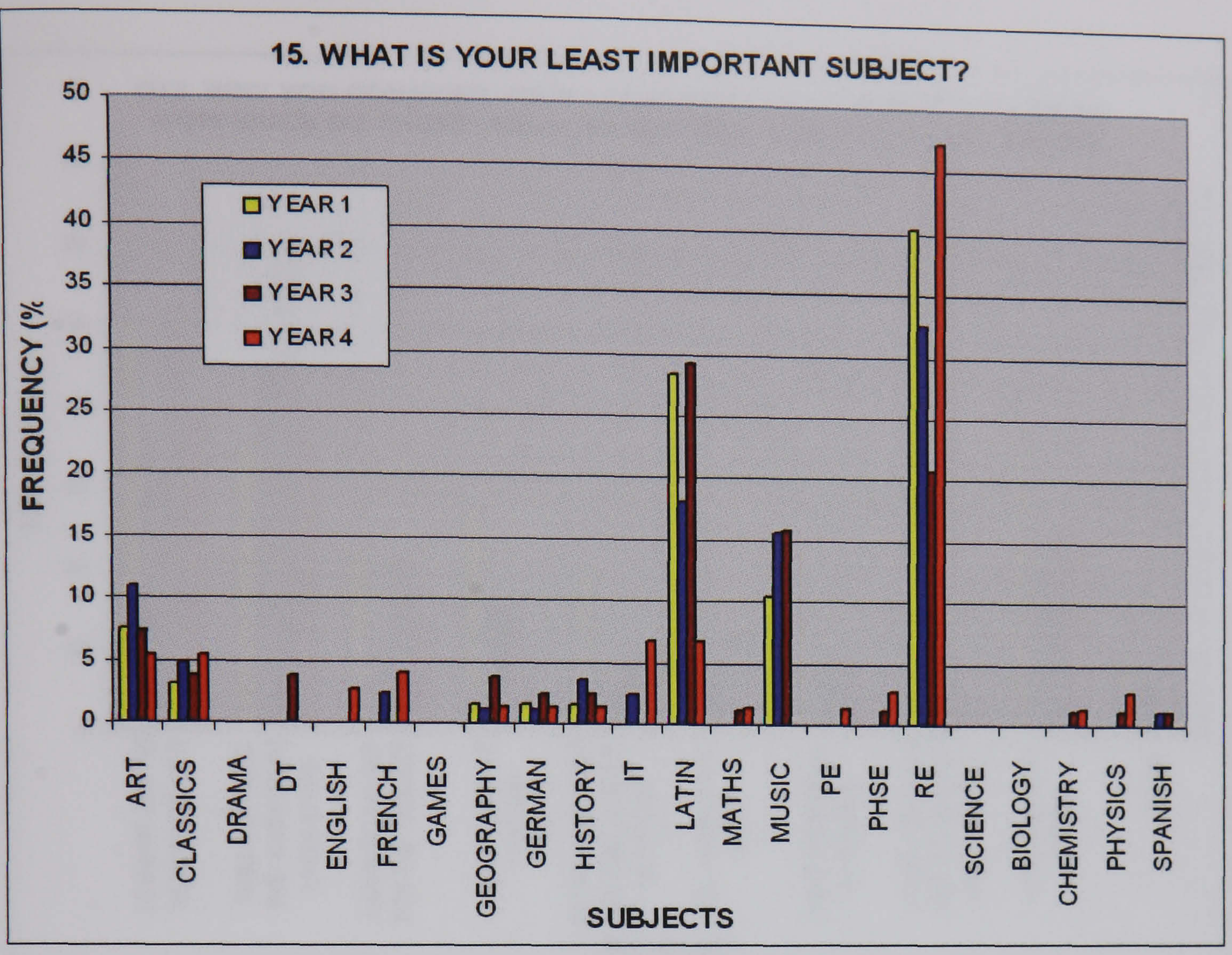

Fig. 15 The single, least important subject

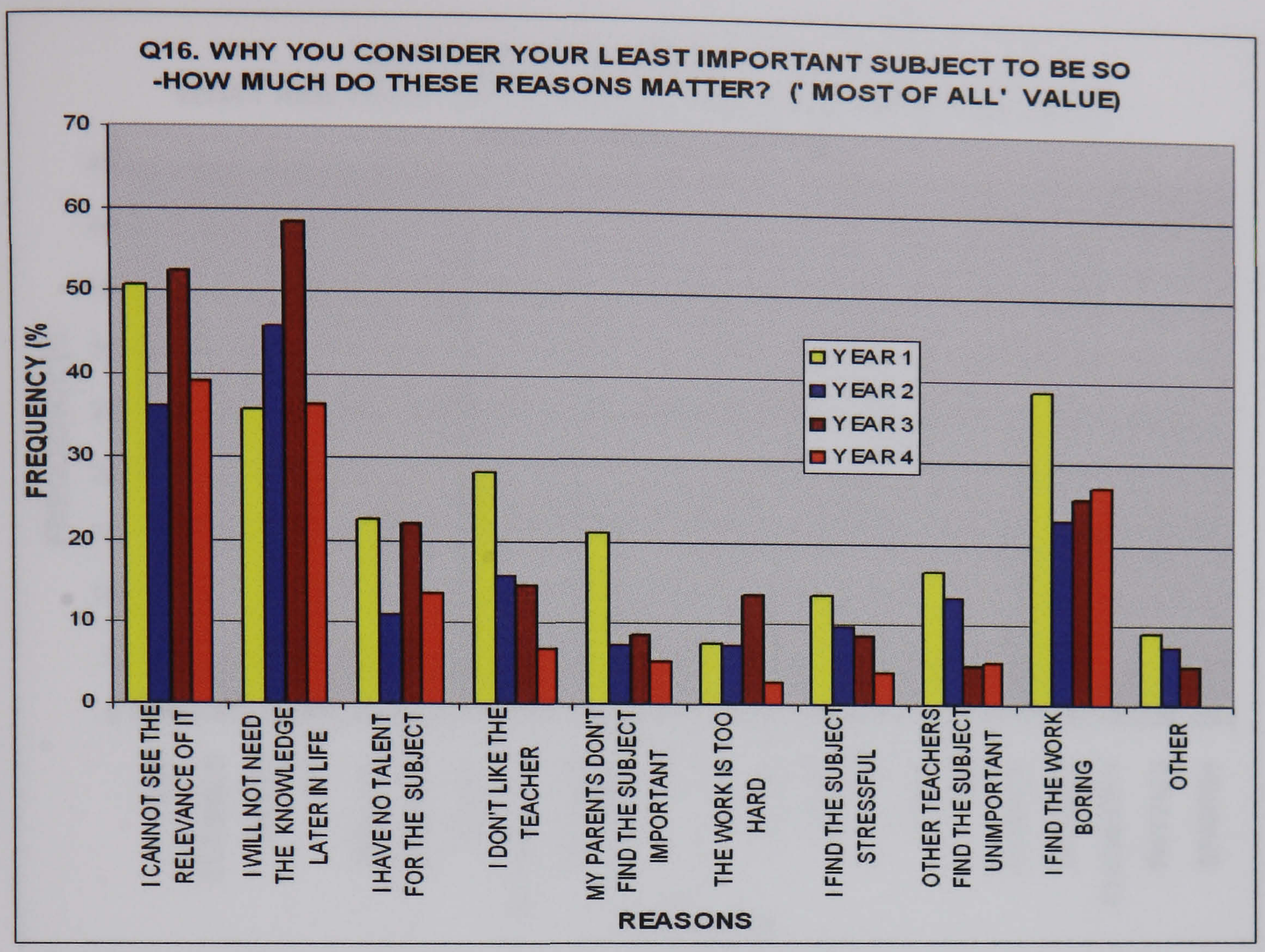

Fig. 16a Reasons why a subject is least important (most significant)

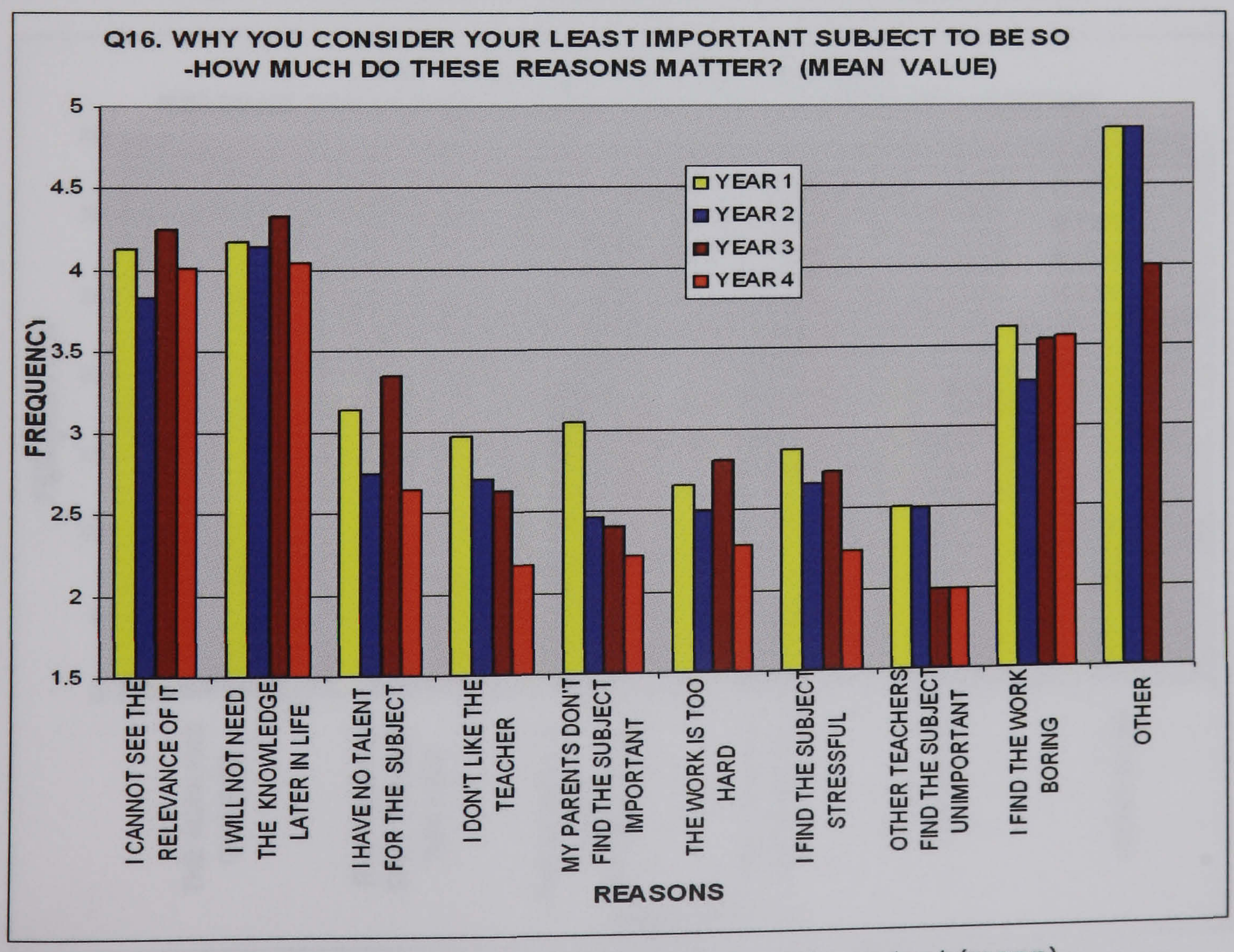

Fig. 16b Reasons why a subject is least important (mean)

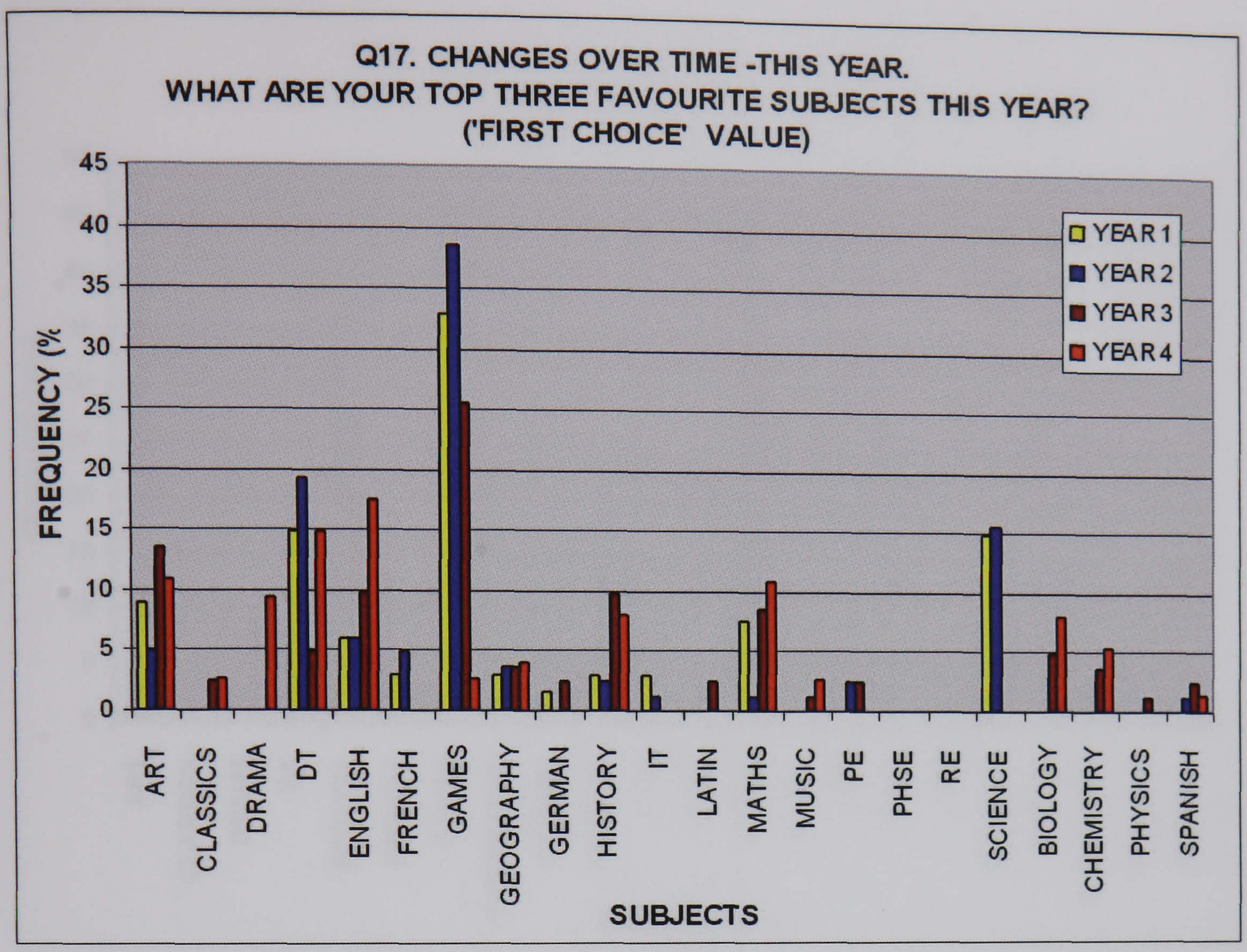

Fig. 17 Top three favourite subjects this year (first choice)

