

A report on the literature available on participation in  
post-compulsory education

The results of a literature trawl commissioned by Dr Keith  
Davies and Jane Elliott (m Phil) for the research project  
'Reaching the non-participant: a pilot study aiming to explore  
reasons why many adults do not participate in formal learning  
opportunities after completion of compulsory schooling.'

Samantha Crookes November 2001

The following bibliography is divided into two sections, literature that is available from UWS libraries and has been checked for content, and literature available in other libraries or unfound on library catalogues. Given the scope of this research the list is by no means exhaustive. Titles are given a relevance rating whereby '\*\*\*' is most relevant.

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**ACACE – ( ) – ‘Adults : Their Educational Experience and Needs.’**

Chapter five of this report concentrates on attitudes towards education. Amongst the issues addressed are the attitudes of friends and family and the ‘image’ of the people who attend courses. A ‘hard core’ of non-participants amongst working class people are found to have been unhappy at school and believe education is not important to them.

In chapter eight non-participants are defined and classified; further divisions into sub-groups are made according to attitude and so on. Leisure activities are examined to assess the potential of groups as targets for promotion and provision of education. General conclusions (chapter 9) are that: the awareness of opportunities and costs varies by region; the issue of ‘use’ differs between men and women; and little resistance by friends and families is anticipated.

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**Ball. Sir Christopher – (1990) – May – ‘More means Different: Widening Access to Higher education – (final report) – RSA.**

Notes variability of demand for higher education by subject, region and socio-economic group. Respondents emphasise need for higher education to be more ‘user friendly, to lose its exclusive character; in Wales to ‘reach out from the institution to the village hall.’ To be seen as ‘useful’ to attract students.

Ball concludes that the main impediment for higher education is the shortage of places. Whilst stating that students need provision for costs of living, travel, childcare and other special needs, he finds that reductions in unit costs would have only a marginal impact on increasing participation.

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**Banks .M and Bryn Davies .J – (1990) – ‘Motivation Unemployment and Employment Department programmes – MRC/ESRC – Social and Applied Psychology Unit – Department of psychology - Sheffield**

Examines the effect of unemployment on the individual – largely negative. Focuses on the effect on individual motivation. Looks at people failing to take up Employment programmes. Reveals misconceptions and concern about implications for receipt of benefits.

Reasons found for low take-up rate include the ignorance of the existence of opportunities, and incomplete/inaccurate information. Negative perceptions of such courses include: ineffectiveness as 'stepping stones' to jobs; insufficient increase in benefits; and 'slave labour' exploitation. Generally the perceived costs of participation exceed the potential perceived benefits.

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**Bond et al –(1997) – ‘Reaching Out: How do Adults Find out about opportunities to return to learn?’ IN ‘Adults Learning’ – Dec 1997 – vol. 9 no 4**

Many who may benefit from returning to learn never come forward. 1996 project aimed at finding out how adults in disadvantaged areas get information. Findings are that it is important to treat publicity and recruitment as a 'staged process'. Contains a description of how Warwickshire Education Authority revised its approach, which may shed light on some reasons for non-participation. Concentrating on drawing people in, using 'eye catching' leaflets, giving the four most important pieces of information – 'fun, free, local, and childcare available'. The underlying message being it is not like going back to school. Bond et al stress the importance of ease of speaking to someone personally as the 'first step' can be frightening.

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**Burke. P.J –(2000) – ‘Intimidating/ory Education’ –IN ‘Research in Post-compulsory Education – vol. 5 no 3.**

Qualitative research on participants in various programmes to re-enter education. Burke concentrates on people's feelings of intimidation and inferiority in connection with educational experiences. Conclusions are that challenging the organisation and contents of the curriculum, and the politics of the (traditionally classist, sexist and racist) academy should be a key area of attention.

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**Charnley. A; Osbourne.M and Withnall .A (1983)– ‘Review of Existing Research in Adult Continuing Education.’ – NIACE**

Study in Southampton found non-participants tend to be older, female, unemployed parents, from lower socio-economic groups, and (contradicting findings elsewhere) to have lived in the locality for a shorter time than participants. The authors identify 'physical' barriers as childcare, time, lack of information and costs. In general the report examines local Education Authorities' notions of 'community' education; specific community projects and community colleges and schools.

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**City and County of Swansea – (2000) – ‘Researching the Barriers to Lifelong Learning in the city and county of Swansea.**

Research findings within South Wales based on 647 residents in Swansea Valley. Main barriers are identified as lack of: time (principle barrier); confidence with computers; knowledge of availability, and transport. A list of factors increasing the likelihood of taking a course is included.

