

BETWEEN THE IDEA AND THE REALITY:
THE TRANSITION FROM YEAR 10 TO YEAR 11

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In Year 11 there are students who have always been fairly clear in their intentions to stay on to the postcompulsory school years and other students who have been less consistent and who may not have planned to return to school in Year 11. This paper examines the relationship between students' plans and students' destinations at the beginning of Year 11. It uses data from a longitudinal study of a cohort of students from a sample of New South Wales government schools to examine the consistency between plans and destinations and to explore the characteristics of those students who changed their plans.

This paper is based on a project concerned with Senior Secondary Schooling commissioned by the NSW Department of Education. A major long term aim of this project is to use the natural variance amongst a sample of schools to seek an understanding of school and student factors which influence student responses to school. Twenty-two government high schools, representing a spread of retentivity, social environment, size, and location were selected as the sample for the study. Within those schools the progress of the 1987 Year 9 cohort is being monitored. Information has been gathered from this cohort in 1987, 1988, and 1989. In addition information is also being gathered from the schools, from teachers in those schools, and from subsamples of parents. An outline of the data gathering for the project is shown in Figure 1.

Background

Over recent decades the proportion of young people in New South Wales government secondary schools who proceed to Year 12 has increased markedly; doubling from 23 per cent in 1968 to 46 per cent in 1988. There has been an even more dramatic recent increase in retention to Year 11; whereas the retention rate to Year 11 was 44 per cent per cent in 1983 (in 1968 it had been 27 per cent), by 1988 it had reached 62 per cent. For many years there has appeared to be two different

patterns of retention in Australian school systems depending on whether student attrition occurred mainly at the end of Year 10 or roughly equally at the end of Years 10 and 11. In New South Wales the end of Year 10 has constituted an important transition point in

secondary education: the majority of students who continued from Year 10 to Year 11 went on to complete their secondary education. Even though there are now more students continuing to Year 11 than previously, the end of Year 10 still constitutes an important transition point.

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A paper presented at the AARE conference in 1988 (Sheret, Foreman, and Ainley, 1988) examined school and student factors influencing students' intentions to leave school or stay to Year 11. It examined the influence of students' views of the quality of school life, achievements, family and social background, and school factors on educational intentions. The results drew attention to the positive and independent influences of achievement and quality of school life on educational intentions, the direct and transmitted influence of parental expectations, and the influence of ethnic background. In addition it explored differences between schools in both the mediating (achievement and school life) and dependent variables (educational intentions) by making use of qualitative data to interpret some of the results of the statistical analysis.

Research Literature

Within the literature on the participation of young people in postcompulsory schooling there are two strands. One has sought to understand the rise in retention rates in terms of the possible influences of such factors as changing school organization and curriculum, changes in employment opportunities and changing expectations (see Ainley, 1985). The other has sought to understand the factors which shape students' decisions to remain at or leave school, either by asking questions directly to the students or by relating information about the influences acting on students to their individual decisions. The present paper seeks to inform the second of these two strands of research by examining the extent to which students' intentions to remain at school are realized in practice and what factors shape changes in plans.

Social Background

A number of general inferences can be drawn from research studies concerned with participation in postcompulsory schooling. Two background factors are consistently positively associated with a decision to remain at school: high socioeconomic status and being the child of a migrant from a non-English-speaking country. Socioeconomic status and ethnic background are often inversely correlated so that the effect of each is masked.

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Social Background. Family socioeconomic status has been

consistently found to be associated with participation in education but the size of this effect is smaller than has sometimes been assumed. Studies at the individual level by Rosier (1978), Williams, Clancy, Batten, and Girling-Butcher (1980) and Williams (1987), and at the school level by Ainley, Batten and Miller (1984a, 1984b) all found that higher socioeconomic status was linked with staying at school, using parental occupation as the measure of socioeconomic status. Several studies have concluded that the observed association between socioeconomic background and participation in schooling resulted from social aspects of the background to a greater extent than economic factors. Williams (1987) examined the effects of family wealth and social status on participation in postcompulsory schooling and concluded that, although each factor influenced participation, the influence of social background was greater than that of wealth as such. That conclusion is consistent with an analysis conducted in South Australia by Power (1984) using data from a few years earlier. Power (1984) looked at the effect of parental education and parental encouragement, and suggested that these socio-educational factors were more strongly linked to retention rates than economic factors. Those results reported by Williams and by Power are consistent with the conclusions of Beswick, Hayden and Schofield (1983) that, in terms of both the transition from secondary to tertiary education and the retention of students in tertiary education, parental encouragement was a stronger influence than the economic aspects of socioeconomic status. Similar conclusions have emerged from studies of the influence of the Secondary Allowance Scheme, even though that scheme was important to some groups of recipients (Meade, 1982; Ainley et al, 1984b; Braithwaite, 1987).