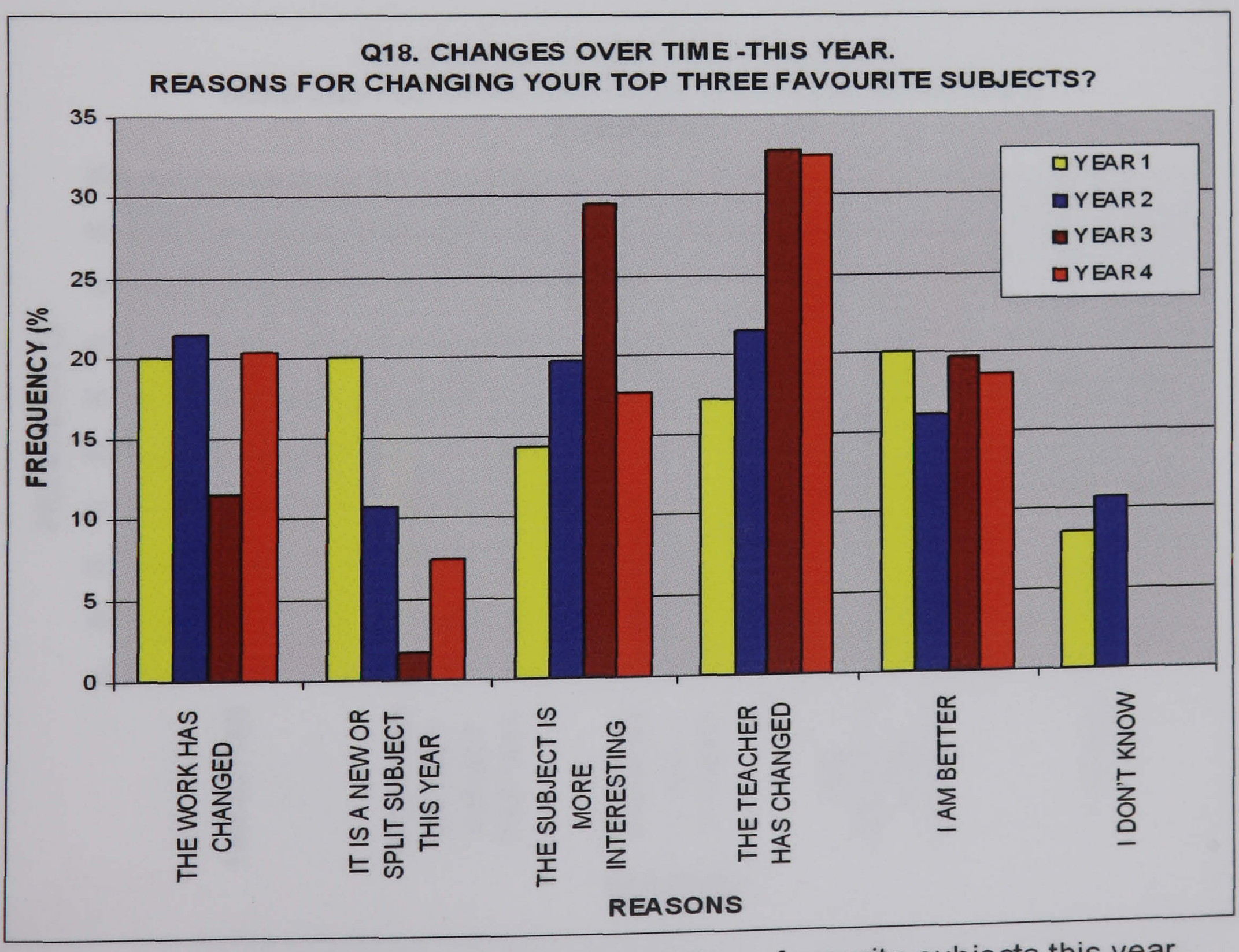

Fig. 18 Reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects this year

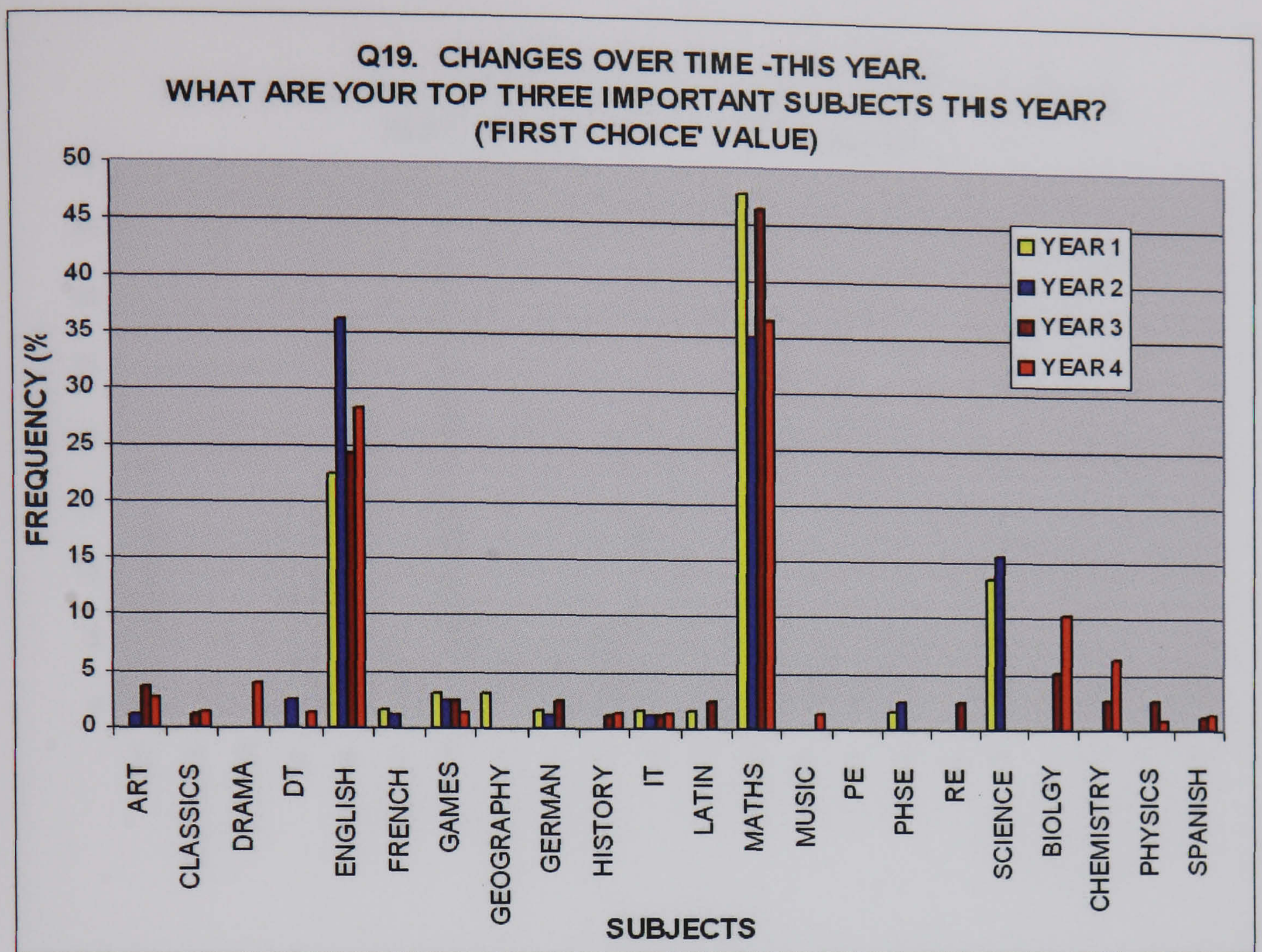

Fig. 19 Top three important subjects this year (first choice)

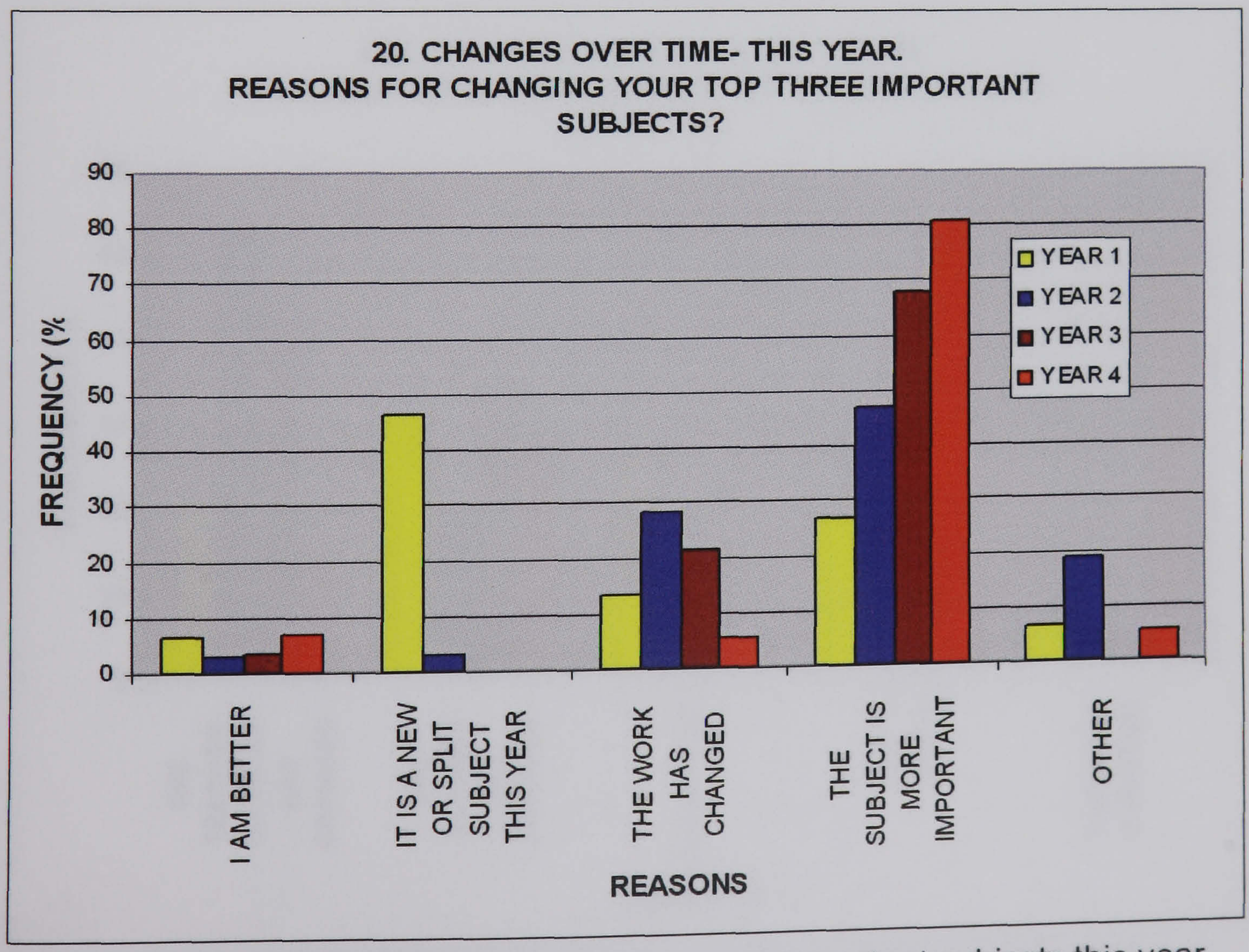

Fig. 20 Reasons for changing your top three important subjects this year

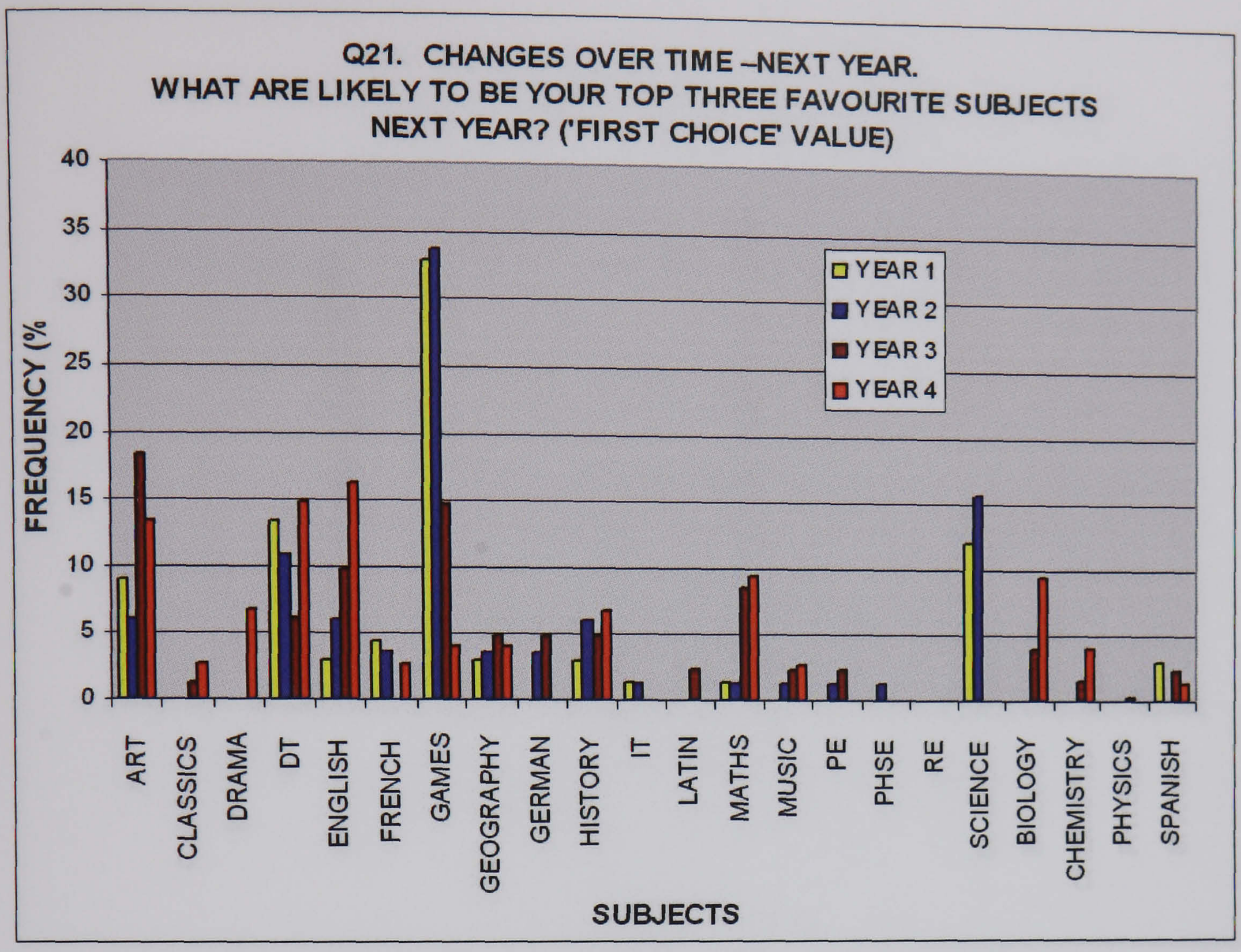

Fig. 21 Predicted top three favourite subjects next year (first choice)