The authors found significant non-motivation, reasons for which include: negative school experience; lack of an ‘accepted culture’ identifying tie need for training/education; timetabling, and drug abuse amongst young men. Notably, despite ‘exhaustive efforts’ they failed to access the category of males living on housing estates. Concerns expressed indirectly to researchers about the invisibility of this group asserted that this might be due to low self-esteem or addiction to computer games, television, or drugs.

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**Coffield . F (Ed) – ‘Differing Visions of a Learning Society: Research findings’ – vol. two.**

Findings of McGivney(1990) are taken into account; where ‘situational’ and ‘institutional’ barriers can be removed, it is suggested that social and cultural restraints will still exist. To understand the determinants of individual ‘learning trajectory’ it is found to be necessary to trace the interactions between social relations specific to place, historical change and individual experiences.

Five broad factors determining learning trajectories are found to be time, place, gender, family and initial schooling. Importantly, characteristics set at an early age seem best predictors. Where age, gender family background and initial schooling is known, predictions are claimed to be 86% accurate. Non-participation is seen as the result of perceived inappropriateness of education/training which is structured relatively early in life, this removal of barriers would have limited impact. Thus it is concluded that priority should be given to facilitating ‘life-long’ progression routes.

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**Coffield. F (Ed) – (2000) – What Progress are we making with Lifelong Learning? The evidence from research’ – NIACE**

See Cullen ‘Informal Learning and Widening Participation’, where the main barriers and constraints are identified as: negative previous experience of education; financial constraints; access problems (social and geographical) and inertia.

Also see Bynner 'Adult Participation and Progression in Education' for an examination of the main factors in determining participation.

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**Coffield. F (Ed)- (2000) – 'The Necessity of Informal Learning' – Policy Press.**

This report focuses on the significance of informal rather than formal learning. Pat Davies 'Formalising Learning' examines the role of accreditation. It is found that fears about distorting the informal nature of courses were unfounded, and accreditation is not necessarily alienating to students – though credit was voluntary and did not include formal exams.

Fevre et al 'Necessary and Unnecessary Learning' emphasise the importance of informal learning through work and leisure, noting that employers now disregard informal knowledge; and suggesting informal learning may be disappearing with the growth of formal participation.

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**Cornwall. R. J. – (1999) 'The Significance of Self-efficacy in Enabling or Disabling the Participation of Long-term unemployed Adults in Lifelong Learning.' – Thesis M. Phil – UWS**

Focusing on unemployed adults and identifying their problems, Cornwall develops a theory of 'self efficacy' as a significant factor in participation and non-participation. Includes a wide-ranging literature review, concerning perceived barriers to adult participation in learning. Drawing on Bandura's cognitive theory of 'self efficacy' – personal conceptions of ability – Cornwall concludes that this is directly relevant to why some participate despite encountering barriers which deter others.

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**Courtney. S. – (1992) – 'Why Adults Learn – Towards a Theory of Participation in Adult Education' – Routledge – New York.**

Courtney asserts that the problem of non-participation is much the same as it was in early investigations. Thus "vintage" studies are not necessarily outdated. Cites the importance of people's orientations to learning. Finally questions whether research on non-participation is moving in the right direction.

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**Cowperthwaite. P; Johnston. R; and Ryves. M (eds.) – (1989) – 'Access in Action: Breaking Down the Barriers' – NIACE/REPLAN**

Identifies a number of barriers to access to education. 16 case studies identify groups affected by each specific barrier. Each section identifies the main and associated barriers and how these were tackled. Around half the case studies are concerned with

removing obstacles to existing provision. Also, accessibility is dealt with in terms of professionals negotiating with users the terms on which they learn – a ‘user model’.

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**DeBelle. D – (1992) – ‘Paying for Skills’ – IN ‘Adults Learning’ – Vol. 4 No 1.**

Findings of research by team at City College Norwich. This work concentrates on financial barriers and who experiences them, giving a detailed list of such barriers.

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**Edwards. R; Simenski. S and Zeldin. D (eds.) - (1993) - ‘Adult Learners, Education and Training - A reader’ - Routledge - London -OUP**

See part one ‘Participation, non-participation and access’. This includes an edited version of McGivney’s work; a discussion on access and the problems with ‘Access’ courses by M. Tight; and an article by Q. Tough advocating a reduction in emphasis on educational ‘credit’ for adults. Part two includes a discussion on how low employer demand for skills is limiting incentives to participate (Keep. E ‘Missing presumed skilled’).