Ethnic Background. There is consistent evidence from a number of studies including that of Williams (1987) that a higher proportion of students of a non-English-speaking background than students of an Australian born background completed Year 12 at secondary school. The results of numerous other studies are consistent with these findings (see Taft, 1975; Williams et al., 1980; Elsworth, Day, Hurworth and Andrews, 1982; Ainley et al., 1984a,b). Hayden (1982) suggested that the influence may derive from higher levels of aspiration among young people of certain ethnic backgrounds, and possibly stronger parental encouragement in those groups for young people to continue with formal study.

It is also clear that females now complete Year 12 in greater proportion than do males, partly because males enjoy greater opportunities for study in apprenticeship programs. Prior to the mid 1970s, retention rates were lower for females than for males; since then retention rates for females have been the higher. The change in relative retention rates for females has been attributed to a number of factors including a change in social attitudes regarding the education of girls.

Achievement and Attitudes

Students' achievements and attitudes to school are frequently thought of as intervening factors which emerge through early schooling and

which potentially influence students' continuation of schooling. Not surprisingly, there is evidence that early school achievement influences participation in postcompulsory schooling. One of the strongest influences on the completion of Year 12 reported by Williams (1987) was early school achievement. Williams found that only one in ten of the lowest achieving quartile completed year 12 compared to six in ten of the highest achieving quartile. Even after adjusting for the influence of other correlated variables the effect remained substantial. There has been less research directed at the effects of school environment on the decisions of students to continue their schooling but one study by Ainley, Miller and Batten (1984b) concluded that an intention to remain at school to Year 12 was influenced by students feeling successful in their work and by general satisfaction with school.

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School Programs

The type of school program available appears to influence the holding power of schools. A study of retention in Victorian government high schools undertaken in 1983 (Ainley et al, 1984b) found that, after allowing for social background influences, progression rates from Year 11 to Year 12 were higher in schools which offered alternative programs at Year 12 than in schools which offered only the traditional public examination subjects geared to university entrance. Satisfaction with schooling was higher in schools where new curricula had been implemented at Year 12 (and often at other Year levels) and where teachers considered the school program to be well co-ordinated. More general trends in enrolments also suggest that curriculum factors may influence the holding power of schools. Between 1982 and 1986 enrolments in newly developed courses at Year 11 and Year 12 grew much more rapidly than enrolments in the more traditional studies oriented to higher education (Ainley, 1989).

An Interpretation: Plans and Destinations

The encouragement and expectations held by significant others may be the underlying explanation for the observed relationship between participation in postcompulsory schooling and socioeconomic background, ethnic background, and gender. One might postulate that these factors would first shape educational plans which might then become manifest in destinations; depending on other circumstances. In addition success at school and satisfaction with school also influence students plans and aspirations and subsequently shape the decisions which taken at the end of Year 10 and beginning of Year 11. Sheret et al (1988) showed that both achievement and satisfaction with school have strongly positive influences on students' educational plans. Moreover those influences were largely independent of each other. This suggests that school environments can influence students' educational plans.

The effects of school programs on participation can be seen as operating in two ways. First, the program provided in the senior school years could be a manifestation of a more general concern with curriculum renewal and encouragement to participation in school which is also present in the junior school. In this way the same underlying factors would be seen as shaping plans and influencing school programs. Secondly, the program could be seen as providing

opportunities for students' plans to be realized as decisions to continue their schooling into Years 11 and 12.

There is a strong similarity between the research results reported for influences on students remaining at school to the postcompulsory years and students' plans to remain at school. Sheret et al (1988) reported on factors in the early secondary years which shaped Year 9 students' intentions to continue their schooling: achievement, satisfaction with school, parental expectations regarding education, and ethnic background. In other words higher levels of achievement, greater satisfaction with school life, a parental expectation that education will be continued beyond school, and having family origins in a non-english speaking country are all associated with an intention to remain at school to Years 11 and 12. Those results provoke an exploration of the extent to which students' educational plans in the junior secondary years are realized in practice.