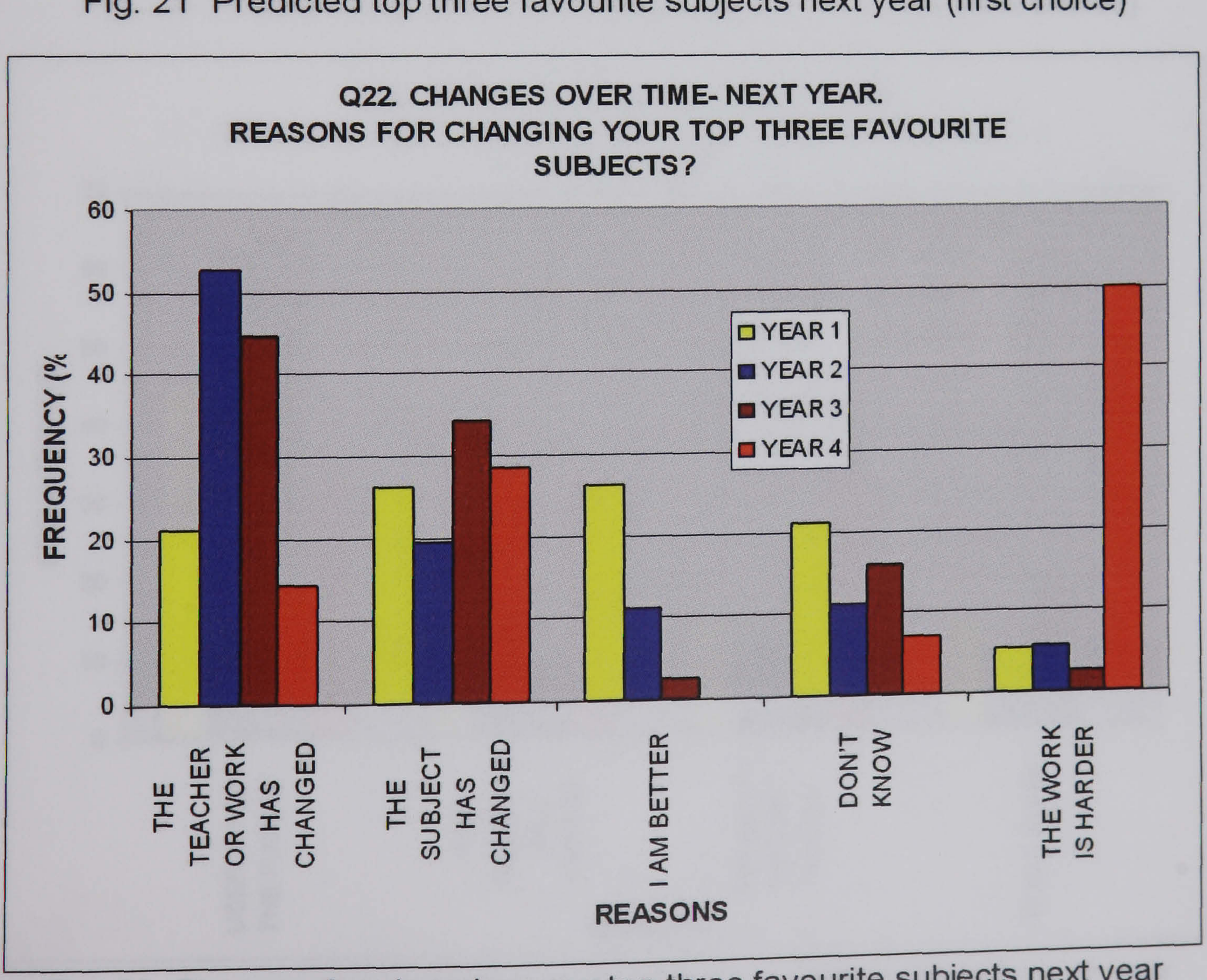

Fig. 22 Reasons for changing your top three favourite subjects next year

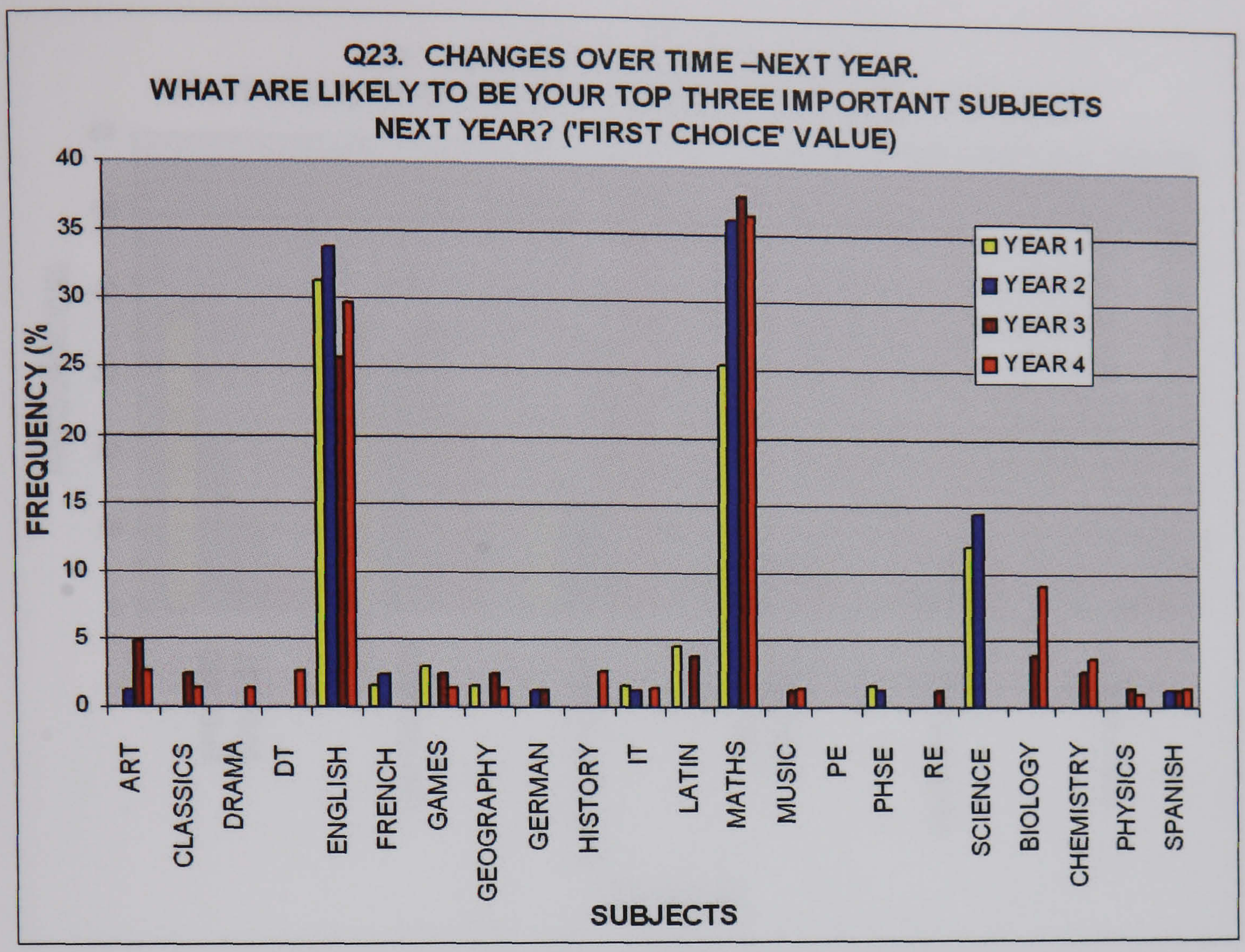

Fig. 23 Predicted top three important subjects next year (first choice)

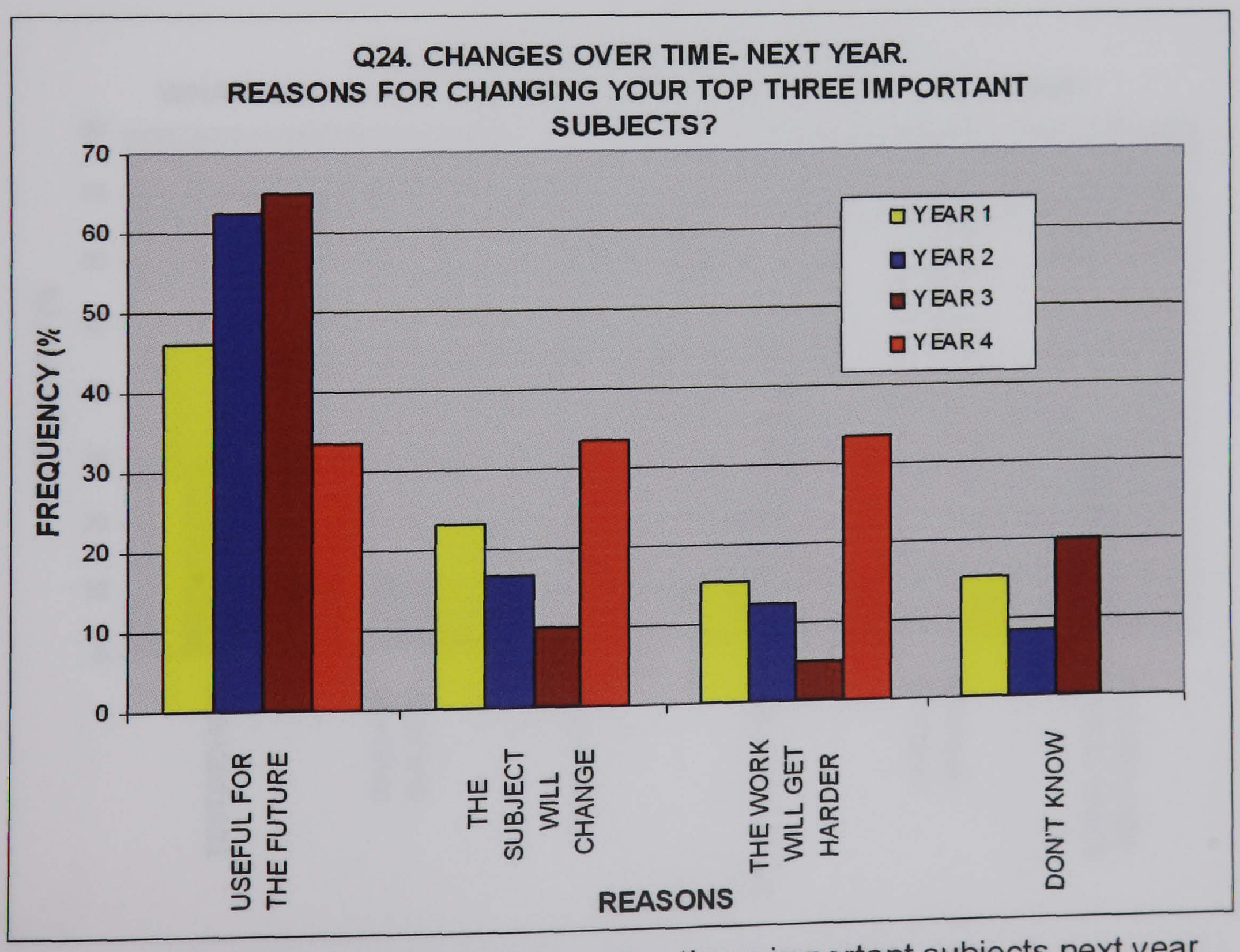

Fig. 24 Reasons for changing your top three important subjects next year

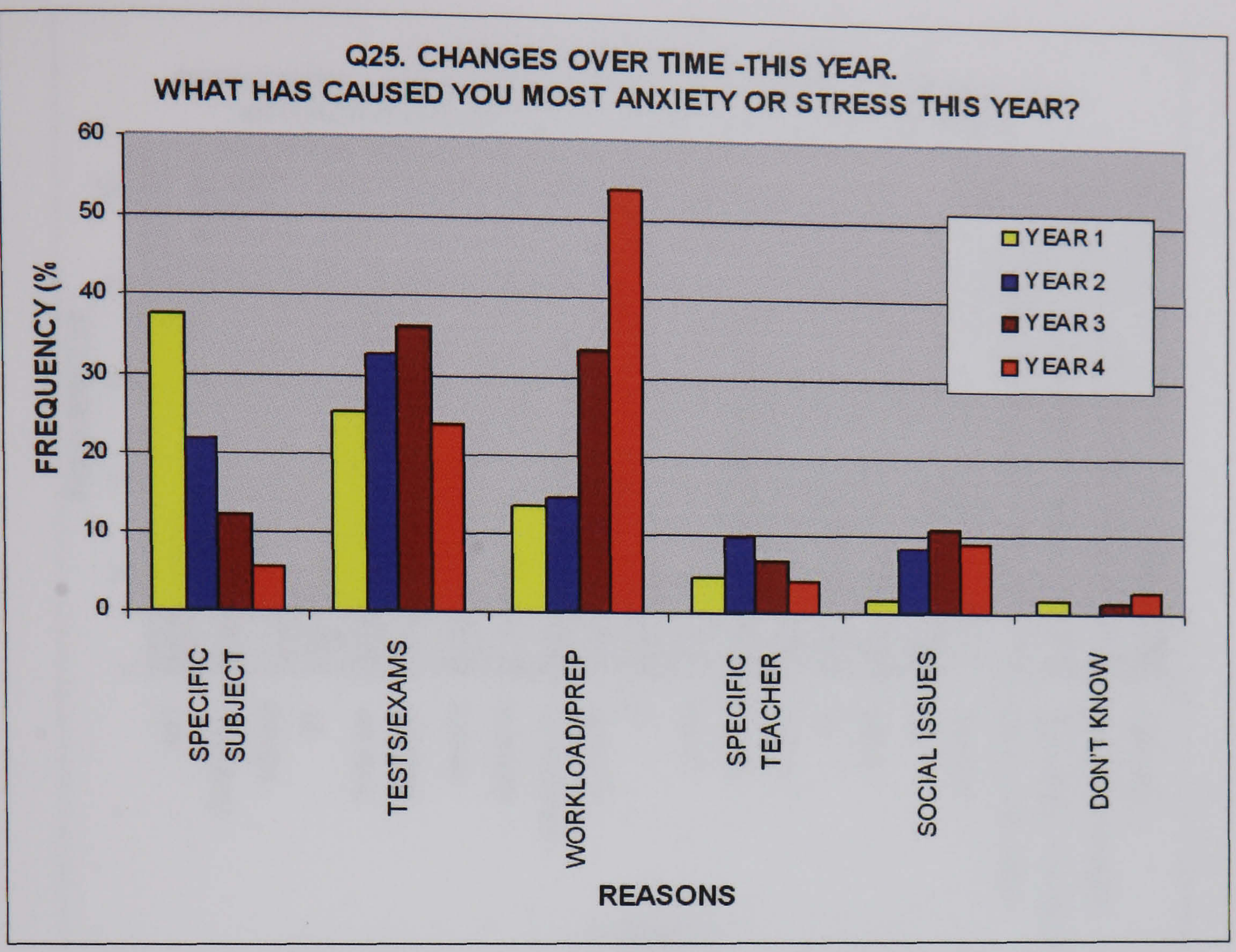

Fig. 25 Causes of anxiety or stress (this year)

