‘FAILURE’ DRIVES DROPOUTS BACK TO STUDY

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The gritty reality of life in unskilled work is driving post-GCSE drop outs back to college or school to get the minimum set of qualifications needed to succeed in life.

Two fifths (41 per cent) of people who left school at 16 returned to school or college after taking time out from learning, according to new research by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Time away from learning it seems, made these people realise how much they needed qualifications for a better quality of life. A third (30 per cent) realised that going back was the only route into the job they wanted to do, and more than a quarter (29 per cent) returned to enable them to earn more money in the future.

So the LSC is reminding young people who have not returned to learning after leaving college or school to ensure they get back to education or training and take advantage of the thousands of short courses starting this month - or they may regret it in the future.

While most school leavers go straight into a full time job (89 per cent), without qualifications such as GNVQs and A-Levels young people could find themselves
earning up to £4,000 less on average a year than their more qualified peers – £185,000 over a lifetime, according to official figures.²

The LSC research found that 30 per cent of dropouts return to education or training within a year, and six in 10 (59 per cent) return within five years.

Although a third (34 per cent) said they gained valuable life skills in their time out, and a quarter (26 per cent) felt that having a break better prepared them to continue with education and training in the future, in a warning to today’s young people, the majority (51 per cent) of dropouts who did not return to some form of learning regretted this decision.

Julia Dowd, Director of Young People’s Learning at the LSC said that she hoped the findings would encourage young people to think seriously about their options: “Our research shows that while time out from learning can be beneficial, it is essential that young people do return to college or school to get the minimum level of qualifications. By getting five good GCSEs, or a Level 2 diploma, they are more likely to be in a good job with prospects and a good wage.

“We know this because the vast majority of employers we questioned think it is essential for job applicants to have the basic set of qualifications (five good GCSEs or a Level 2 diploma) before applying for a job.

“It is also important that young people who do drop out use their time while away from learning constructively, and make plans to re-enter into education at a later point.

“Young people who have taken a break from learning could consider doing voluntary work or getting involved in a work experience programme. These
experiences will grant the person valuable life skills which we know employers value."

Phil Hope MP, Skills Minister said:
"It is vital that all young people gain the essential skills and qualifications so that they are better prepared for getting on and success in life.

"Young people should think carefully about their choices post-16 and if they drop out of learning without at least five good GCSEs, or a Level 2 diploma they should strongly consider returning to education or training to gain these necessary qualifications so they can increase their job prospects. The good news is that there has never been so many ways to achieve this minimum level of qualifications. After young people leave compulsory education at 16, they can study a huge variety of courses at college, school or in the workplace. It is never too late to return to learning and change your future for the better."

For more information about staying on in education, young people can visit www.getsetforlife.org.uk or contact their local Connexions centre. To apply for EMA, young people can call 080 810 16 2 19 or visit www.direct.gov.uk/ema

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Notes to editors:
This press release applies to England only.

The research was conducted online between 8th – 14th December 2005. YouGov interviewed a sample of 2396 adults aged 18 and over. 1110 had dropped out at 16 or earlier.
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.

Apprenticeships
- There are currently 255,500 young people aged 16-24 undertaking an Apprenticeship. They can choose from over 180 career paths in 80 different sectors of industry and commerce
- Apprenticeships provide 16-24 year-olds with a mixture of on and off-the-job training while they are being paid. For employers, Apprenticeships offer the opportunity to improve their businesses bottom line through the tailored, relevant training of highly motivated young people
- There are two levels of Apprenticeships:
  - ‘Apprenticeships’, equivalent to GCSE level, incorporate a National Vocational Qualification to Level 2; key skills and in some cases a technical certificate
  - ‘Advanced Apprenticeships’, equivalent to A-levels, incorporate a National Vocational Qualification to Level 3, key skills and a technical certificate

EMA
All 16-year-olds in England from a household with an annual income of up to £30,000 who stay on at college or school are eligible for the EMA. The scheme allows payments of £10, £20 or £30 a week in return for a commitment to study. Additional benefits of up to £500 over two years are also available for meeting certain targets.

For advice and information on how to apply for the EMA call 080 810 16219 or visit the web-site www.direct.gov.uk/ema for application packs. For people with speech and hearing difficulties who use textphone, please call 0800 056 5344.

Separate EMA and Apprenticeship schemes are operated by the administrations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

1. There are 602,405 17 year olds in England according to the 2001 census. 14 per cent are not in education, training, or employment by the age of 17, and 17 per cent are in education without training. Therefore 31 per cent have dropped out of education or training = 186,746
2. Employment rate and gross weekly earnings by highest qualification'. Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics, spring 2003 - the latest figures available. People with a highest qualification of A-Levels or equivalent earn £397.94 per week, on average (multiplied by 52 gives and average salary of £20,692.88).
The gap between the average annual salaries of someone with FE (Level 3) qualifications and someone who leaves school without Level 2 qualifications is £3,953.56. Assuming a person who leaves school after GCSEs will work until 65, £3,953.56 multiplied by the number of working years (47 - 49, minus the two additional years someone who leaves education at 16 will work compared to someone who leaves at 18) equals a lifetime salary difference £185,817.32 on average. People with a highest qualification of five GCSEs, grade A - C, including Maths and English (i.e. Level 2 qualifications), earn on average £350.19 per week on average (multiplied by 52 gives an annual
salary of £18,209.88). Those without these qualifications earn £345.96 a week with some qualifications or £297.85 without qualifications at all - an average of these two figures is £321.91 (£16,739 a year).

The gap between the average annual salaries is therefore £1,470.56. Assuming a person who leaves school at this point (aged 16) will work until 65, £1,470.56 multiplied by 49 years equals a lifetime salary difference of £72,057.44.