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**Ferir. G - ‘Participation in Education in Europe - (1977) - CCC- CE - New York.**

Though this work is mainly concerned with compulsory education see chapter five where Ferir asserts that participation implies a profound change in attitudes and behaviour, which people can find ‘threatening’. He finds there are basic problems concerning communication and authority.

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**Fryer .R .H - (1997) - ‘Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century’ - 1<sup>st</sup> Report of the National Advisory Group for continuing Education and Lifelong Learning - London - NAGCELL**

Fryer notes how ‘widening social inequalities’ are blamed for disaffection and hostility towards institutions. Recognised obstacles to participation range from ‘physical’, such as time, cost, location; to lack of support for carers. Specific obstacles are related to specific social groups. Other problems are: inflexible funding; underdeveloped personal and organisational commitment; lack of confidence from school experiences; and an ‘off-putting’ multiplicity of acronyms and jargon.

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**Gorard. S; Rees .G and Fever .R; - (1999) - 'Patterns of Participation in Lifelong Learning: do families make a difference?' - IN 'British Educational Research Journal' - Vol. 25**

This article draws on the results of a large-scale study of lifetime participation. Gorard et al note that despite large changes in provision since 1945, 'individual participation trajectories remain very similar within families. This 'reproduction' is strongest amongst lifetime learners and non-participants, though its role decreases with age. They conclude that further analysis of family as an important influence on 'learner identity' is required.

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**Gorard .S; Rees .G; Fevre .R and Furlong >J - (1998) - ' Society is not built by Education Alone: Alternative routes to a learning society -IN 'Research in Post Compulsory Education'- Vol. 3 No 1**

A well referenced discussion of barriers including difficulties with costs, institutions, literacy and numeracy. Other issues addressed are: the lack of knowledge about benefits and uneven interpretation of rules by benefit offices; availability of time in relation to copious leisure opportunities; and the lack of motivation due to perceived irrelevance. Gorard et al conclude that the high level of predictability of participation, based on social and family background, suggests policies should be concentrated on reducing inequalities in society rather than trying to increase 'opportunities'.

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**Hampton .W - (1978) - 'Adult Education and the Urban programme: A memorandum prepared for the University Council for Adult Education Working Party on Adult Education and Participation.'**

Concerned with the relationship between education and the political framework within in which it operates. Hampton describes problems (perhaps now somewhat out of date) in: relating adult education to the development of community participation; the rigid separation affecting objectives, institutions and curricula; some community workers equating adult education approaches with 'elitist' attempts to impose attitudes and constraints.

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**Hart .M - (1982) - 'Variables Affecting Adult Learning Projects' -IN 'Adult education' - Vol. 54 no 4**

Hart examines motivation, finding that 71% envision immediate use or application of knowledge or skills gained, whilst only 21% identified motives catagorisable as having long-term implications.

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**Higher Education Funding Council for England - interim report - 'The Influence of Neighbourhood Type on Participation in Higher Education' (April 1997)**

The factors investigated by this project on participation in higher education are gender, region and geodemographic (neighbourhood) group. The report finds that the likelihood of a young person entering higher education is strongly related to neighbourhood type; differences in participation by gender and region being very much smaller. The affluence of a geodemographic group is particularly important. Low participant areas are characterised by low income, high unemployment and high proportion of manual workers.

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**Istance .D; Morris and Rees - (1996) - 'Barriers to Further Education: A Study of Participation and Non-participation with Special Reference to Taff Ely and Pontypridd College'.**

Istance et al describe the barriers reported by both participants and non-participants, focusing on non-participating women with dependent children and unemployed males.

Barriers perceived by participants include age, family responsibilities, transport and cost. Barriers to non-participants include limited information - particularly on types of courses available - and confusion/intimidation about where to go to get information. Those who said they did not wish to participate stated lack of confidence, time or socio-economic irrelevance of education as reasons.

Women with dependent children saw lack of childcare as most significant. Unemployed males perceived types of courses as 'for others'. Istance et al found that the practices in benefit offices played a crucial role, often actively discouraging participation. However the factor which distinguished most successfully between participants and non-participants is identified as the accessibility of course provision.

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**Kennedy .H - (1997) - 'Learning Works: widening participation in further education' - Coventry - FEFC**

Kennedy notes the impact of unemployment on men's confidence; and strong links between economic disadvantage and low levels of achievement. The report is concerned with who the non-participants are, identifying two ways of looking at this - by specific characteristics and general characteristics'. The findings are that general characteristics are better indicators, for example qualifications at sixteen is a 'predictor' of continuing education which 'reduces the impact of factors such as sex, age and ethnicity. An important point is that underrepresented groups differ by locality. Generally it is found that people with children are less committed to learning, and fear of losing benefits is a major deterrent. The diversity of choices in further education is thought 'confusing'.