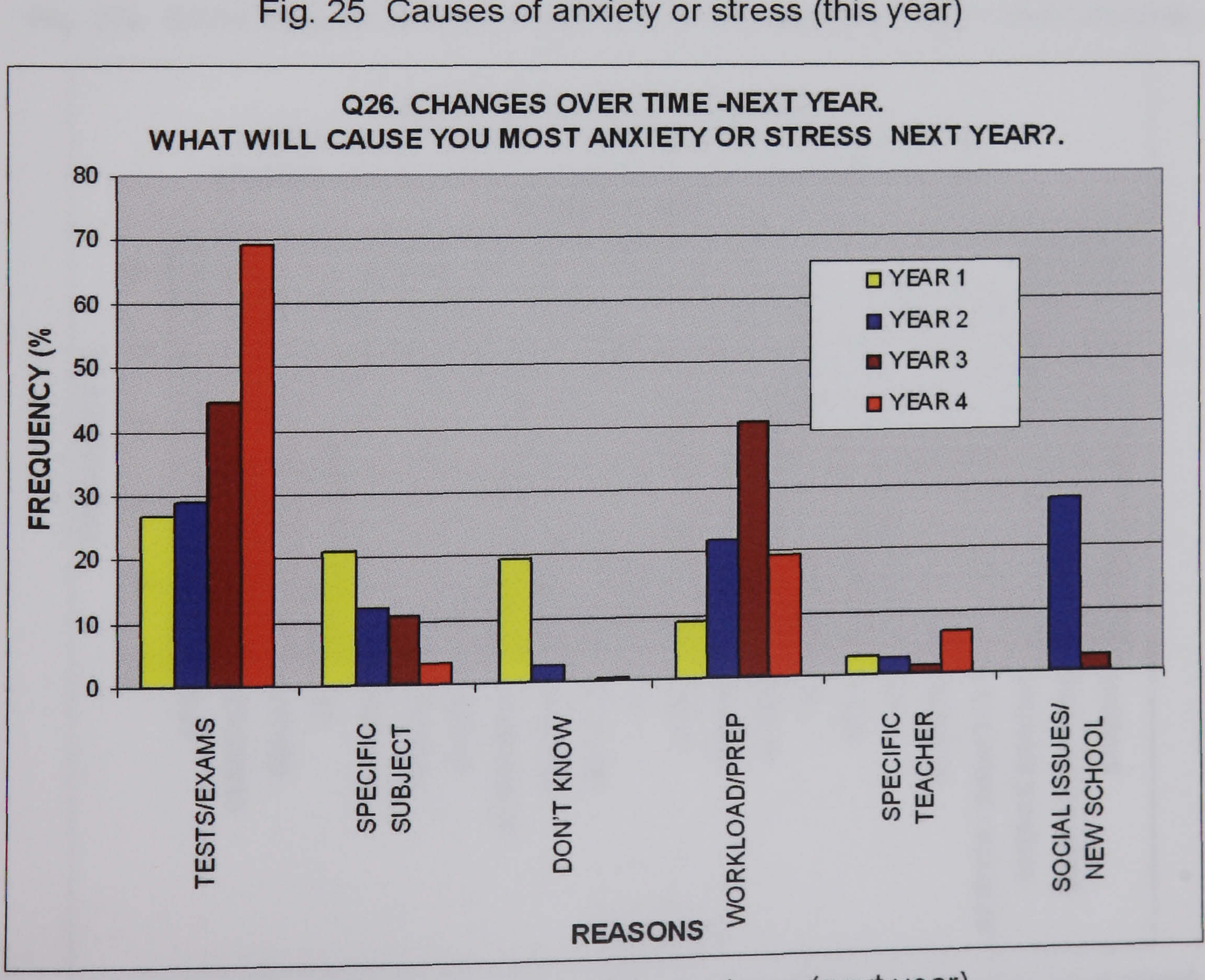

Fig. 26 Causes of anxiety or stress (next year)

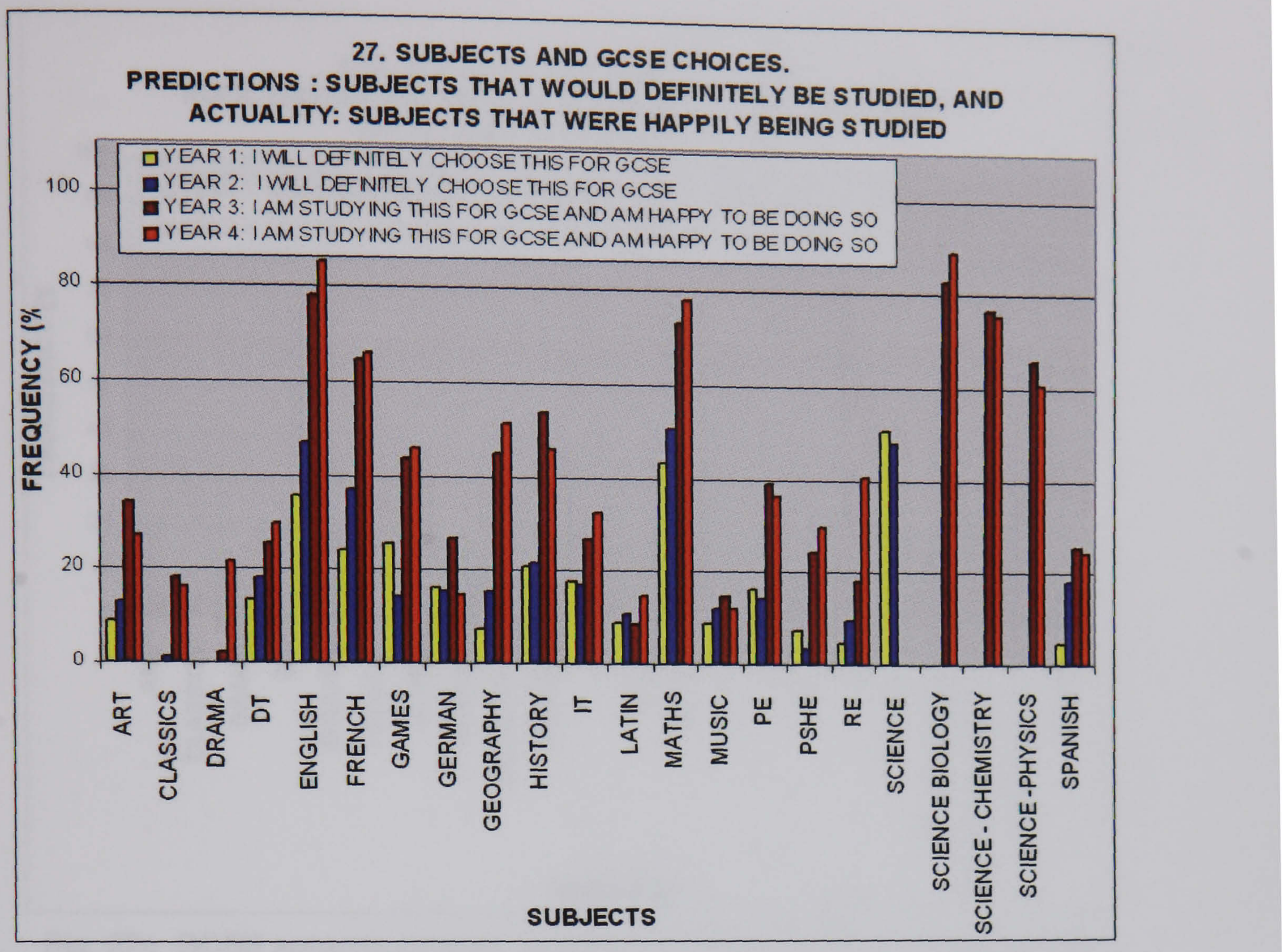

Fig. 27a GCSE subjects choices: prediction and actuality (positively viewed choices)

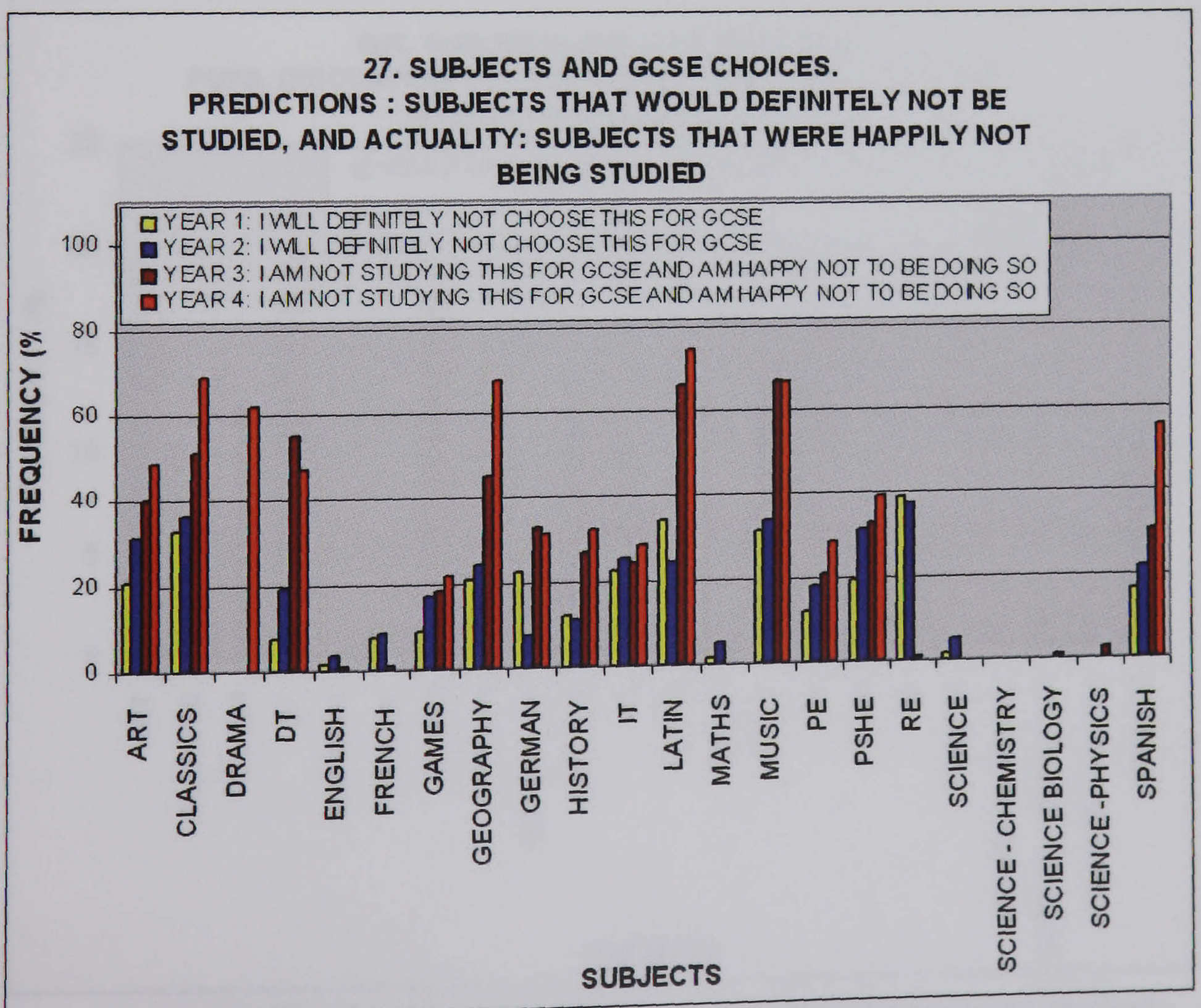

Fig. 27b GCSE subjects choices: prediction and actuality (negatively viewed choices)

