



Consultation on Post 16 Transport Policy for Central Bedfordshire

Full report, December 2010

Background

During November and December 2010 Central Bedfordshire Council undertook consultation on proposed changes to the eligibility criteria for subsidised transport to assist 16-18 year old learners access education.

The Department for Education issues guidance to local authorities in preparing their Policy Statement. Guidance for the 2011/12 academic year was being awaited at the time of consultation; therefore the guidance issued for 2010/11 was used throughout the proposals.

A consultation questionnaire and guidance note was sent to all Central Bedfordshire schools to be distributed to Year 11 students and those currently in the sixth form. The consultation questionnaire and guidance note were also sent to parents and carers of all students currently in receipt of subsidised transport to attend college and all students with special educational needs in receipt of transport. The papers were also sent to Directors of Children's Services, and 14-19 lead officers of neighbouring Local Authorities, local colleges and work based learning providers and voluntary and community sector organisations.

A meeting was held to present the consultation questionnaire and guidance note to Central Bedfordshire school and college leaders and colleagues responsible for 14-19 education in Bedford Borough Council, Luton Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council.

The consultation documentation was also emailed to chairs of governors of upper schools and head teachers and chairs of governors of middle schools.

The proposals were also distributed to members of the Youth Parliament and presented to the December 2010 meeting of the Equality Forum.

Central Bedfordshire residents and the general public were able to view the proposals and consultation questionnaire through the Council's website and those who have registered interest in school transport consultation were sent a email notification.

Responses

328 responses were received to this consultation.

As well as providing the overall results, we have also analysed the results by respondents' interest in the consultation:

- Parent or Carer of someone receiving free or subsidised transport for Further Education
- Student currently receiving free or subsidised transport for Further Education (aged between 16-18 years old)
- Student under 16 year old considering free or subsidised transport for Further Education
- Central Bedfordshire resident

and age;

- 13-15 years old
- 16- 18 years old
- 19+

In the interpretation of these results it must be noted that the largest proportion of responses (62%) to this consultation were from those who were currently in receipt of free or subsidised transport (either the student themselves or their parent carer). Therefore the responses to the consultation are not representative of the views of the population of Central Bedfordshire but will be biased towards those who currently receive support.

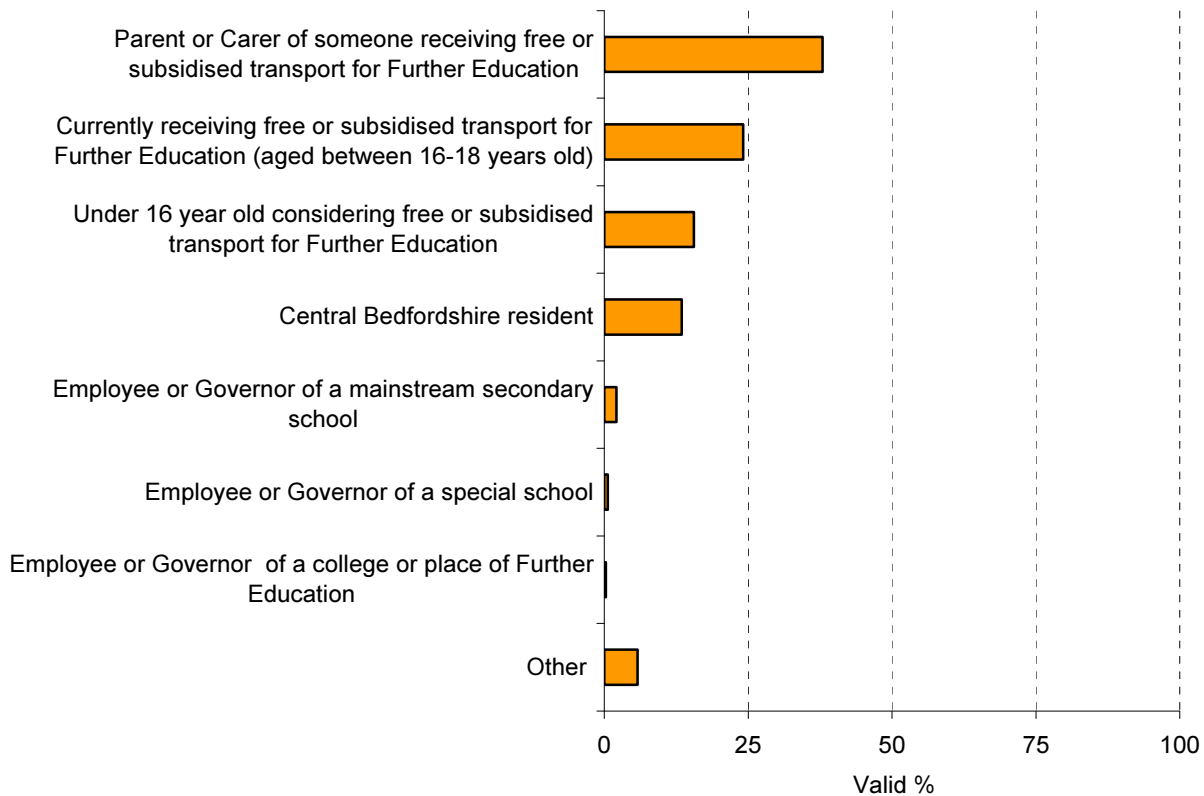
Cross analysis of the results by different groups of respondents will identify the views of these groups, and highlight where contrasts in viewpoints exist.

