SSAC Occasional Paper 27: The influence of the social security system on educational and vocational decision-making at age 16

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This report looks at how the social security system interacts with the decision to remain in full-time education or pursue an alternative pathway post-age 16.

Between ages 16 and 18, young people pass through various overlapping transitions as they move from being a dependant child to an independent adult. At 16 they must decide whether to remain in full-time education or pursue an alternative pathway, such as an apprenticeship. The Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) legislation, introduced in 2013 in England, mandates that all 16 to 18-year-olds must remain in some form of education or recognised training until their 18th birthday.

This report explores how the design of the social security system influences the choices 16-year-olds and their families make about staying in full-time education or moving into apprenticeships and other vocational routes. As well as exploring the consequences for benefit payments that flow from the choice, we ask whether the decision could end up being skewed against a young person’s best interests, or indeed whether they are making it without understanding the financial consequences – ignorance that could create nasty surprises. In effect, social security provision has never been adequately updated to adapt to the increased participation age. The unintended result of siloed departmental responsibilities and policy drift are rules that can punish the parents of young people particularly when on Universal Credit – and sometimes whole households – when a young person takes up an apprenticeship.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ssac-occasional-paper-27-the-influence-of-the-social-security-system-on-educational-and-vocational-decision-making-at-age-16