Students' Plans and Students' Destinations

Information about students' educational plans were obtained by questionnaire in 1987 and 1988. Some 3045 students completed a questionnaire entitled School and You in 1987 when they were in Year 9. In 1988 the same question about educational plans was asked as part of a similar questionnaire directed to students in Year 10. Of the 2932 students surveyed in 1988, 2351 could be matched with the 1987 data; a correspondence with 77 per cent of the original cases. Whether or not students actually returned to school in Year 11 or left at the end of Year 10 was obtained from school records. These data were obtained for 2676 (or 88 per cent) of the original group and 2870 (or 98 per cent) of the group contacted in Year 10. Failure to match was mainly a result of a few students in 1987 not providing names with the original questionnaire.

Table 1 shows the correspondence between students intentions regarding continuing with school, when they were in Year 9 in 1987, and whether they actually remained at school to Year 11. It can be seen that there was a strong correspondence between intentions and the resultant destination. For over two thirds of the students the match was precise; eighteen per cent intended to leave school and did leave, and 51 per cent intended to continue at school and did continue at school. For 19 per cent of students there was a discrepancy between intentions and destination; 12 per cent had planned to stay but eventually left and seven per cent planned to leave but stayed. Thirteen per cent of students had been undecided in Year 9 as to whether they would stay or leave. A similar analysis of students educational plans when they were in Year 10 revealed the same pattern but with a somewhat stronger correspondence between intentions and destinations. Over three quarters of the students had a precise

match.

Table 1 Students Educational Plans in Year 9 and Year 11 Destinations

Year 9 Intentions (1987)	Year 11 Destinations (1989)		
	Left	Stayed	Total
Leave	18%	7%	25%
Uncertain	5%	8%	13%

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Stay	12%	51%	63%
Total	35%	66%	

N=2676

X2=600

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Table 2 Students' Plans for Further Schooling and Parents Wishes

Students Intentions	Parents Wishes			Total
	Leave	Unsure	Stay	
Leave	13%	2%	5%	20%
Uncertain	3%	1%	12%	16%
Stay	2%	1%	61%	64%
Total	18%	4%	78%	

N=231

Students' educational plans matched the wishes of their parents. The parents of a sub-sample of the cohort of students were contacted by mail and responses obtained from 77 per cent (231) of those to whom the questionnaire was sent. Two-thirds (68%) of the respondents were mothers of the students. Of those whose children indicated an intention to remain at school, 95 per cent indicated a wish for their child to continue at school. Of those whose children intended to leave school, 64 per cent indicated that was also their wish but 26 per cent wanted their child to continue with school to Year 11 and 12. Results are shown in Table 2.

Those students who remained at school to Year 11 were asked whether they had planned to return to school. A total of 1473 students had

returned to school and completed the Year 11 Student questionnaire. Most of those who said that they had planned to return to school had indicated in Year 9 an intention to continue their schooling but those who indicated they had not planned to return to school were more mixed in the previously stated intentions. The match between intentions and reflections was between 80 and 87 per cent depending on the way uncertainties were classified. Data are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Year 9 Students Intentions and Reflections by Year 11 Students

Intentions	Year 11 Planned to Stay		
	No	Yes	Total
Leave	2.4%	5.3%	7.7%
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Uncertain	2.1%	9.5%	11.6%
Stay	2.9%	77.8%	80.7%
Total	7.4%	92.6%	

N=1473

Match= 80 to 87 per cent

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Overall, it can be inferred from these data that students' educational plans in Year 9 provide a good indication of their destinations beyond Year 10. That suggests that in examining participation in postcompulsory schooling it is important to look at the junior secondary, and possibly earlier, years of schooling.

Distinguishing Characteristics of Four Groups

From the classification of students' Year 9 intentions (and combining those who were uncertain with those who planned to leave) with their Year 11 destinations it was possible to group the cohort in four categories:

1. Those who planned to leave and had left school (N=593, 22% of the total).
2. Those who planned to leave but had remained at school (N=409, 15% of the total).
3. Those who planned to stay and had remained at school (N=1364, 51% of the total).
4. Those who planned to stay and had left school (N=310, 12% of the total).

A discriminant function analysis was then used to examine the distinguishing characteristics of these four groups of young people (Klecka, 1975). This technique identifies sets of linear combinations of variables which maximizes the differences between the groups. In the present study the sample was split randomly into two. One half was then used for the analysis phase to establish discriminant functions and the other half was used for the classification phase to test the discriminations.

Variables

The variables used in the discriminant analysis were those which had been previously established as predictors of an intention to remain at school (Sheret et al, 1988): achievement score, school life, parental influence, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender.