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**Lumb .L - (1996) - 'A Study of the barriers to the Participation of women in adult education' - Thesis (M. Sc Econ) - University of Wales Swansea.**

Includes findings of existing literature such as McGivney's work, and the findings of original interviews. The main barriers to women's participation are seen to be grounded in expectations that they will be the primary homemaker/carer. Lumb's work highlights the problem of opposition from male partners and parents, which fits with other identified problems such as lack of physical (eg housework) and psychological support. Lack of confidence is found to be 'an enormous barrier'.

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**Mac an Ghail .M - (1996) - 'What about the boys? Schooling, class and crisis masculinity - IN ' Sociological Review' - Blackwell**

Focusing on male, white, working class students, Mac an Ghail examines the effect of socio-economic restructuring on the construction of student identities. The role of peer groups and parents in influencing attitudes towards education is examined. A key problem is identified as young men being attached to 'traditional masculinity' which is no longer viable in view of changes in local labour markets.

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**MacDonald .A; Saunders .L and Benefield .P - (1999) - 'Boy's Achievement, Progress, Motivation and Participation: issues raised by the recent literature' - Nfer.**

Concentrates on boys in compulsory schooling, particularly GCSE results. It is found that there is a need to review various issues raised by the boys interviewed. This work is included as educational achievement is emphasised in much of the literature on non-participation.

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**Maguire .M; Maguire .S and Felstead .A - (1993) - 'Factors Influencing Individual Commitment to Lifetime Learning: a literature review.' - London - Employment Department.**

Maguire et al look at the uneven participation as related to age, social class, qualifications and income/occupation. The main motivating factor is seen to be work related; the main barriers are identified as cost, fear of loss of job security, time and lack of basic skills. Additional constraints - 'domestic', transport and childcare - are seen to be experienced by women in particular.

In Reviewing the literature the authors found further research is needed in the following areas: individual 'commitment fluctuation'; awareness of opportunities;

understanding of notions such as credit accumulation; how to 'effect an attitudinal shift' and greater understanding of the reasons for non-participation.

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**McGivney .V - (1990) - 'Education's for Other People: Access to Education for Non-participant Adults' -Leicester - NIACE**

Based on research carried out between 1987 and 1989 McGivney gives a wide-ranging and detailed analysis of non-participation. Existing research into non-participant groups is examined and compared with McGivney's own findings. In discussing reasons given by non-participants McGivney expresses reservations about survey results, on the basis that respondents may wish to answer in socially acceptable ways, or may be unable to analyse their own behaviour.

Barriers to participation are categorised into 'situational', 'institutional' and 'dispositional', after the work of Cross 1981. Some interesting points include: 'contradictory' evidence on time and costs as barriers; and class and peer group pressures. Main conclusions are that: the education system is too elitist; there is limited knowledge of opportunities; learning is seen as being for younger, affluent intellectual individuals; and anger and hostility exist towards class based values of the system. Overall the major barriers are attitudes, perceptions and expectations which are most difficult to change when related to gender roles or social class.

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**McGivney .V - (1992) - 'Motivating Unemployed Adults to Undertake Education and Training' - NIACE**

McGivney examines the lack of motivation to take up education and training amongst unskilled and semi-skilled workers, finding that it was seen as irrelevant to their work or promotion prospects. Other factors in non-participation include Gooderham's 'Reference group theory'.

Noting how working people participate more than unemployed, she goes on to investigate the role of unemployment in some detail. The main consequences include: a progressive loss of confidence/self-esteem; deterioration of personal and social skills; growing social isolation; and, particularly, a perceived inability to initiate or control future events. As to the perceived 'risks', the risk to benefit entitlement is found to be the most powerful disincentive. Barriers to specific groups are considered, and factors which encourage participation are discussed.

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**McGivney .V - (1994) - 'Women, Education and Training' - NIACE**

This work looks at the commonalities of women's experiences despite differences due to race, age, class, educational background and so on. The key obstacles described

are classified as: personal and domestic constraints; dispositional constraints, structural constraints; practical and material constraints; and cultural constraints. The findings are well summed up in McGivney's conclusion that "multiple barriers that deter women... stem from deep-rooted cultural attitudes and expectations underpinned by social and economic structures and policies".

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**McGivney .V - (1998) - 'Excluded Men who are Missing from Education and Training' - NIACE**

A well referenced examination of factors affecting participation amongst underrepresented groups of men. Issues addressed include: attitude to education; high male unemployment; lack of positive role models; race; peer group pressure; perceptions of irrelevance; social class issues; time; finance; institutional factors and structural disincentives (such as exclusion by employers and the benefit system.).

