

1. INTRODUCTION

Young women achieve better educationally than boys at the age of 16. A higher proportion of girls than boys continue in education to degree level. Their early success, however, does not translate into similar advantages in terms of careers and pay in later life. Women are also less likely than men to work in certain sectors such as science, engineering and technology.

This small scale survey looked at the choices of courses and careers made by girls and young women at various stages in their education and training. Between **June 2009** and **December 2010** inspectors visited 16 primary schools, 25 secondary schools, (including 13 single-sex girls' schools) and 10 further education colleges. The report evaluates the extent to which careers education, guidance and other provision raise aspirations and inform the choices of courses and careers by girls and young women to support their long-term achievement. It identifies weaknesses and examples of good practice in these areas.

2. KEY FINDINGS

- From an early age, the girls surveyed had held conventionally stereotypical views about jobs for men and women. They retained those views throughout their schooling despite being taught about equality of opportunity and knowing their rights to access any kind of future career.
- The programmes of careers education and work-related learning, and the provision of information, advice and guidance in the schools visited, were not focused sufficiently on the knowledge, understanding and skills that girls and young women needed in order to deal with factors such as career breaks and the roles they might wish to play as future parents.
- A narrow range of gender-stereotypical work placements dominated choices in almost all the settings seen.
- The girls and young women spoken to had limited knowledge and understanding of how choices about courses and careers influenced pay and progression routes.
- Even in the all-girls' schools visited for this survey, and despite the rich range of awareness-raising activities across all the schools, most girls chose careers along stereotypical lines.
- For a few girls, career ambitions were changed through direct observation of a professional at work, through mentoring activities, and through personal encounters and extended discussion with a professional about what their job was actually like.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools and colleges should:

- ensure that young people have a better understanding about career choice, subsequent progression and its impact on their long-term earnings;
- assist young people in developing an understanding of the responsibilities and choices associated with parenthood;
- develop better, and more carefully planned opportunities for young women to meet professionals working in non-stereotypical roles, and to learn more about what such work entails;
- strengthen the knowledge and understanding of staff about the wide range of progression routes available so that girls and young women can make informed choices;
- consider how to link the content of lessons and the skills to be developed more frequently to career opportunities;
- consider ways in which mentoring could be used to help support young women in overcoming barriers to achievement.

The full report can be viewed/downloaded at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090239>