Respondents' postcodes have been converted to town level. This is summarised in Appendix 4.

Commentary on results is provided where there are significant differences. Full data tables are provided in Appendix 2.

Respondent profile

Interest in consultation



The largest level of response to this consultation was from parents or carers of someone receiving free or subsidised transport for further education (38%, 124 people) or 16-18 year old currently receiving free or subsidised transport (24%, 79 people).

In autumn 2010 964 were in receipt of free or subsidised transport from home to a place of further education. Those responding to this consultation currently receiving transport represent an estimated 21% of the current number of people receiving this service.¹

There were lower levels of response to this consultation from people who were currently not in receipt of free or subsidised transport (under 16 year olds considering free or subsidised transport for FE 16%, 51 people, and Central Bedfordshire residents² 13%, 44 people)

19 people specified other reasons for their interest in this consultation. These have been grouped into common themes and are summarised in the table below. Verbatim comments are provided in Appendix 3.

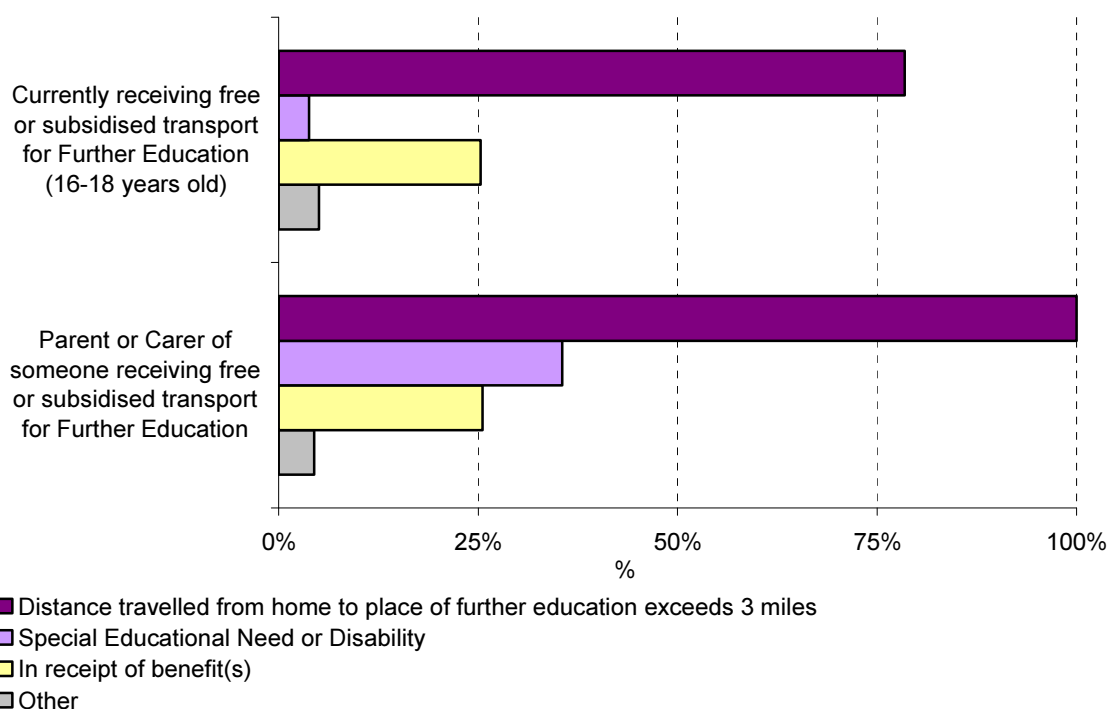
	Count	%
Parent of/16 year old refused subsidised transport	5	2