McGivney finds the missing groups are prevented by structural constraints, institutional rigidities, scepticism about the value of participation, and views about 'appropriate male behaviour.' Returning to education or training can be seen as not only irrelevant but 'humiliating'.

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**Metcalf .H -(1997) - 'Class and Higher Education: the participation of young people from lower social classes' - Council for Industry and Higher Education - Lloyds TSB foundation.**

Focusing on the statistical evidence showing young people from lower social classes are less likely to enter higher education than those from higher social classes, Metcalf examines whether this is due to social class itself or some other related factor. It is found that the influence of social class is strongest at earlier stages in education than entrance to higher education.

Social class itself is identified as a factor in so far as educational achievement is concerned. This is found to be less of a direct factor when considering the non-participation of those with sufficient qualifications. Metcalf finds that 'later' hurdles differentially impact on young people from lower socio-economic groups. Key related factors include financial need, lack of confidence/encouragement, and lack of knowledge of options. It is suggested that further research should focus on mechanisms for influencing young people's career choices.

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**Munn.P and MacDonald .C\_(1998) - 'Adult Participation in Education and training' -Scottish Council for Research in Education.**

Munn and MacDonald asked groups of participants and non-participants about factors affecting their choice. The most important reasons were lack of interest, followed by

time, responsibility for dependants, and irrelevance to jobs. In discussing 'subsidiary' factors, the authors make some interesting points relating to lack of knowledge, lack of use and unhappy experience of education. Finding lack of knowledge to be a fairly minor factor contradicted previous research, it is suggested that this was not cited as non-participants may have assumed that they did know, and were not interested. The small percentage citing lack of use or unhappy educational experiences prompt the authors to suggest that perhaps lack of interest or time is seen as a more 'socially acceptable reason' (this is interesting as other work makes more or less opposite suggestions about respondents answering in socially acceptable ways!

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**Nash .I -(1996) - 'Labour Launches post-16 cash study'-IN 'Times Educational Supplement 26<sup>th</sup> April p2**

Article on the Labour Party's review on grants, awards and benefits to stop over 16's dropping out of education through poverty.

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**Nash .I - (1996) - 'Thousands face music on skill levels' - IN 'Times Educational Supplement 16<sup>th</sup> Feb p28**

Nash highlights the fact that 10% of the British population have problems with basic reading.

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**Norris .E -(1985) - 'Towards a Theory of Participation in Adult Education' - IN 'Adult Education' vol.58 no 2.**

Norris became a student for research purposes. The report concludes that there appears to be no point of contact of 'social worlds' between those of a part-time student, and those of work, family and leisure. It is recommended that providers demonstrate an 'overlap of interests'.

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**O'Shea .J and Corrigan .P - (1979) - 'Surviving Adult Education' - IN Adult Education' vol 52 no4**

This study is based on participating male, adult industrial workers. O'Shea and Corrigan reach the rather depressing conclusion that participation amongst this group comes at 'great personal cost' that the vast majority would not be prepared to pay. Education, it is claimed, is experienced in political terms leaving participants with severed relationships, disrupted families and political ambivalence! This is seen as a product of an 'enormous cultural divide' between institutions and student backgrounds. The transformation of institutions is recommended (though this may have been partly addressed in the last 22 years).

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**Parnham .J - (2001) - IN 'Journal of Further and Higher Education' Vol. 25  
no 1 Feb 2000**

Drawing on the work of McGivney, Hillier and Bond et al; Parnham discusses who the non-participants are, and their views on education.

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**Percy .K et al - (1983) 'Post Initial Education in the North West of England: A Survey of Provision' - ACACE**

This report discusses barriers to entering adult education. 'Barriers to access' are identified as lack of information, venue, travel and costs. 'Social barriers' include the marginality of educational opportunities to the 'public consciousness', and alienating experiences of schooling. Institutional barriers are discussed in terms of limited scope, lack of support services and administrative inflexibility. Percy et al conclude that whatever the quantity or quality, no locality was without 'gaps' in provision with regard to range or accessibility.

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**Preece .J (ed); Weatherald .C and Woodrow .M - (1998) - 'Beyond the Boudnaries: exploring the potential of widening participation in higher education' - Leicester - NIACE**

See Trotman C and Pudner (Ch 5) 'What's the Point?', who conclude that a lack of interest may stem from 'failure' at secondary school and/or lack of economic opportunities. It is noted that in Swansea social exclusion discourages involvement.