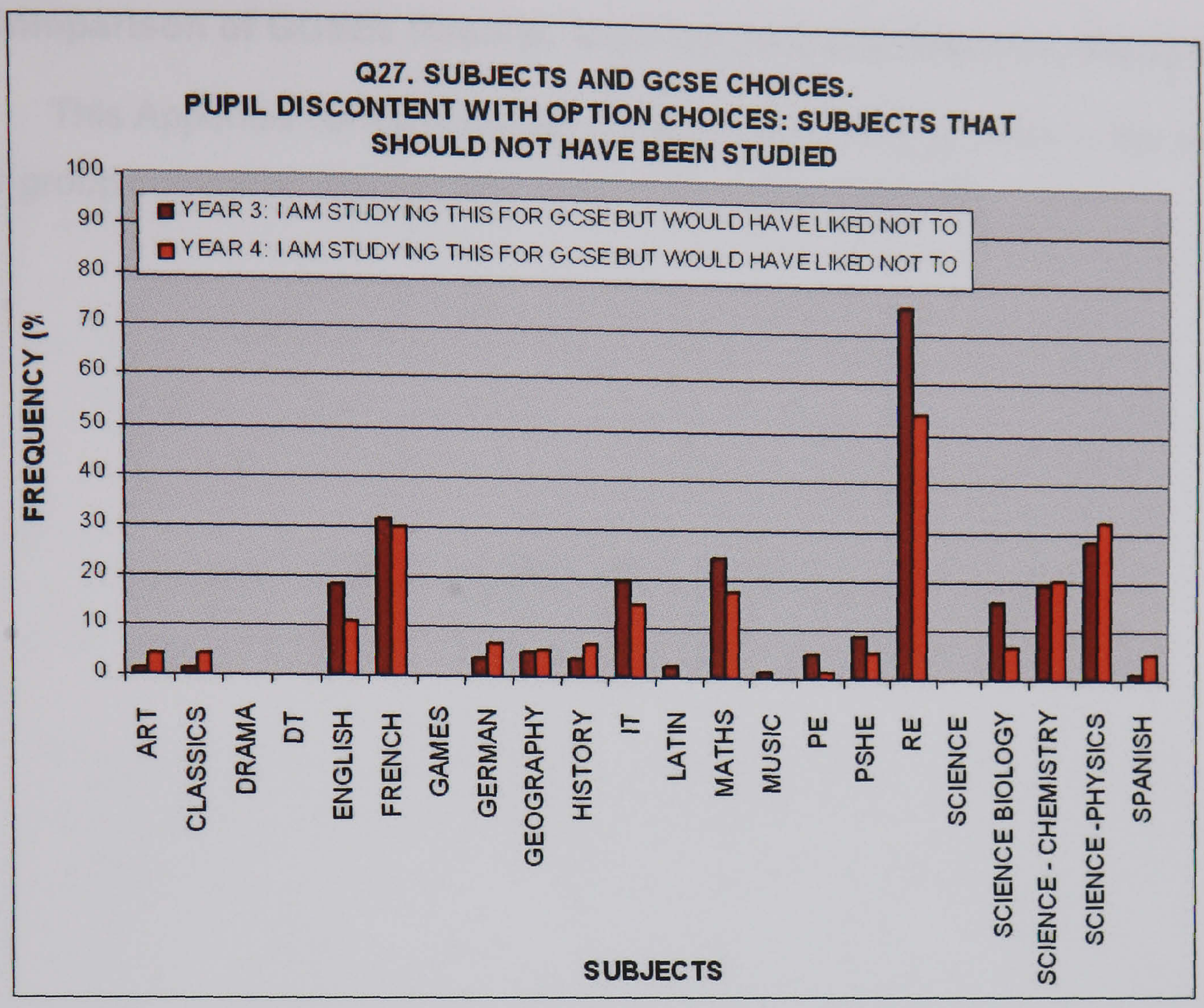

Fig. 27c GCSE subjects choices: subjects that should not have been studied

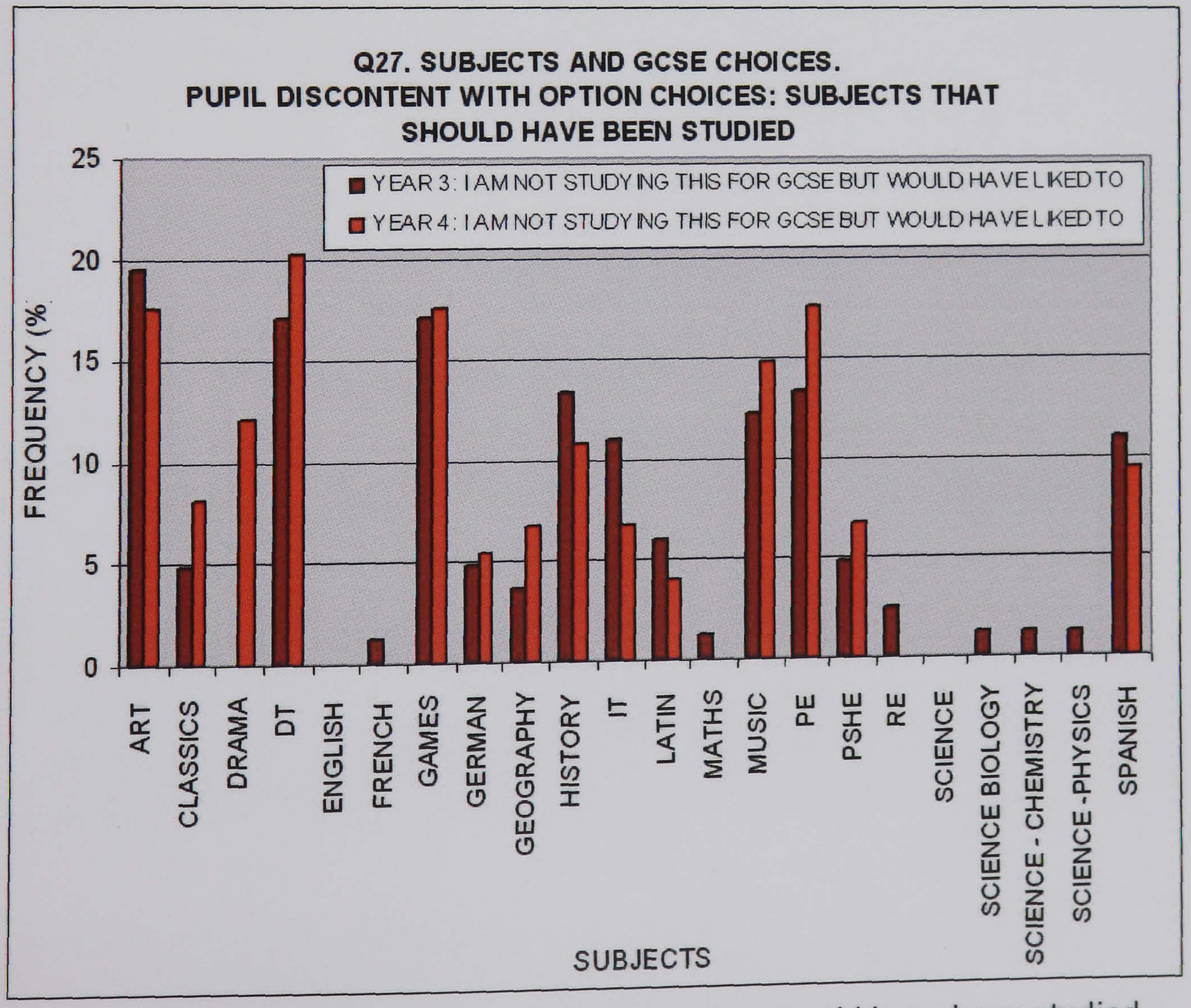

Fig. 27d GCSE subjects choices: subjects that should have been studied

Appendix D

Comparison of GCSEs Results: National Data and Research Group Data

This Appendix contains details of the GCSE results of pupils in the research year group compared against their wider peer group nationally.

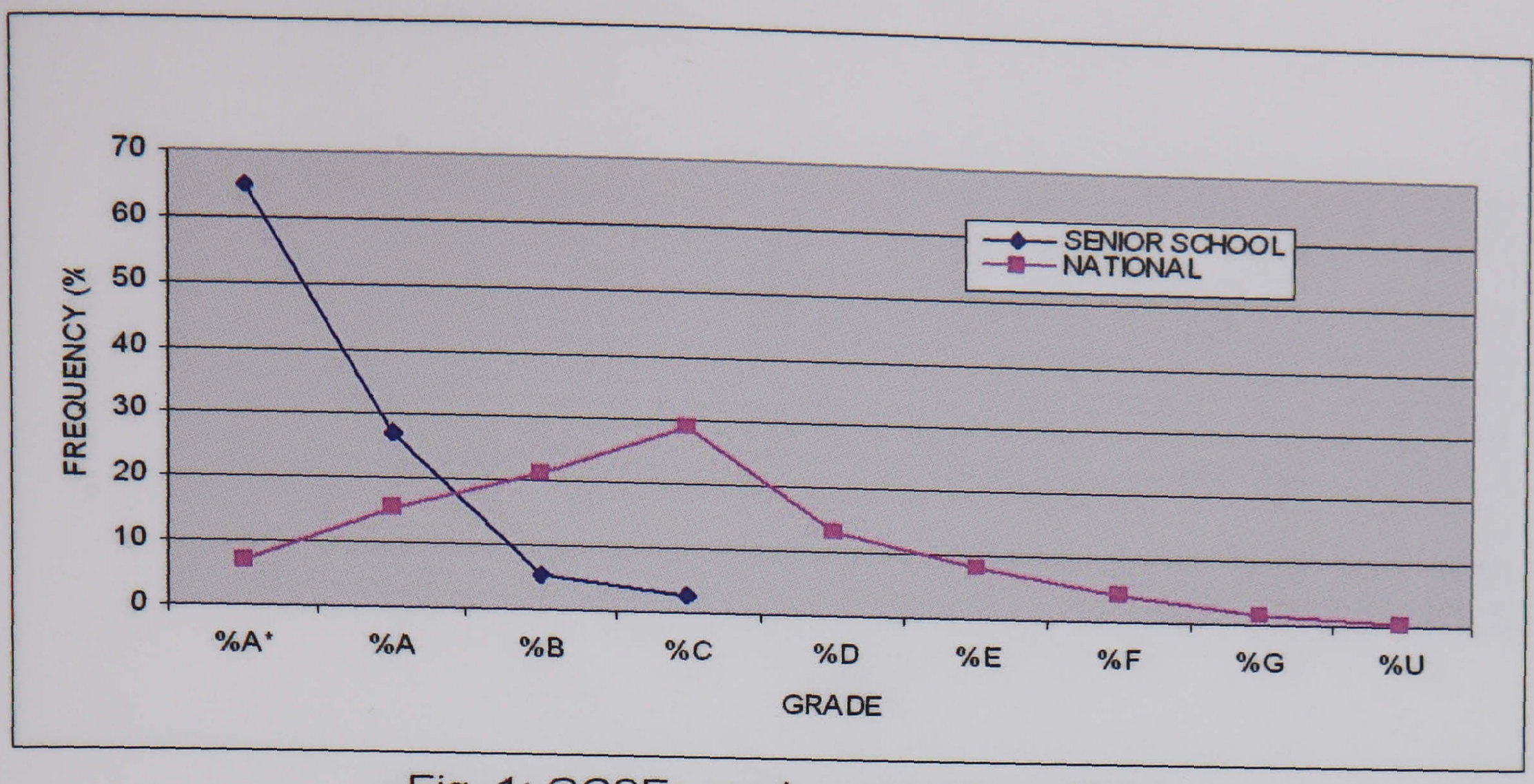

Fig. 1: GCSEs grade comparison (Art)

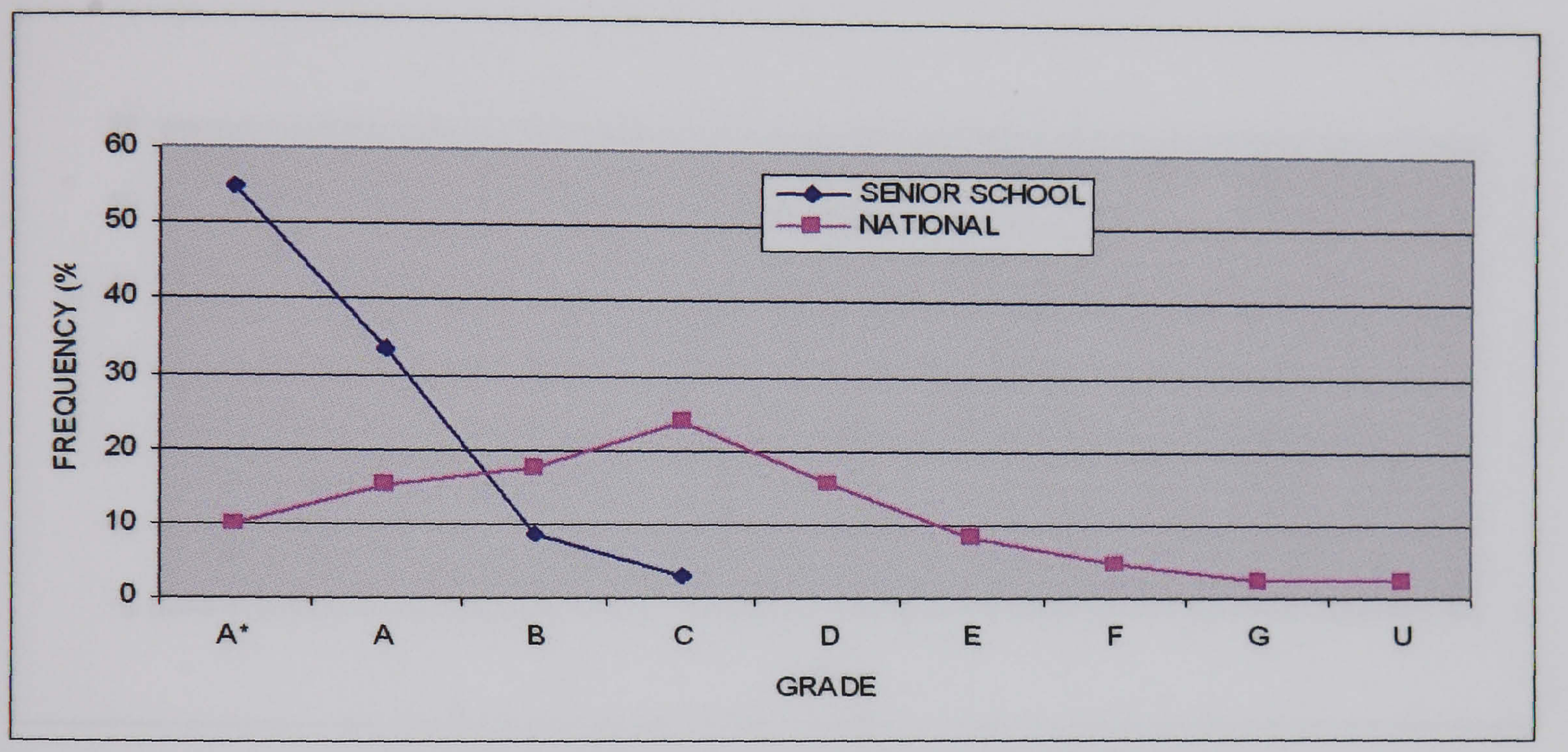

Fig. 2: GCSEs grade comparison (Geography)

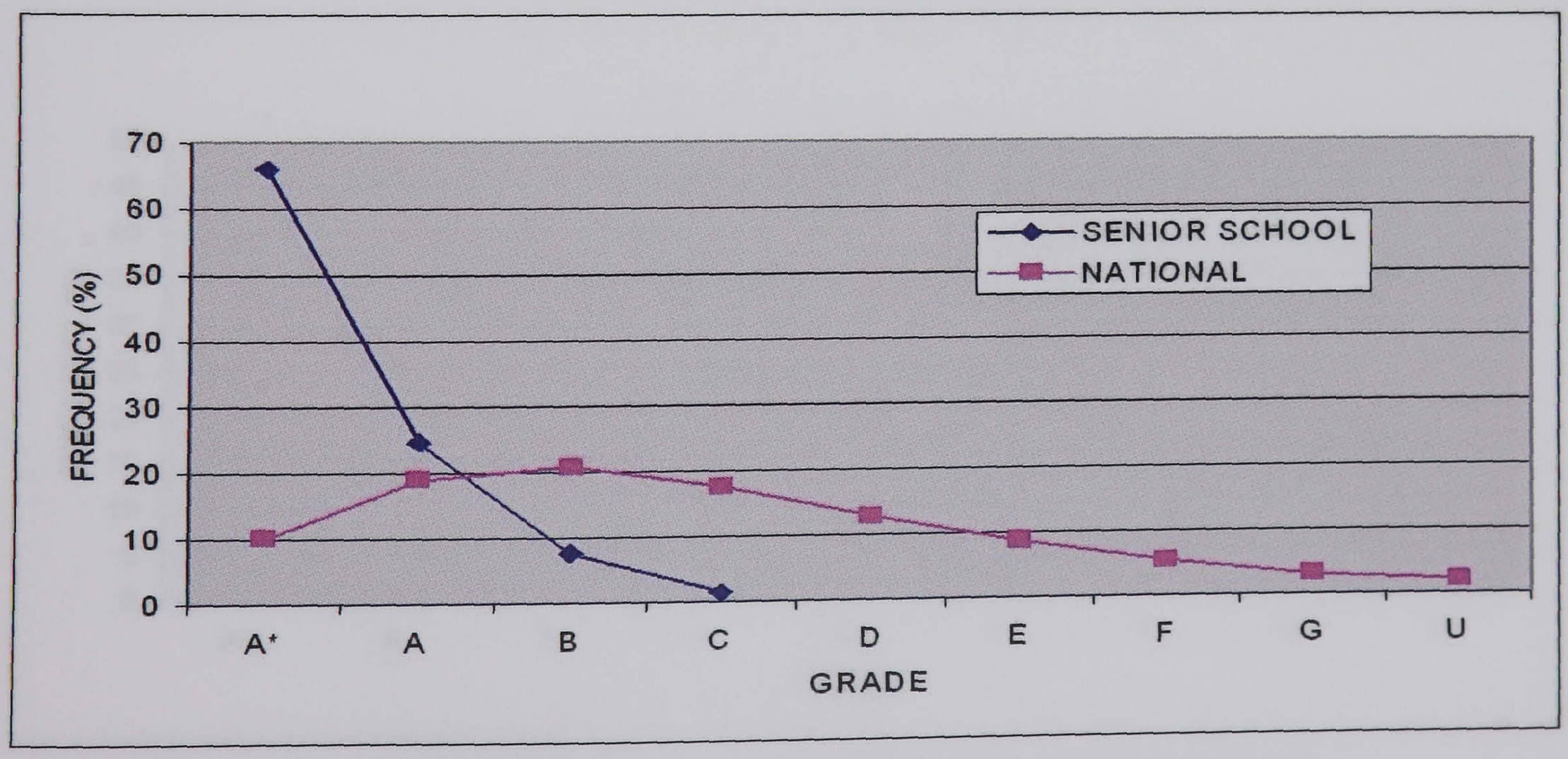

Fig. 3: GCSEs grade comparison (History)

