

Majority of pupils unaware of post-GCSE options
Parents urged to help as research reveals that fewer than half of pupils preparing for GCSEs receive specialist advice on post-exam options

26th September 2011 - Research released today shows considerable confusion among young people about their post-GCSE options. A half of Year 10 pupils are unable to name more than two post-GCSE qualifications; a quarter can only name one.

The study, which was conducted on behalf of the Association of Colleges and is being released today to launch the beginning of Colleges Week (26th September – 2nd October), involved interviews with 500 pupils aged of 14 who are currently studying for GCSEs.

The research found that while 63% of young people are able to name A-Levels as a post-GCSE qualification, very few can name any of the other choices available.

Only 7% of pupils are able to name Apprenticeships as a post-GCSE qualification.

- Only 26% of pupils are able to name NVQs
- Only 19% of pupils are able to name BTECs
- Only 9% of pupils are able to name Diplomas
- Only 3% of pupils are able to name Foundation learning courses

Joy Mercer, Director of Education Policy at the Association of Colleges, comments:

“The research released today highlights the confusion among pupils about their post-GCSE options. They are having to make serious decisions which will significantly impact on their futures, without enough information about the choices available to them. These findings show that parents have a hugely important role in helping their children to fully understand all of their options.

“Parents and young people have a chance to find out more this autumn by taking part in a Have a Go event at a local College or by visiting the WorldSkills 2011 event.”

The study found that half of all pupils do not feel that they have received enough advice from their school or academy in planning their future career. It also reveals that only half receive advice from a specialist careers advisor.

“Young people deserve to know about all of the post-GCSE options available to them and their peers – including Apprenticeships. These results suggest that guaranteed face-to-face guidance from an independent source would be preferable to asking schools and academies to be the primary source of advice.”

Despite being unable to name many of the options available to them after their GCSEs, the survey found that most pupils feel assured that they are making the right choices for their future with 69% confident they have the right information to achieve their post-GCSE goals.

Ms Mercer said: "There is perhaps an element of overconfidence among young people, believing that they are making the right decision based on having all of the information they need. However, there is clearly a gap in knowledge and understanding about the wide variety of options open to them."

Pupils also said that the advice that they receive from their parents about the options available to them after their GCSEs is more useful than that received from teachers or careers advisors.

Ms Mercer concludes: "It's not about whether one option is better than another, it's about ensuring that our children can make an informed choice about their future. We would encourage parents to speak to their children early to ensure they are aware of all the options open to them.

"We would also urge young people to ask about options themselves. Parents and pupils can find out more about post-GCSE alternatives by visiting their local College during Colleges Week, take part in a series of 'Have a Go' taster events, or even speak to the national careers advisory service, which will be represented at the WorldSkills 2011 event, the world's largest international skills competition, taking place at ExCel London between the 5th and the 8th October 2011."

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Notes to editor

About Colleges Week 2011

Colleges Week is the education sector's major showcase for the vital role that Colleges play in providing young people, adults and businesses in the UK with the opportunities they need to succeed. This year, the theme is "Connecting with Communities".

From 26th September-2nd October, Colleges around the country are taking part in a range of initiatives designed to engage young people, parents, post 19 adults and employers by highlighting the range of courses on offer and the excellence of the teaching available. Activities range from holding "Have a Go in Colleges Week" events, to commissioning research into careers advice delivery in the UK, to supporting the UK team at the World Skills London Competition and a campaign to boost participation in other skills competitions. See www.Collegesweek.org for more information.

About WorldSkills London 2011

WorldSkills London 2011 is the world's largest international skills competition. It will bring together 1,000 young people from 50 nations to compete in 45 skills areas from seven sectors, ranging from

creative arts and fashion to transportation and logistics. Taking place from 5–8 October 2011 at ExCeL London, it aims to be the catalyst that sparks the ambitions not just of competitors but of people across the UK.

To help make that happen, a programme of WorldSkills London 2011 Have a Go activities are taking place across the UK in the run up to the Competition with the goal of creating one million opportunities for people to try out a new skill and explore how skills shape our world. WorldSkills London 2011 - Have a Go culminates in a three-week, UK-wide skills festival from 19 September–9 October 2011. See www.worldskillslondon2011.com for more information.