In chapter seven Morris and McMakon find the greatest barriers to be unemployment and poverty and the middle class ethos of learning institutions.

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**Preece .J - (1999) - 'Combating Social Exclusion in University Adult Education' - Ashgate.**

Preece finds self- exclusion a key problem. One argument is that education may be seen as valuable in itself but not regarded as a 'ticket' to anywhere, thus learning for oneself may be thought 'selfish'. Other problems are found to be doubt about ability, and identification of university people as 'different'. Preece looks at differences according to race and disability, suggesting for example that physically disabled people may sense 'non-entitlement'.

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**Portwood .D - (1988) - 'Outreach and Inreach: Colleges and Unemployment Groups' -FEU/REPLAN**

This work examines individual's experience of unemployment and the personal distress and hardship it causes. Main problems are found to include adverse experiences of state bureaucracy/officialdom, and stereotypical perceptions of providers.

Portwood discusses how 'outreach' (professionally dominated) developments differ from 'inreach' (participant feedback) developments. In conclusion it is noted that the approaches used to individuals is usually unappealing to the unemployed, and local action in settings where they are comfortable is recommended.

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**Pyke .N - (1996) - 'Seating Champions the Young no-hopers' - IN 'Times Educational Supplement' Mar 29<sup>th</sup> p1**

An article on the report by Ron Dearing advocating the prioritising of school leavers who end up with no education, training or employment. Specifically the 20 % who fail to attain G grade GCSE English or Maths.

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**Raffe .D and Williams .J - (1989) - 'Schooling the Discouraged Worker: local labour market effects on educational participation' - IN 'Sociology' Vol 25 1998**

This paper is concerned with the effects of local employment on non-compulsory education. Raffe and Williams draw the conclusion that post-compulsory schooling is 'negatively attuned to the labour market and expands or contracts in inverse relation to its health'. The effect is strongest amongst 'marginal' stayers or leavers with slightly above average attainments. It is also suggested that employer preference for recruiting at sixteen pulls relatively well-qualified students out of education.

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**Rees .G; Fevre .R; Furlong .J and Gorard .S - (1997) - 'History, Place and the Learning Society: Towards a Sociology of Lifetime Learning' - IN 'Journal of Educational Policy' - Vol 12 no 6 Nov- Dec 1997**

The main thrust of this work is that change over time and differentiation between places cannot be ignored when looking at learning behaviour. Rees et al argue that individual choice is constrained by access and 'collective norms' which vary systematically over space and time.

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**Sargant, Field, Frances, Schiller and Tuckett - (1997) - 'The Learning Divide' - Leicester - NIACE**

In discussing barriers to learning Sargant et al find that amongst all respondents not currently learning, the most common barrier is lack of interest. However it is noted that the size of uninterested groups is heavily age related. The dominant issues for under 55's are found to be more practical such as time, cost and childcare. Other factors discussed include social class and length of initial education.

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**Sargant .N - (1991) - 'Learning and Leisure: A Study of Adult participation in learning and its policy implications – NIACE**

Chapter 10 contains useful tables of participants and non-participants incorporating factors such as sex, age, social class leisure time activities school leaving age and so on.

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**Sargant .N – (1993) – 'Learning for a Purpose: participation in education and training by adults from ethnic minorities'**

This research into ethnic minority participation finds the main reasons for not studying to be work pressures and family pressures; followed by lack of courses they wanted to study. Other barriers were a lack of spoken English and a lack of knowledge of local provision. Interestingly very few people mentioned lack of money or other barriers more usually quoted in U.K. studies.

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**Sargant .N –(2000) – 'Learning Divide Revisited: A report on the findings of a U.K wide survey on adult participation in education and learning carried out by NIACE – by Research Surveys of Great Britain (RSGB).**

In this up to date report, Sargant notes that socio-economic class continues to be a key factor in non-participation, and length of initial education continues to be the best predictor of participation. A decrease in retired people in learning since 1996 suggests age is still relevant. In considering reasons for non-participation it is found that a large group has no interest, whilst 19% feel too old/ill/disabled. Other reasons cited are childcare and time pressures. Particularly see tables/figures on 'main things preventing learning these days'.

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**Smithers .A and Robinson .P – (1989) – 'Increasing Participation in Higher Education' – BP**

Given that one fifth of those with A' levels saw no advantage in proceeding to higher education Smithers and Robinson see the raising of aspirations as the most important

way to increase participation. Influences on choices are seen to include schooling, community, accessibility and better information. Incentives for studying include financial support and 'value', in terms of better pay for example, at the end.

