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“I would rather die”: reasons given by 16-year-olds for not continuing their study of mathematics.

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Summary: Improving participation rates in specialist mathematics after the subject ceases to be compulsory at age 16 is part of government policy in England. This article provides independent and recent support for earlier findings concerning reasons for non-participation, based on free response and closed items in a questionnaire with a sample of over 1500 students in 17 schools, close to the moment of choice. The analysis supports findings that perceived difficulty and lack of confidence are important reasons for students not continuing with mathematics, and that perceived dislike and boredom, and lack of relevance, are also factors. There is a close relationship between reasons for non-participation and predicted grade, and a weaker relation to gender. An analysis of the effects of schools, demonstrates that enjoyment is the main factor differentiating schools with high and low participation indices. Building on discussion of these findings, ways of improving participation are briefly suggested.

Classification: C24 C23

Keywords: participation; attitudes; post-compulsory; choices; gender differences

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