Achievement. Achievement was measured by tests; one in mathematics one in reading comprehension. The mathematics test was a form of PATMATHS 3A (ACER, 1984) modified so as to exclude five items

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concerned with set theory and one other item which seemed ambiguous. It consisted of 49 multiple choice items and it proved to be a highly reliable instrument with a reliability coefficient (KR20) of 0.91. The reading comprehension test was one (Towing Icebergs) chosen from the Tests of Reading Comprehension - TORCH - (Mossenson, Hill, and Masters, 1987). It was found to be highly reliable with a reliability coefficient (KR20) of 0.91. For the present paper overall achievement was determined by combining the standardized scores in each of the two separate tests. If a student had completed only one of the two tests it alone was used to estimate overall achievement.

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School Life. A questionnaire developed to assess students' views of school life has been developed and tested at ACER. It consists of 40 statements about school to which students are asked to indicate their level of agreement on a self-report likert scale. The items are intended to encompass a number of different aspects of school life and form clusters or subscales. It distinguishes general feelings of well being (positive affect), general negative feelings (negative affect), and feelings related to specific domains of school life. The five specific domains of schooling embodied are Achievement (a sense of confidence in ones ability to be successful in school work), Opportunity (a belief in the relevance of schooling), Status (the relative degree of prestige accorded to the individual by significant others within the school), Identity (a sense of learning about other people and getting along with other people, Teachers (a feeling about the adequacy of the interaction between teachers and students). The School Life questionnaire has been tested extensively so that there is empirical evidence to support its structure (Batten and Girling-Butcher, 1981; Williams and Batten, 1981; Ainley, 1986; Ainley et al., 1986). The model does not envisage the domains as being

independent of each other but that together they constitute a view of the elements of school life for students. In general separate subscales are used in analyses based on the School Life questionnaire but for the present analyses an overall score was computed to represent overall satisfaction with school. The total scale was found to be reliable with a reliability coefficient of 0.93 (coefficient alpha) a mean of 115.6 and a standard deviation of 13.8. The possible range was from 40 to 160.

Socioeconomic Status. Socioeconomic status was based on the stated occupation of the respondent's father coded initially according to the 16 point ANU scale of prestige (Broom et al, 1977). For the present analyses it was collapsed into the ANU six point scale; unskilled (14%), semi-skilled (15%), skilled (32%), clerical (12%), managerial(16%), professional(13%) coded 1 to 6 respectively.

Ethnicity. Ethnic background was based on the place of birth of the students and their parents. Four categories were used according to whether the students or their parents were born in a non-english speaking country. The first category was where neither parent was born in a non-english speaking country (65%) coded as 1, the second was where one parent only was born in a non-english speaking country (8%) coded as 2, the third was where both parents were born in a non-english speaking country (17%) coded as 3, and the fourth was where

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the student was born in a non-english speaking country (10%) coded as 4.

Parental Expectations. Parental expectations were based on students' reports of the extent to which they thought that their parents wanted them to continue study when they left school. Students who indicated work without any form of study were assigned a score of 1, those who indicated that they did not know their parents' expectations were assigned a score of 2, those who indicated part-time time study were assigned a score of 3, and those who indicated full-time study were assigned a score of 4.

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Table 4 Structure and Function Coefficients

Variable Structure Coeffts. Function Coeffts.

Variable	Structure Coeffts.	Function Coeffts.
Achievement Score	0.69	0.72
Parent Influence	0.50	0.33
School Life	0.46	0.46
Ethnicity	0.24	0.33
Socioeconomic Status	0.21	0.11
Gender	0.15	0.15

N=1113

Analysis and Results

With four groups there are three possible discriminant functions but not all necessarily contribute to the discriminating power. In the present example the first of the discriminant functions accounted for 98 per cent of the trace (eigen values were 0.36, 0.005, 0.003 for the three functions). For this reason only the first discriminant function was examined. The canonical correlation of the first function with group membership was 0.51 (for the second function it was 0.07) indicating that 25 per cent of the variance in this discriminant function was explained by the four group classification.

To aid in the interpretation of the discriminant function the correlations coefficients between the function and each of its constituent variables were examined (Tatsuoka, 1973: 280). These structure coefficients are preferred for interpretation purposes over the function coefficients. Both are shown in Table 4. From these data it can be seen that the discriminant function categorizes a dimension characterized by high achievement, parental encouragement to continue education and satisfaction with school life. Figure 2 shows the means on the discriminant function for each of the groups. It can be seen that the leave-left (group 1) and stay-stayed (group 3) groups are well separated and that the other two groups fall between those extremes. The stay-left (group 4) group was closer to the stay-stayed than the leave-left group. Similarly the leave-stayed group was closer to the leave-left than the stay-stayed group. In brief, the groups in which destination differed from intention were closer to those with similar intentions than those with similar destinations.