¹ This is an estimated figure, as it is possible for a response to be submitted to this consultation from a parent of carer of someone receiving transport and the individual themselves.

² Reference to Central Bedfordshire resident denotes a general member of the public that has no connection to the Post 16 Transport service.

Employee of local authority services (Council, Connexions/ School)	4	1
Over 16 year old /parent of over 16 year old	3	1
Currently pay for transport to place of further education	2	1
16 year old + at school requiring transport	1	0.3
Parent of child with SEN entering FE in 2011	1	0.3
Parent of under 16 year old considering free/subsidised transport	1	0.3
Other	2	1

Reason child currently receives free or subsidised transport to access further education or post 16 learning.



Receiving free or subsidised transport due to distance travelled from home was the most common reason for support amongst the young people currently receiving the service (78%) and the parents/ carers of someone receiving the service (100%) who responded to the survey

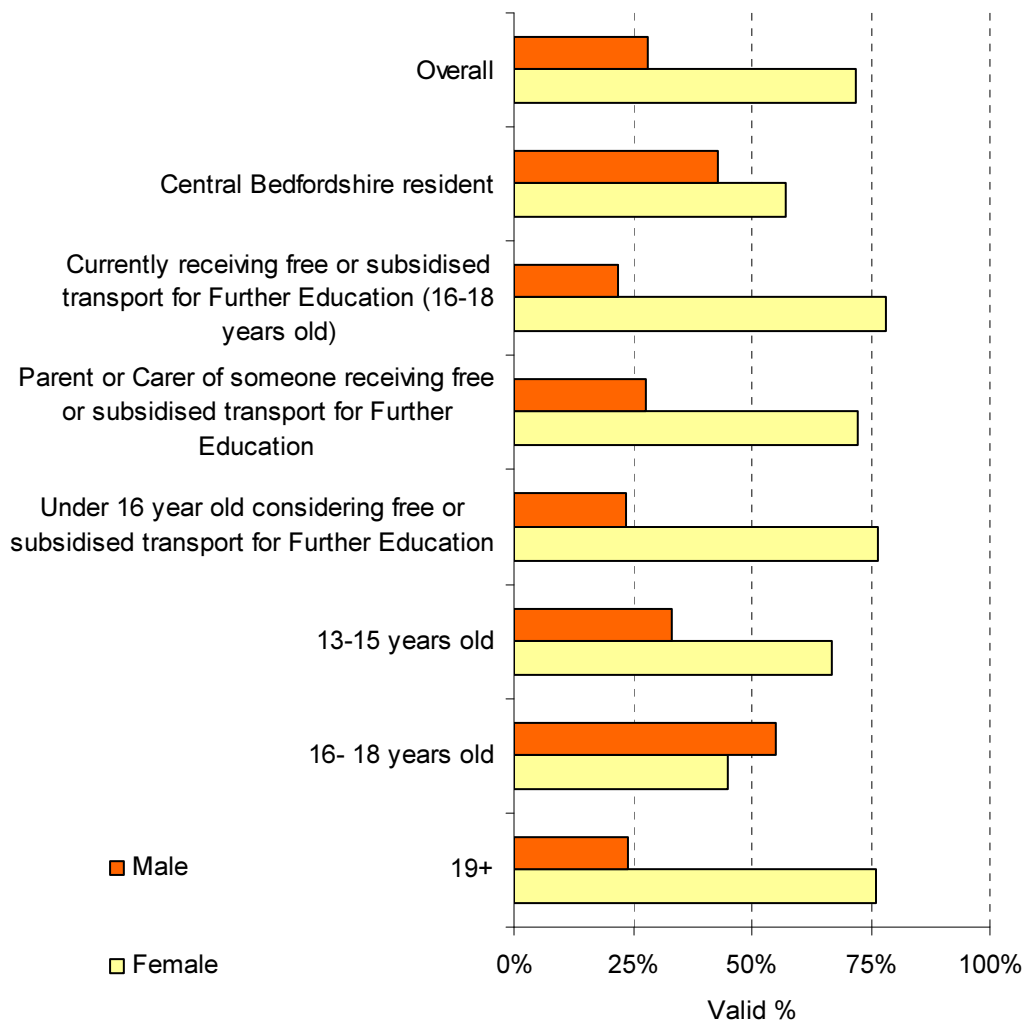
Over a third of parents/ carers said their child currently receives free or subsidised transport because of a Special Education Need (SEN) or disability (36%). Only 4% of young people currently in receipt of free or subsidised transport who responded to the survey said this was due to a SEN or disability.