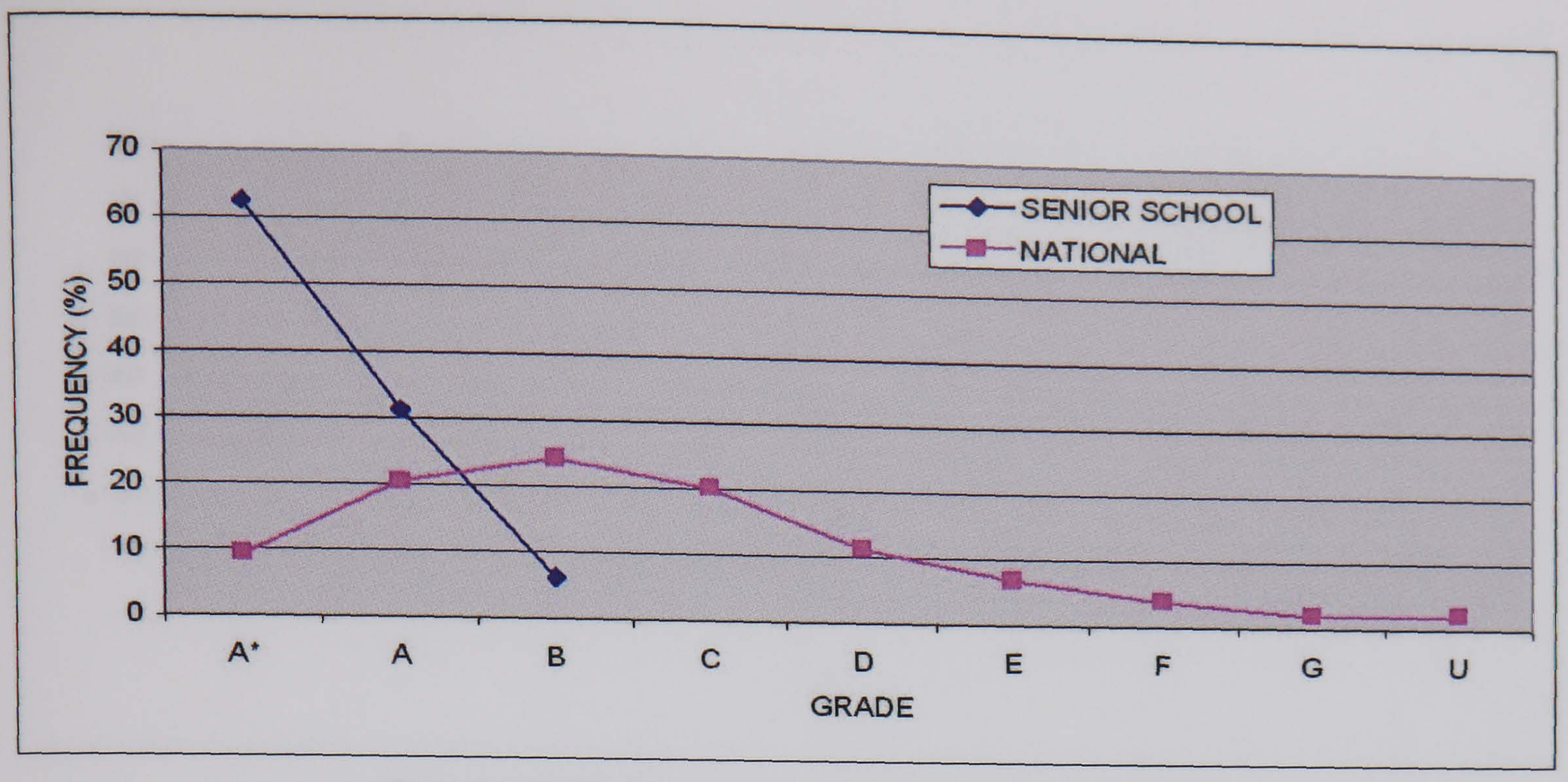

Fig. 4: GCSEs grade comparison (Music)

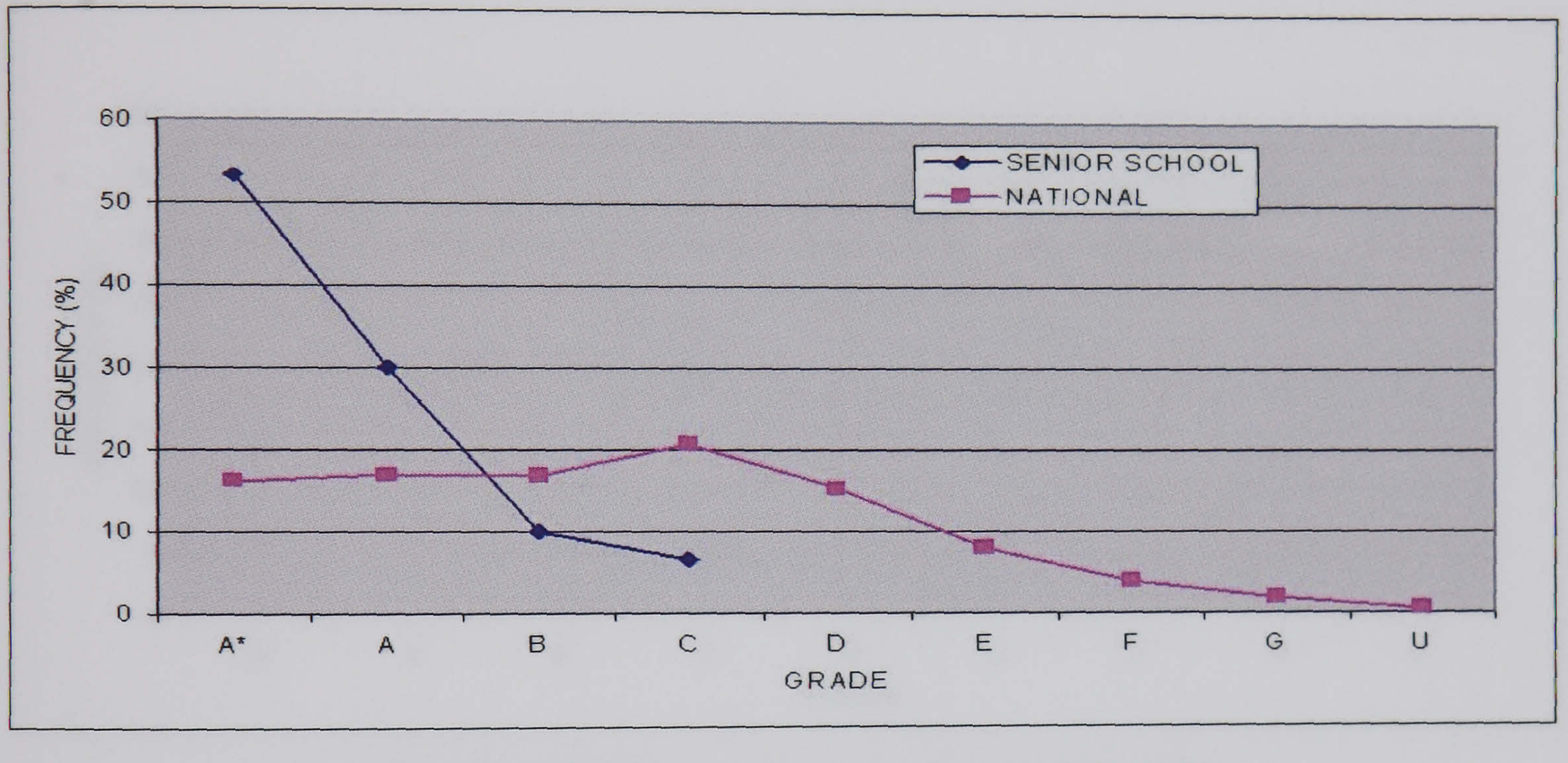

Fig. 5: GCSEs grade comparison (Spanish)

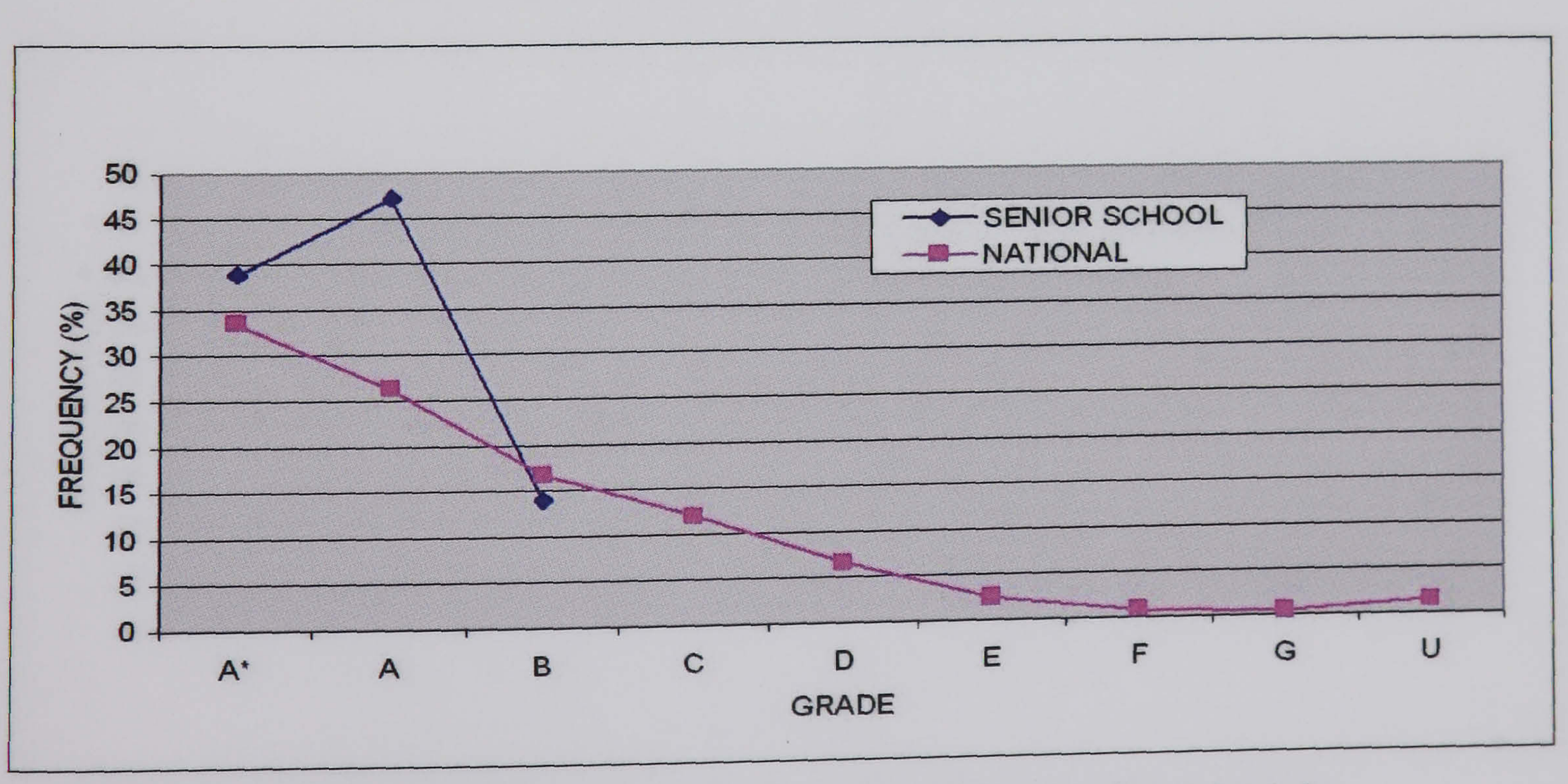

Fig. 6: GCSEs grade comparison (Classical subjects)

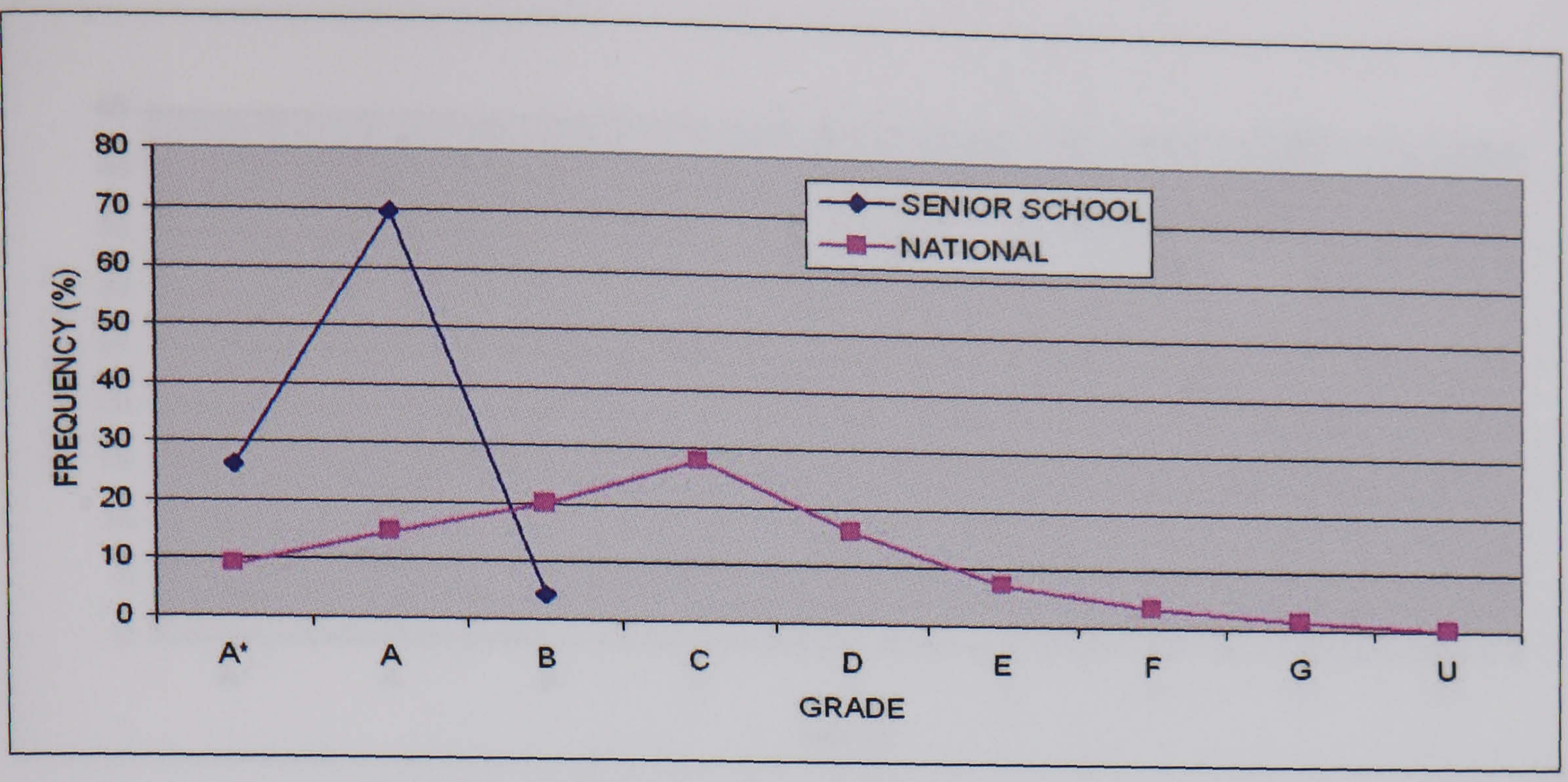

Fig. 7: GCSEs grade comparison (German)