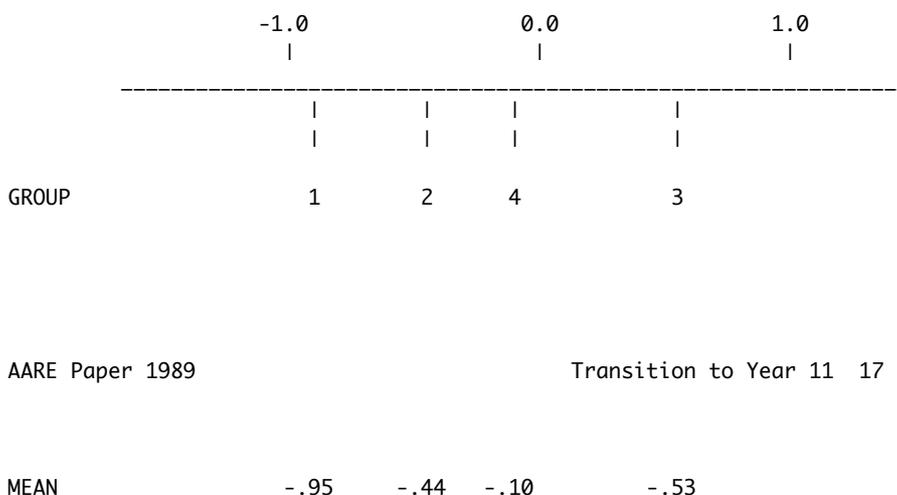


Figure 2 Group Means on the Discriminant Function

Table 5 Group Means on Discriminating Variables

Variable	Leave/ Left	Leave/ Stayed	Group Stay/ Left	Stay/ Stayed	Eta- Squared

Achievement	-0.42	-0.18	-0.06	0.38	.14	0.90
School Life	110.6	113.5	116.7	118.7	.06	13.4
Parents	1.67	2.04	2.42	2.66	.11	1.23
Ethnicity	0.40	0.64	0.70	0.85	.03	1.06
SES	3.14	3.21	3.44	3.59	.01	1.56
Gender	1.41	1.47	1.50	1.53	.01	0.50

N=2676

Table 5 displays the group means on each of the discriminating variables which constitute the discriminant function. The pattern revealed is similar to that contained within the function overall. The three variables providing the greatest discriminating power are achievement, parental expectations, and satisfaction with school life. It does suggest, however that satisfaction with school life, and parents expectations of further education are a little more powerful than achievement in distinguishing between the two middle groups.

For the classification phase cases which had not been selected for the analysis phase were used. Table 6 shows the percentages of cases which were accurately classified according to values on the discriminant function. Overall 50 per cent of the cases were correctly classified. Sixty two per cent of the stay-stayed group, and 58 per cent of the leave-left group were correctly classified. However, only 19 per cent of the leave-stayed and twenty per cent of the stay-left groups were correctly classified. For these two groups the most common misclassifications were into the group with the same intention rather than the group with the same destination.

Table 6 Classification Results for Cases Not Selected for the Analysis

Actual Group	No. Cases	Predicted Group Membership			
		1	2	3	4
1 Leave-left	211	123 58.3%	35 16.6%	21 10.0%	32 15.2%
2 Leave-stayed	173	74	32	36	31

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3 Stay-stayed	591	42.8% 76	18.5% 57	20.8% 370	17.9% 88
4 Stay-Left	112	12.9% 30	9.6% 17	62.6% 43	14.9% 22
		26.8%	15.2%	38.4%	19.6%

Percent of "grouped" cases correctly classified: 50.32%

In summary the classification was successful for the groups whose destination matched their intention but was less successful for those whose destination was different from their intention.

Reasons for Returning to School: Early and Late Deciders

As part of the questionnaire administered to Year 11 students in 1989, respondents were asked to rate 15 items as reasons for staying at school on a four point scale from "not at all important" (1) to "very important" (4). For each item a mean rating was calculated for those who in Year 9 said they would stay and those who had said they would leave. The results have been presented in Figure 3 which shows the mean ratings as a profile for each of the groups together with an indication of the difference between the each pair of means in standard deviation units: the effect size calculated as the difference between the means divided by pooled standard deviation. Differences greater than 0.2 to 0.3 standard deviations can probably be regarded as substantively significant. Those differences which are statistically significant at the one-tenth of one per cent level ($p < .001$) have been indicated with an asterisk. Because the rating for each item measures the relative importance attached by the student to a particular reason for staying on to Year 11, comparing the two sets of mean ratings allows inferences to be drawn about the motivations of the two groups of students.