93 students across Central Bedfordshire were in receipt of free or subsidised transport on the grounds of special education needs or a disability at the time of the consultation. 44 of these responded to this consultation, accounting for an estimated 47% of transport recipients on SEN and disability grounds.³

Receiving free or subsidised transport from being in receipt of benefit(s) was also common amongst parents/carers (26%) and young people (25%).

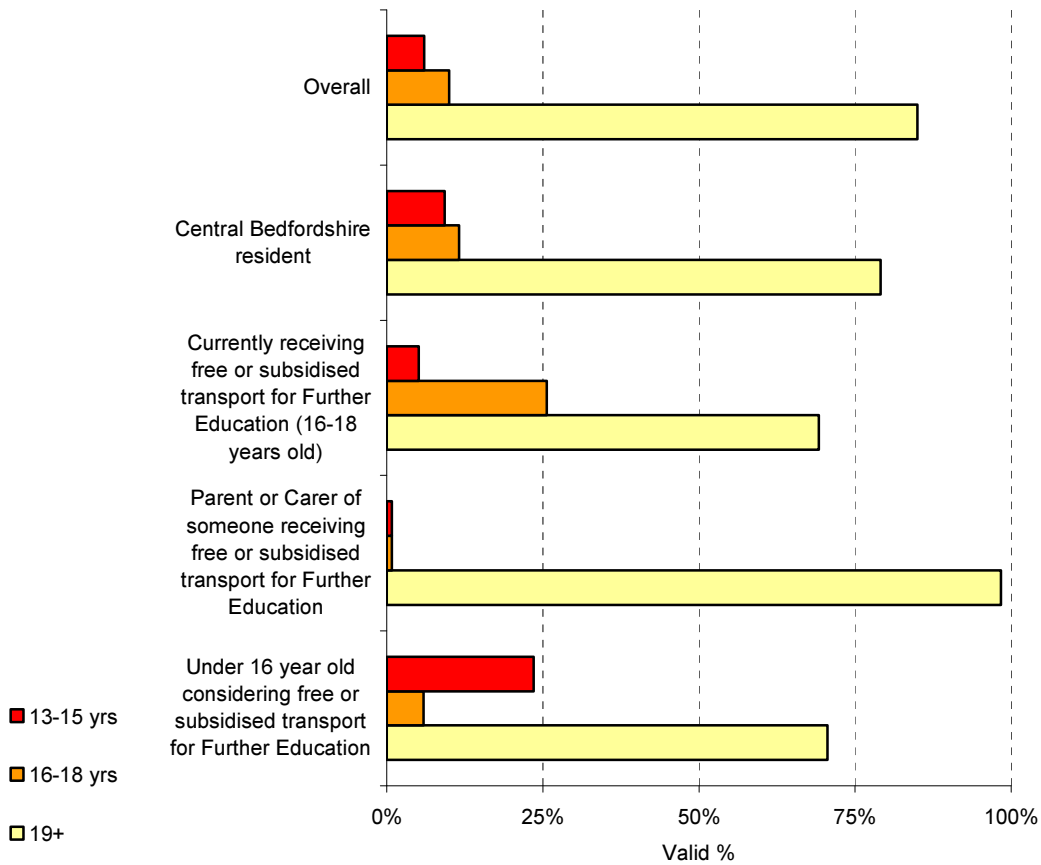
Gender

³ This is an estimated figure, as it is possible for a response to be submitted to this consultation from a parent of carer of someone receiving transport and the individual themselves.



