

PARENTS URGED TO RETHINK CHILDREN'S LEARNING OPTIONS

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Hundreds of young people in the South West could be missing out on valuable vocational learning opportunities because their parents are unable to see beyond traditional academic routes, according to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) South West.

New research from the LSC South West has revealed that despite the ever widening choice of learning routes available, eight out of 10 parents (80%) encourage their children to follow traditional academic routes such as A-levels or GCSE retakes. This is regardless of the proven value of vocational learning and its increasing popularity with employers and young people alike.

With 68 per cent of young people turning to their parents first for careers advice, the LSC South West is calling on parents to find out more about further education and vocational routes.

Sue Anderson, Young People's Learning Director at the LSC South West, said: "When parents were younger their choices in terms of education were more limited. Today there are so many ways to stay on in learning and they don't all mean staying on in the classroom."

There are literally hundreds of vocational courses on offer to 16 to 19-year-olds, including NVQs, Apprenticeships and the newly-launched Diplomas. There will be 40,000 Diploma places available for students across the UK from September 2008. Courses in construction and the built environment; engineering; society, health and development; IT; and creative and media, will be offered by pioneering partnerships of schools, colleges and training organisations.

In addition, financial support is available to young people to encourage them to continue in learning, principally through the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) - a weekly payment of up to £30. Recent evidence shows that the EMA, which was taken up by more than 48,000 young people in the South West in 2006/2007, has succeeded in increasing the number staying on in learning at 16 and learners achieving qualifications at 19.

Sue added: "We are urging parents to consider all of the options for their children at age 16, and not just the traditional academic ones. With fewer low-skilled jobs, we need more young people with high level skills. Vocational learning is highly prized by employers and provides a great mix of on the job training and academic education. It can also make a real difference when it comes to opening up young people's career options."

To help parents understand the learning options in more detail, the LSC is encouraging them to contact their local Connexions service and speak to a member of their team about the different programmes running across the region. Details of Connexions can be found 080 800 132 19 or via www.connexions-direct.com

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All media enquiries, please contact:

Kelly Davis or Richard Cook at Bray Leino PR

T: 0117 973 1173

E: kdavis@brayleino.co.uk / rcook@brayleino.co.uk

Note to Editors:

Learning and Skills Council (LSC):

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a

single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers. For more information visit: www.lsc.gov.uk/southwest