A similar analysis has been performed comparing those in Year 11 who said they had planned to return with those who said they did not plan to return. The pattern of results is similar although the differences between those groups are generally a little larger than those presented here.

The items included form clusters both by design and confirmed by factor analysis. Items 3, 6, and 13 associate together as indicators of how much the senior secondary years are regarded as important for long term career goals. On two of these there are substantial differences in favour of those who had planned to stay at school and on the third a smaller difference in the same direction.

Another cluster of items referred to school factors. Items 1, 5, 9, and 12 associate together as indicators of positive feelings about school: doing well, enjoyment, useful subjects and

interest. Generally late deciders do not find these factors influenced their decision to as great an extent as the early deciders.

Items 11, 13, and 14 referred to immediate labour market influences and were somewhat negative influences: no apprenticeship, no suitable job, and no job at all. Those influences were greater for the late deciders than for early deciders. Another similar item referred to returning to school because of having no other plans. Not surprisingly, it also was a stronger influence on the late than the

early deciders.

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Three items (2, 7, and 10) referred to the influence of significant others. There was no difference between the groups in terms of the influence of parents, teachers, and friends. One item referred to financial support through Austudy. Support from Austudy was more important to late than early deciders.

From these data it could be inferred that among Year 11 students those who had from Year 9 planned to continue school into Year 11 had slightly different motivations than those who had not planned to return. The former group were more influenced by long term career considerations and satisfaction with their experience of school while the latter group was more influenced by immediate job opportunities. This is consistent with the information obtained from interviews with educational practitioners.

School Life in Year 11

In general the study has found that, for the same students, between Year 9 and Year 11 there was an increase in satisfaction with school life on some scales (eg. teachers, status), very little difference on some (eg. positive affect), and a decline on others (eg. opportunity, achievement). In this paper the school life scores of those Year 11 students who planned to stay when they were in Year 9 are compared with the school life scores of those who had not planned to stay at that time. Table 7 contains the relevant data.

Table 7 shows the scores on each of the school life scales for those who planned to return and those who had not planned to return to school. Effect sizes for the differences between means are also shown together with an indication of the statistical significance of those differences. For reference the school life scores of the same students when they were in Year 9 are also shown.

Table 7 School Life Scores for Students in Year 11 (1989)

Scale	Stay-Stayed	Leave-Stayed	Effect Size	Sig.	Year 9 (1987)
Positive affect	14.0	13.5	0.20	**	14.0
Teachers	17.6	16.6	0.36	***	17.0
Status	16.7	16.3	0.11	*	16.6
Social	18.6	18.6	0.03	ns	18.3

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Opportunity	18.5	17.7	0.26	***	18.9
Achievement	18.0	17.2	0.31	***	18.2

Negative affect	10.2	9.9	0.11	ns	9.6
Total	118.6	114.8	0.28	***	

N=1470

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The largest differences between the two groups of Year 11 students were found for the teachers, achievement, opportunity and, to a slightly smaller extent, positive affect scales. This indicates that those who were in Year 11 and had not planned to continue to Year 11, were less satisfied with teacher-student interactions, felt less confident about success in their school work, and were not as convinced that their school work was relevant to their futures. In addition those who had not planned to return had fewer positive feelings towards school.

In Summary

On the basis of the information in this paper it can be inferred that there are differences in the characteristics and motivations of those who return to school in Year 11 as an outcome of an intention established by Year 9 and those who return as a result of decision different from their previous plans. In terms of characteristics in early secondary school, the two groups differ in terms of achievement levels, views of school life and parental expectations. Students who planned to leave but in fact stayed were more similar in these characteristics to those who left than those who stayed. The late deciders were more influenced by the immediate job market and financial support than the early deciders. On the other hand the early deciders were more strongly influenced by longer term career plans and their sense of interest, enjoyment, and success in school. When they were in Year 11 the early deciders found school more satisfying in terms of teacher-student interactions, success, and the relevance of the curriculum for their futures.

Recent increases in school retention cannot only be attributed to greater numbers of late deciders. However, the data in this paper suggest that increasing numbers of students who did not plan to return to school present a challenge in terms of curriculum, organization and teaching.

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