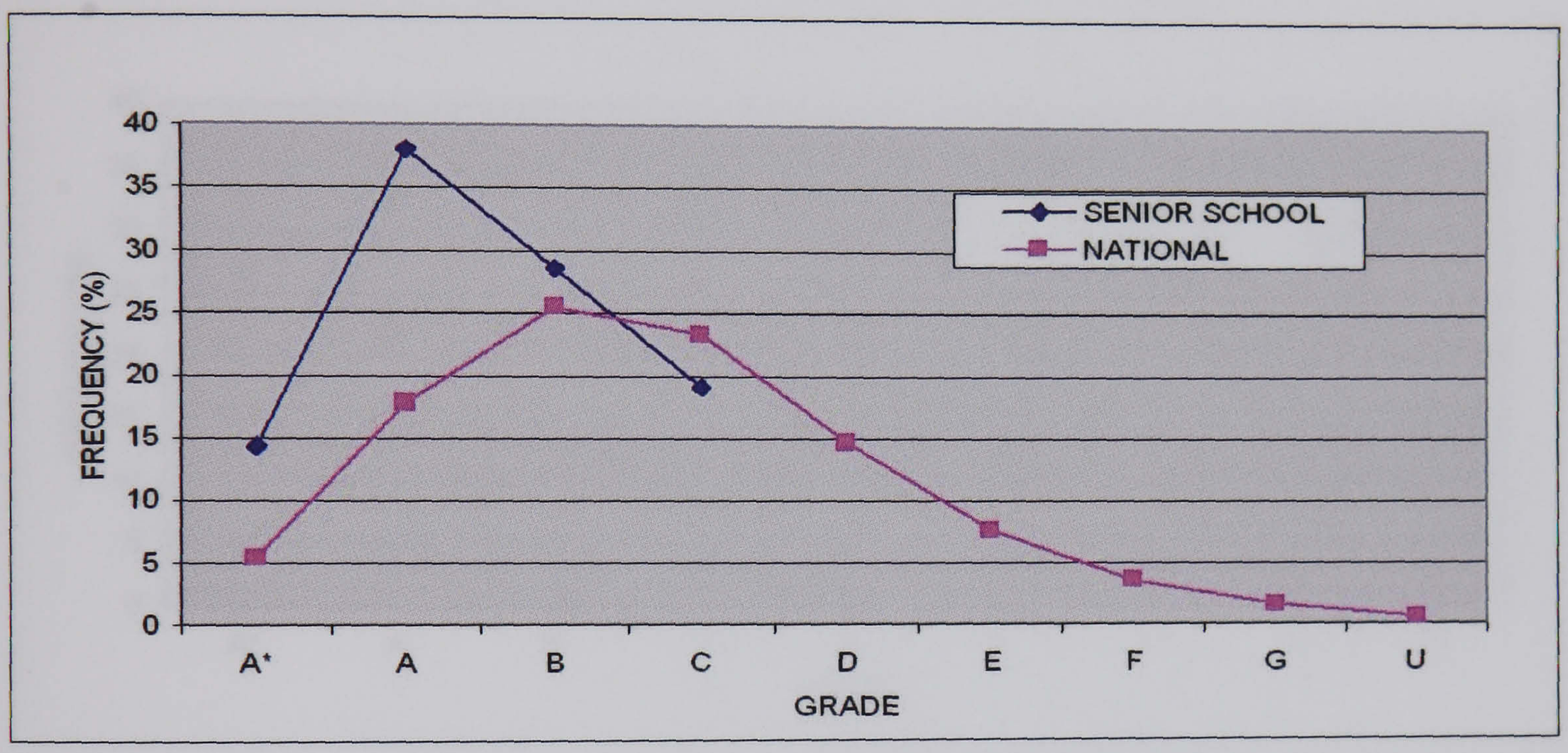

Fig. 8: GCSEs grade comparison (Drama)

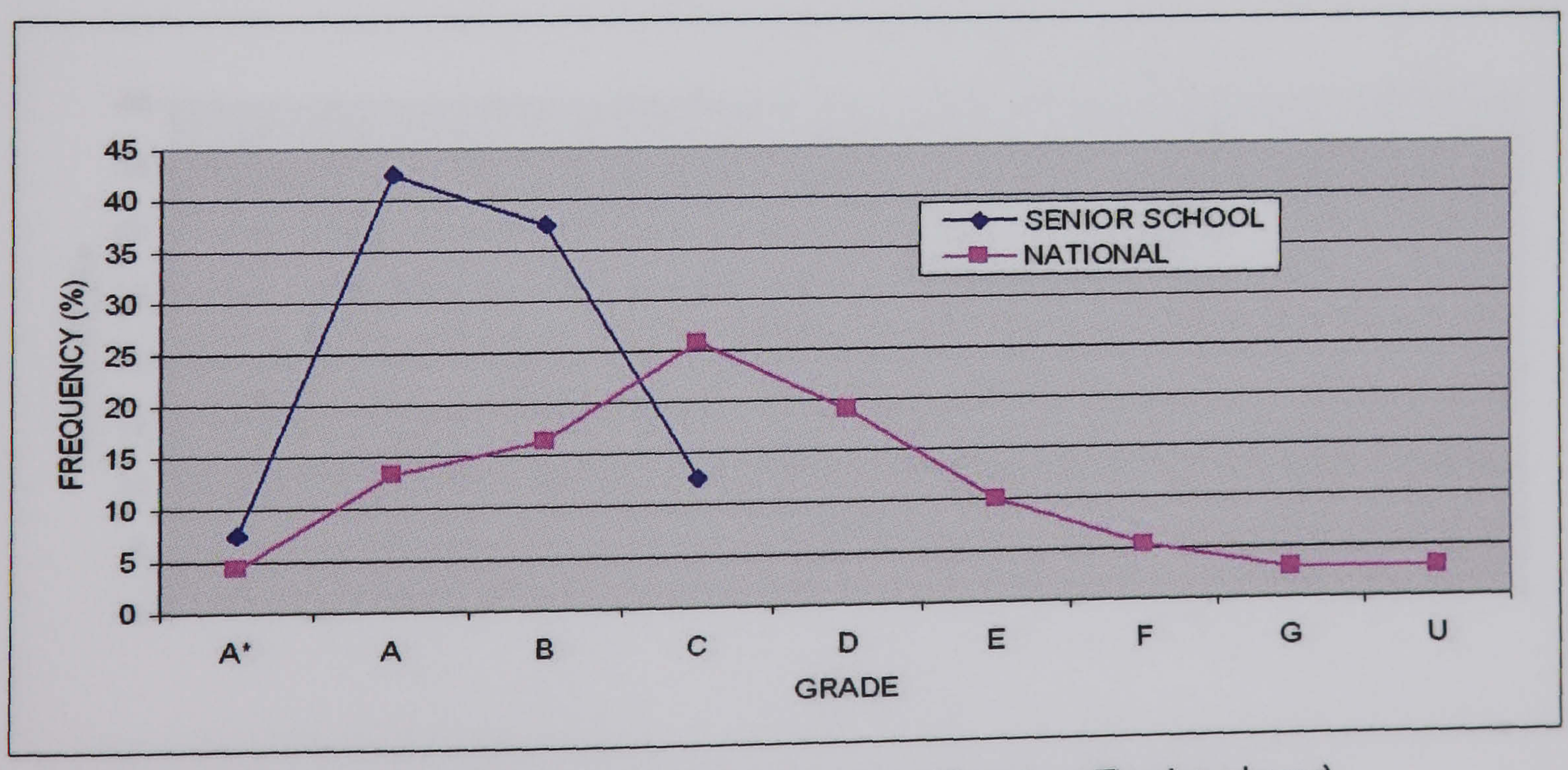

Fig. 9: GCSEs grade comparison (Design Technology)

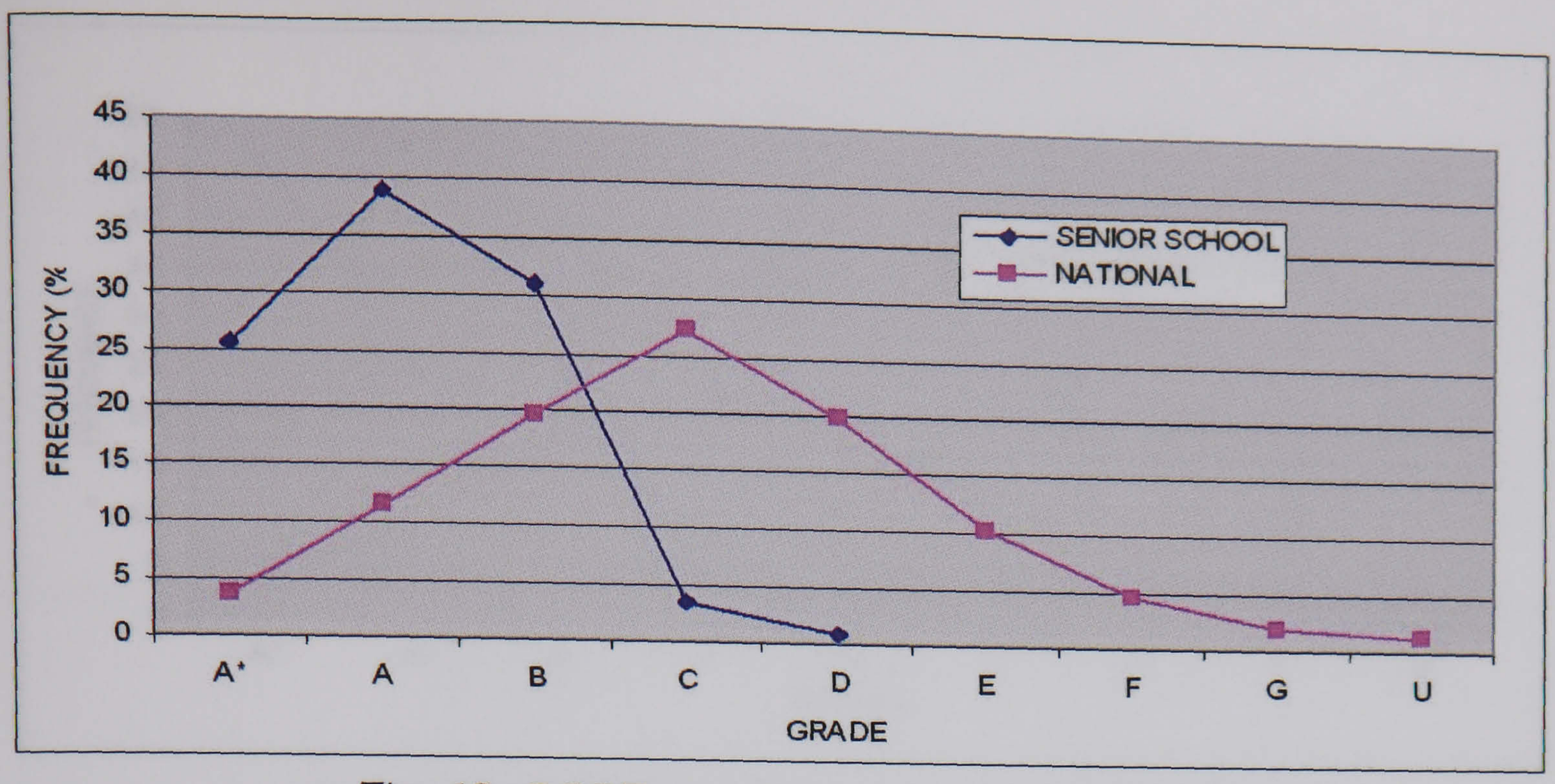

Fig. 10: GCSEs grade comparison (English)

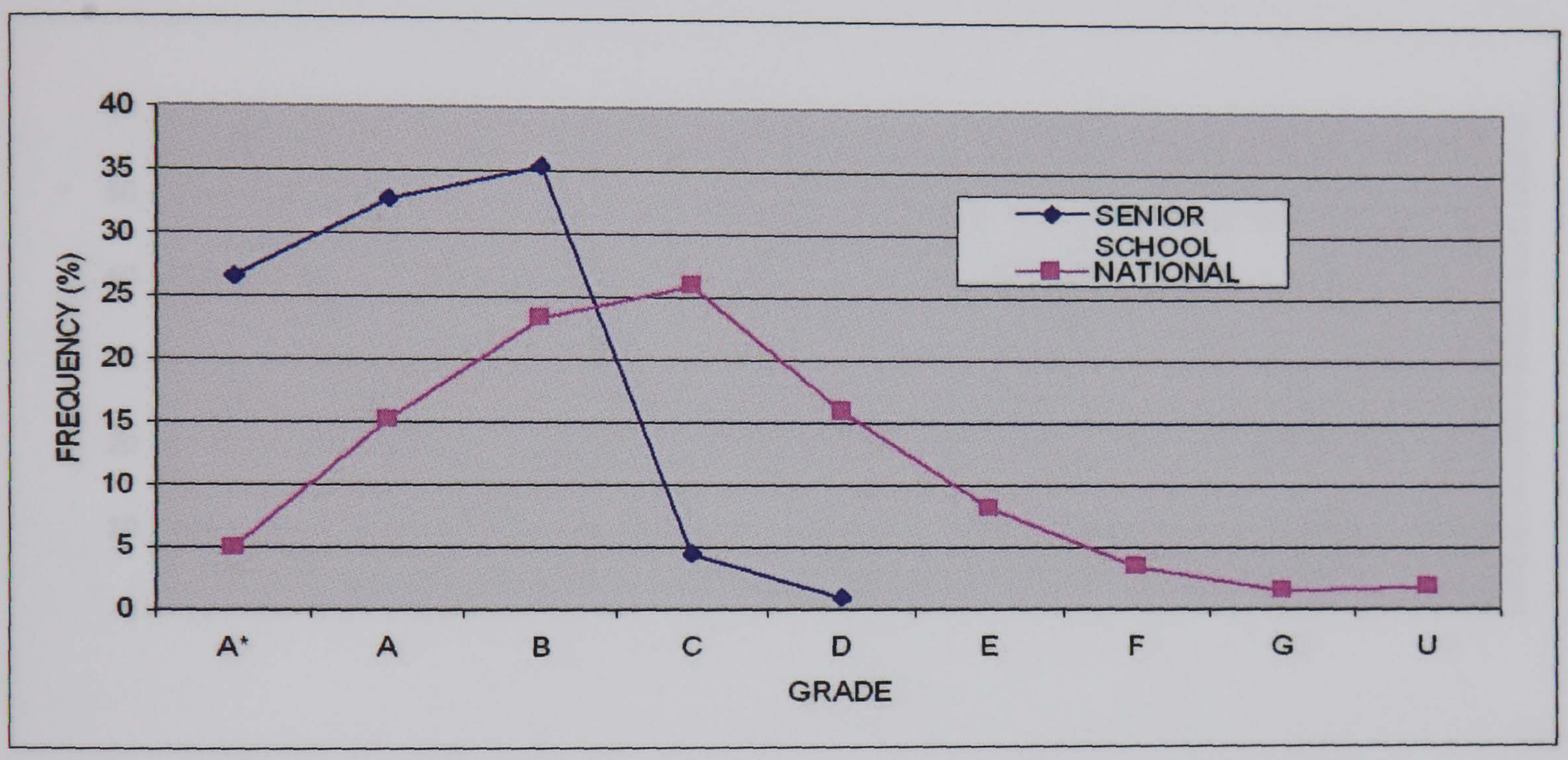

Fig. 11: GCSEs grade comparison (English literature)