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**Sutcliffe .J and Jacobson .Y – (1998) – ‘All Things Being Equal?: a practical guide to widening participation for adults with learning difficulties in continuing education’ – Leicester – NIACE**

Sutcliffe and Jacobson cite research by NIACE 1996, which shows provision for older people and those with profound learning difficulties has diminished since the Further and Higher education Act of 1992. It is suggested that accreditation may exclude some groups of learners, the biggest barrier to access being lack of appropriate provision nationally. Other main barriers are found to be lack of physical access, transport and inaccessible information. Fees are seen as creating barriers particularly for those with learning difficulties as they tend to be on low incomes.

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**Tuckett .A and Sargant .N – (1999) – ‘Marking Time – The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning’ – NIACE.**

This survey reiterates the powerful effects of social class, age and length of initial education on adult participation. It is noted that despite a general rise in participation there have been declining numbers at both ends of the age-group spectrum. Other changes include the decline of cost as a major barrier. Other main barriers such as work pressures or individual's belief that they are too old or ill, remain. Tuckett and Sargant also investigate the main sources of information about 'courses for different sexes and age groups.

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**Tuckett. A – (1997) – ‘Lifelong Learning in England and Wales’ – NIACE.**

This report contains tables on participation by, for example: social class, 'terminal age' and likelihood of participation. However it is included mostly for its mention of novel approaches to the problem of contacting groups who remain sceptical about education. The EYLL project sent questionnaires to six inner city pubs, identified interest and successfully ran courses there. Rycotewood College targeted women at their hairdressers by involving the stylists! Tuckett also recommends more traditional ways for stimulation participation.

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**Uden .T –(1994) – ‘The Will to Learn: Individual Commitment and Adult Learning’ – A policy discussion paper – NIACE.**

Uden finds that participation remains determined by factors such as social class, age,

and previous educational experience. 'Supply side' barriers are identified as off-putting, issues such as timing and location of provision, student support services and flexibility of the curriculum are discussed. Absence of information on courses and support available is seen as 'one of the most serious gaps'.

Recognition is given to the fact that some groups are persistently underrepresented, particularly working class and unemployed men; young black men; and Pakistani/Bangladeshi women. Noting that reasons for non-participation may be complex, Uden finds that generally there is a failure to perceive the benefits of participation, or a disposition against education all together. The benefit system is also identified as problematic.

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**Videotape – London – (1987) – Team Video Productions – 'Barriers to Education.'**

A 'fly-on-the-wall' style of production designed to portray the deterrents to participation in education from a working class persons viewpoint. Three individuals in a pub setting experience very negative responses from friends and families to their decision to participate. Dissuasive comments are made about costs, family commitments and relevance.

Further points are made about institutional barriers, from confusion over course choice to the 'mouthful' address of the venue. One man arriving at the venue is shown to get lost in a maze of stairs and corridors, hindered rather than helped by a patronising porter/security guard, and leaving without enrolling. The accompanying sound track makes additional points about 'class reaction' and so on (though it may make you cringe a little!).

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**Williams .E – (1996) – 'Despair Beneath the Macho Surface' – IN 'Times Educational Supplement' – march 15<sup>th</sup> p8.**

A report on how unemployment and a 'macho' dislike for being seen to work hard affect working class boys' education. In an area of high unemployment a sense of hopelessness exists even amongst primary school pupils.

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## A Brief Report on the Key Themes in the Available Literature.

Given that there has been research on participation in non-compulsory education for decades, it is not surprising to find that a large body of material exists on this subject. However, in-depth work on non-participation is not so prevalent, and tends to be over-generalised, localised or specialised. The key themes discussed in the literature are outlined below.

One question addressed most often is ‘who are the non-participants?’ Given the nature of this enquiry there is, more or less, a consensus on the answer. For a representative list of groups see McGivney (1990) who notes that throughout the world non-participants tend to be:

People with no/few educational qualifications

People with basic education needs

Low-income groups

People in unskilled or semi-skilled manual occupations

Ethnic minority groups

Older people

Women with young children

People with mental/physical handicap

People living in rural areas.

Some authors focus on one particular group, for example: Metcalf (1997) – young people from lower social classes; Banks and Bryn Davies (1990) - the unemployed; Lumb (1996) – women; McGivney (1998) – men; Sargant (1991) – ethnic minorities. Indeed some argue that only less generalised surveys are of real practical use, for example, Rees et al (Nov-Dec 1997). Work, which focuses on particular localities, includes Istance et al (1996) and City and County of Swansea report (2000).

The issue of *why* some people do not participate is a more complex issue. Various studies look at the ‘barriers’ which may stop people from participating, again there seems to be general agreement on what factors have this effect, although different accounts vary on the impact levels of specific factors. A useful starting point is McGivney’s (1990) discussion of barriers, based on Cross’ classification into ‘situational’, ‘institutional’ and ‘dispositional’ barriers.

Situational barriers are factors which affect individuals according to their present life circumstances. The most frequently mentioned are time, and (particularly in Britain) costs. A lack of time is due to work or family commitments, and thus encompasses other situational barriers such as, for example, caring for relatives/children. Costs (real or perceived and ranging from course fees to transport and child-care) are seen as a major barrier to those who are low-waged or unemployed, this being borne out by research into costs/participation levels (NIACE 1970 and ACACE 1982).

Institutional barriers are seen to be grounded in the middle class character/ethos of educational institutions. This alienates working class people, particularly those belonging to strong peer pressure groups (Gooderham 1987).

Also working class attendees may face hostility from those closest to them, as participation may be seen as 'class betrayal' (O'Shea and Corrigan 1979). The dissemination of information on the range of courses and the support available has been found to be ineffective in a number of studies (Portwood 1988). Lack of knowledge is seen as an important barrier (Banks et al 1990 and Istance et al 1996). Non-educational institutions can also create barriers, the benefits system and interpretation of benefit rules has been condemned in several reports (Istance et al 1996 and Kennedy 1997).

Dispositional barriers are negative attitudes, perceptions and expectations. McGivney notes that a number of studies show that non-participant respondents: see education as irrelevant; feel hostility towards schooling; feel too old to learn; and/or lack confidence in their ability to learn. Attitudes related to social class and gender roles are seen as particularly difficult to change.

The above barriers are those cited by respondents; which has raised questions about the value of such surveys. This is partly due to doubt about the assumption that respondents can analyse their own behaviour. Another point raised is that respondents may wish to answer in 'socially acceptable' ways – though there is not necessarily agreement on which answers *are* more acceptable. McGivney suggests that 'time' or 'costs' may be more acceptable reasons than a lack of interest; while Munn and MacDonald (1988) wonder whether 'lack of interest' or 'time' are more acceptable reasons than 'unhappy educational experience' or issues of 'use'. Such misgivings are generally related to contradictory or unexpected results from surveys. It has also been proposed that factors such as time, cost, transport and so on may be more widespread, as those with no intention to participate may not have considered these as relevant.

It is recognised that specific barriers will impact differentially depending on the 'group' of non-participants considered. This is discussed in studies on specific groups (see above) and also in wider ranging work such as Cowperthwaite et al (1989). However, taking all accounts into consideration, dispositional barriers appear to be major factors in non-participation. Some of the circumstances, which are seen to create negative attitudes, are discussed below.

One of the best predictors of likelihood of participation in non-compulsory education is school leaving age, those who leave earliest being the least likely to participate (Kennedy 1997, McGivney 1990, Sargant et al 1997). This is strongly connected with bad experience of schooling, which can create hostility towards educational institutions and doubts about personal ability (Munn and MacDonald 1988). Other problems linked with this are 'institutional', where participation is perceived as going back to school (Bond et al 1997).

Unemployment is seen as a major factor in non-participation for several reasons. Firstly, in areas of high unemployment, it is found that men (in particular) see no 'use' of returning to education as it would not help them get a job (Istance et al 1996, Banks and Bryn Davies 1990). The psychological effects of unemployment such as lack of confidence and isolation (see knowledge of opportunities), are mentioned in several studies (McGivney 1999. {Portwood 1988., Cornwall 1999). Unemployment is connected with school leaving age; Williams 1996 reports defeatist attitudes

amongst boys in an area of high unemployment, where education is again seen as having little use. However, Raffe and Williams (1989) found that local unemployment *increased* 'staying on' rates, thus (given the relevance of school leaving age) can positively affect participation levels.

Some of the dispositional barriers affecting unemployed people also apply to manual workers; education/training may seem irrelevant to many in manual occupations. Furthermore, such employees are less likely to get employer supported education, as this tends to be concentrated on people in 'higher level jobs (McGivney 1999).

Another major factor in participation is parental attitudes and educational history. This is discussed by Gorard et al (1999), who assert that despite large changes since 1945 participation levels remain very similar within families. Here the perceived value of education is important. In addition to parents' value systems, it has also been noted that some leave school due to economic necessity of the family.

Peer groups too are seen to have a large influence on participation, it is noted that manual workers for example have strong peer groups (see above) which discourage participation. The influence of 'reference groups' on attitudes towards education is discussed by Gooderham (1987).

The above issues are some of the important themes emerging from the literature available and are not meant to constitute a full report.