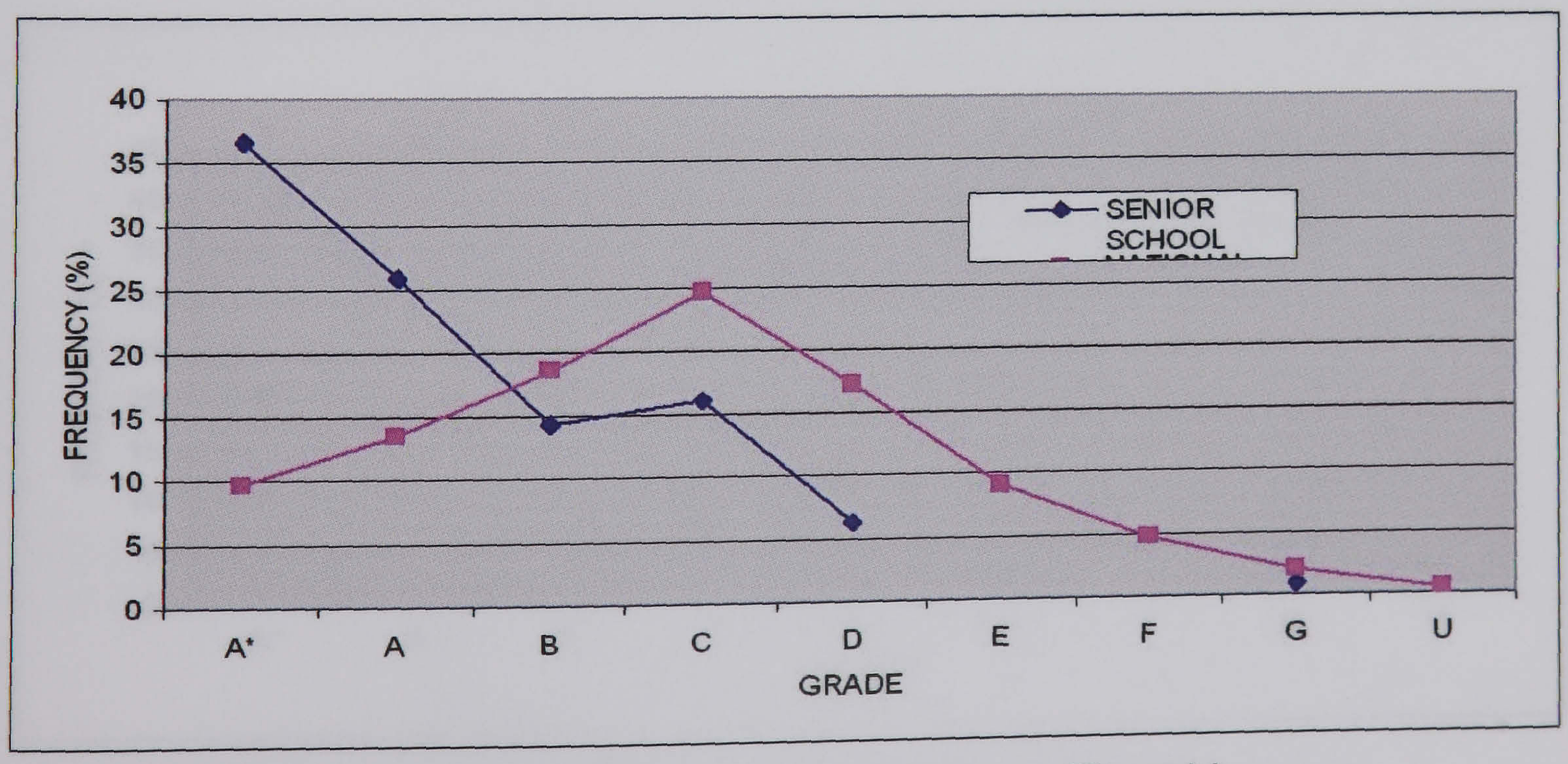

Fig. 12: GCSEs grade comparison (French)

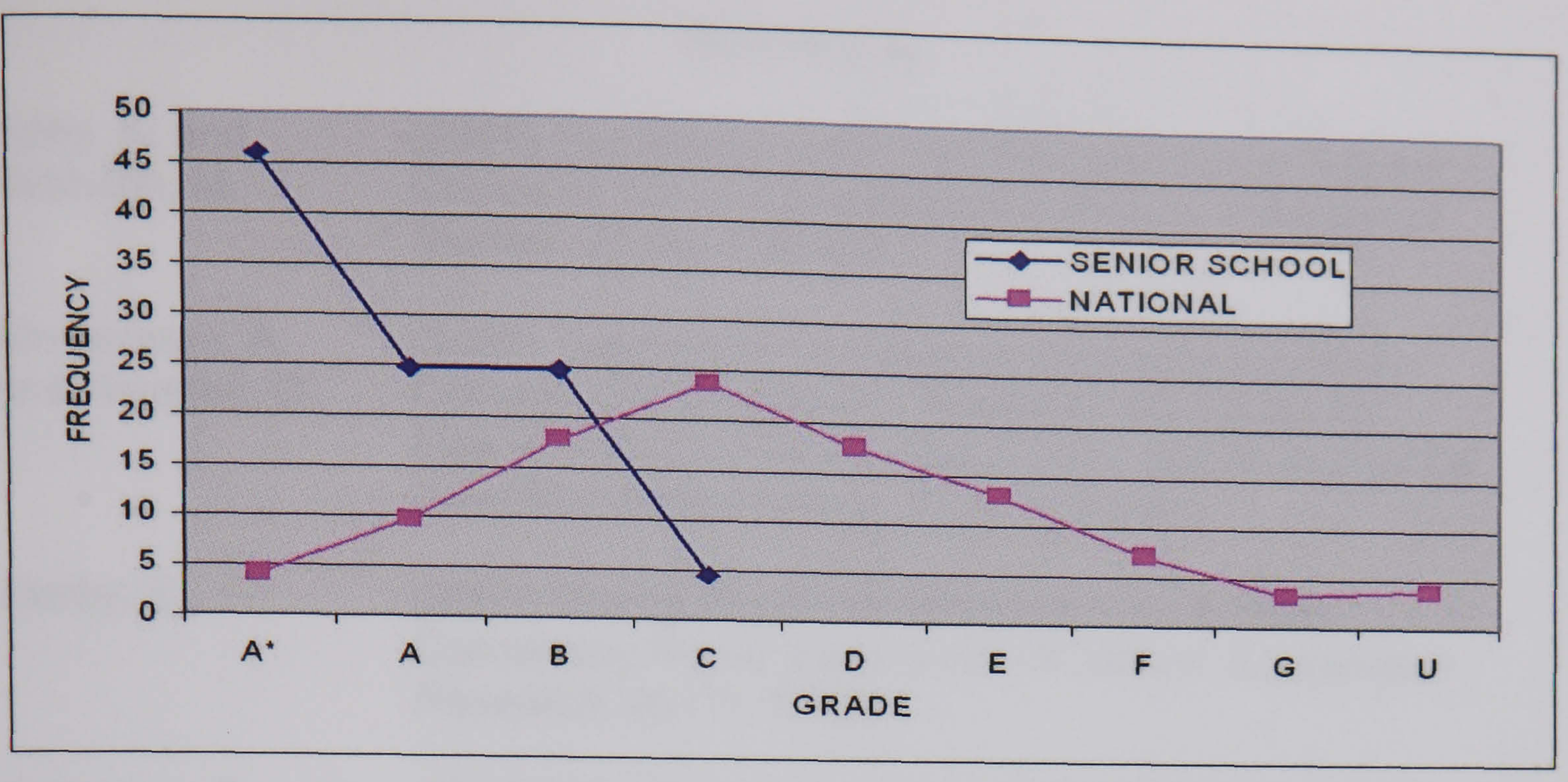

Fig. 13: GCSEs grade comparison (Mathematics)

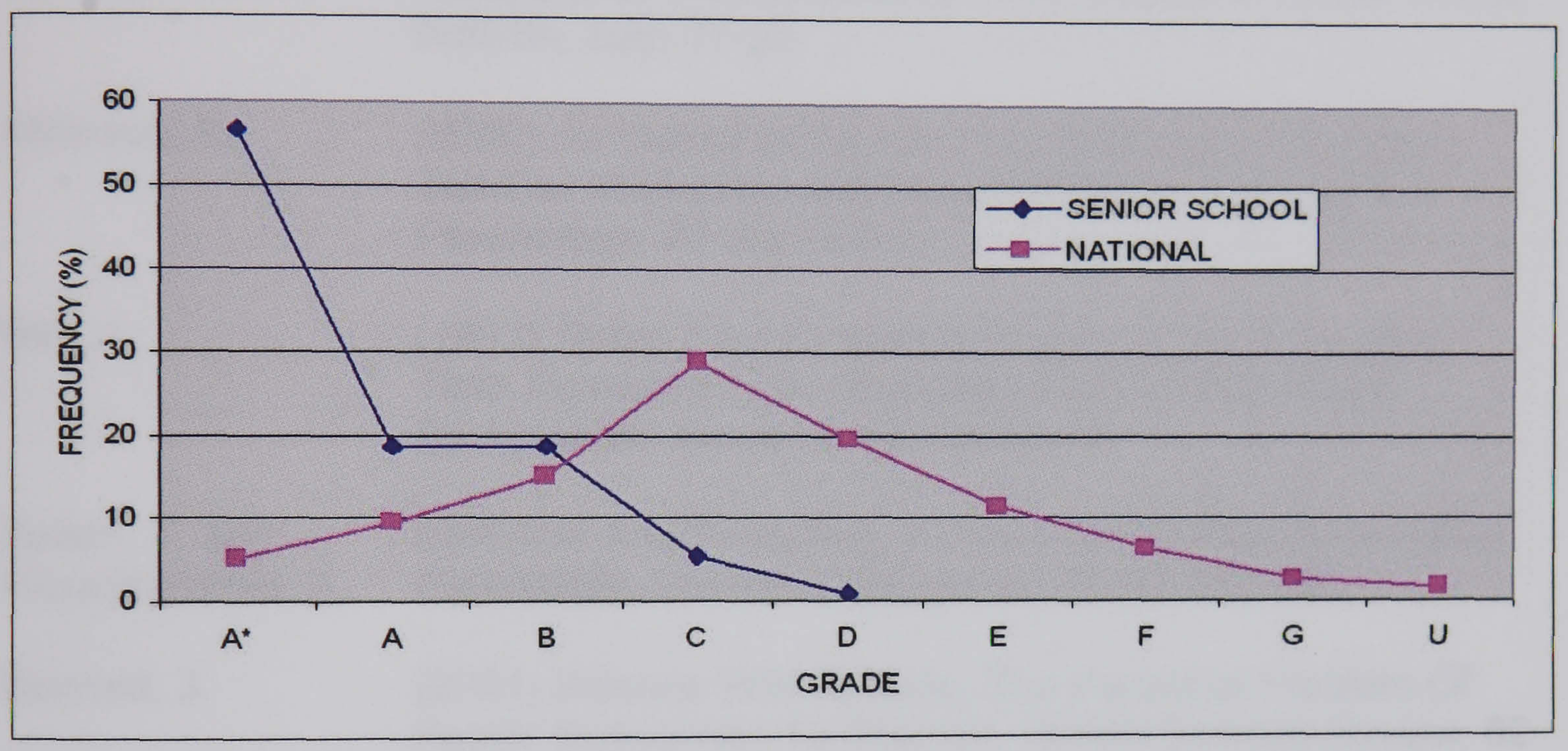

Fig. 14: GCSEs grade comparison (Science – dual award)

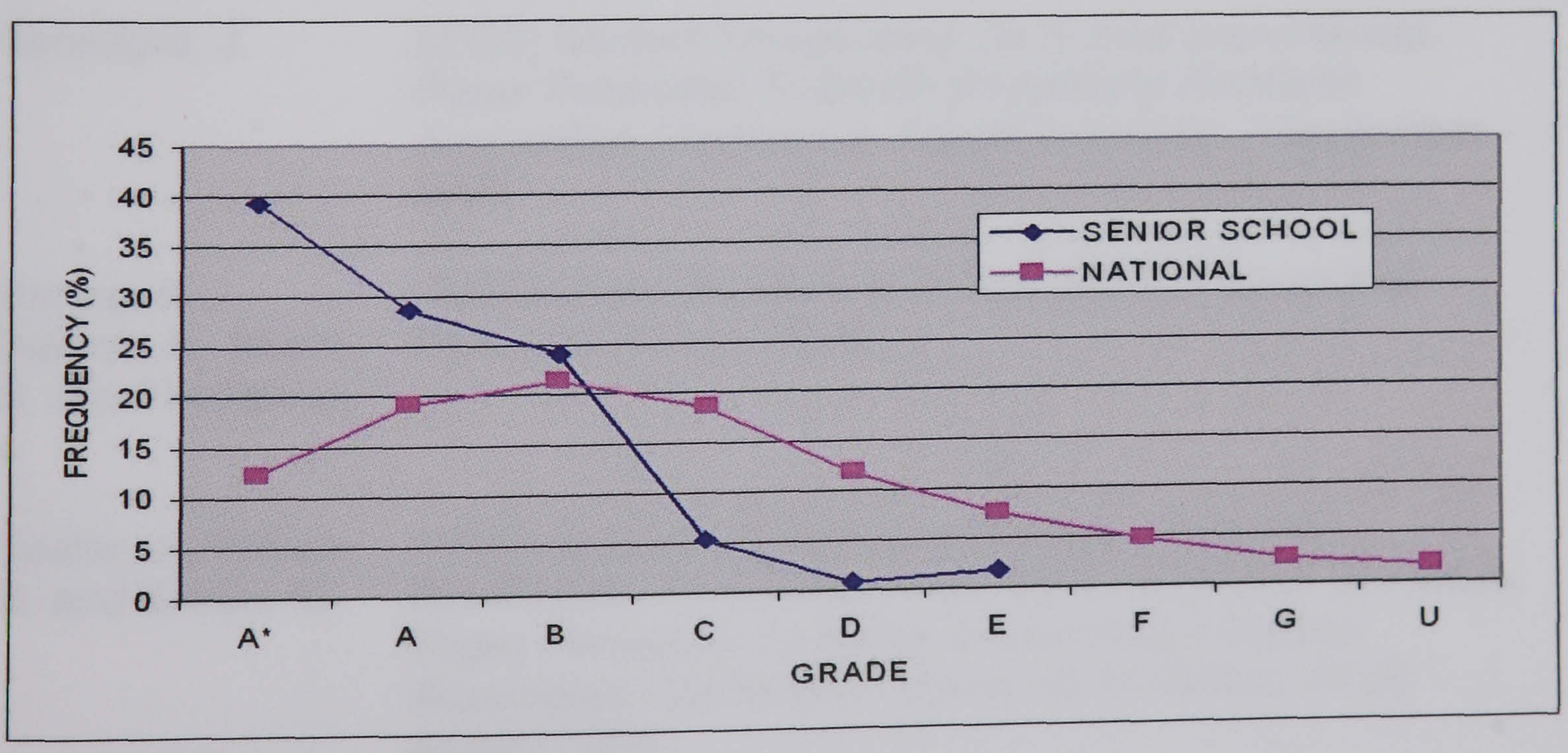

Fig. 15: GCSEs grade comparison (Religious Education)

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