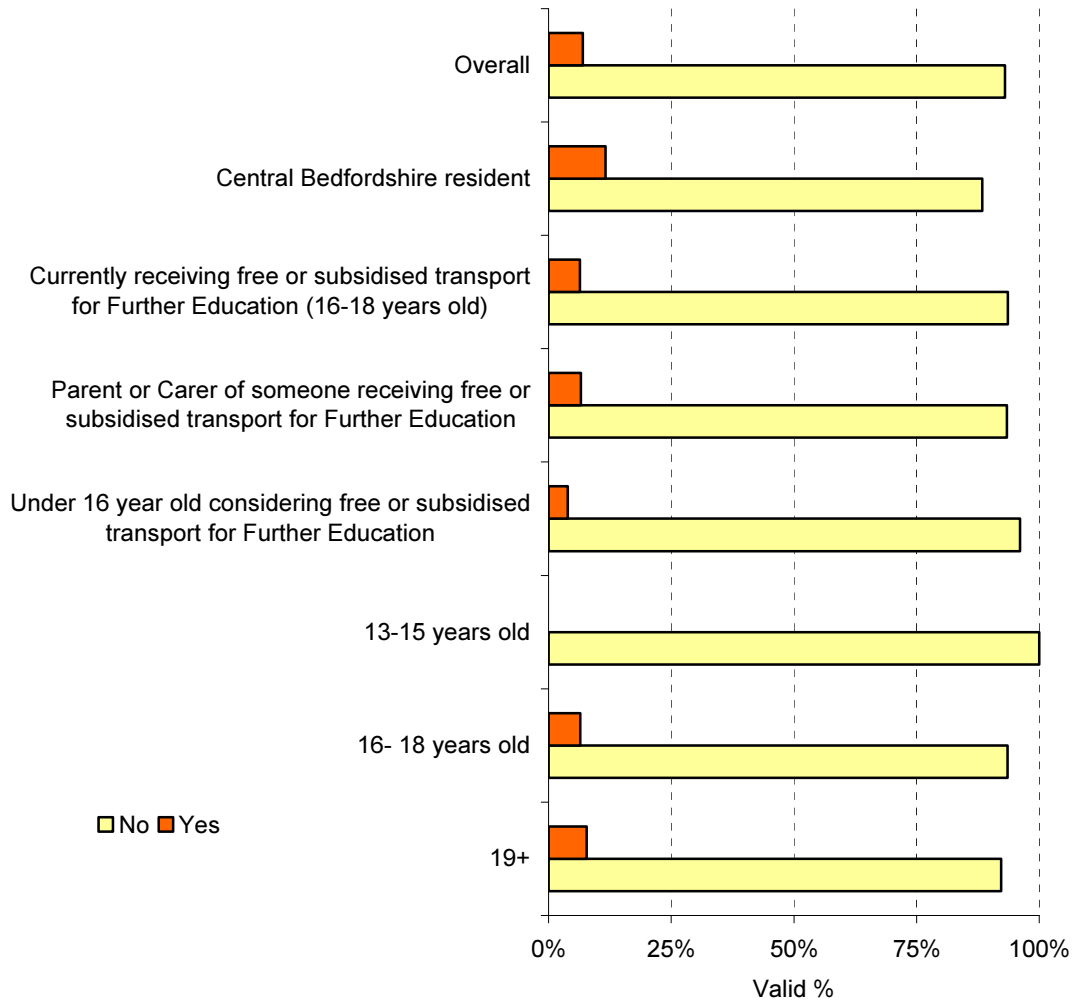
The majority of respondents were female (72%). The mix between respondents indicating they were Central Bedfordshire residents was somewhat more balanced (57% female, 43% male), however across each of the other sub-groups females accounted for the majority of respondents.

Age



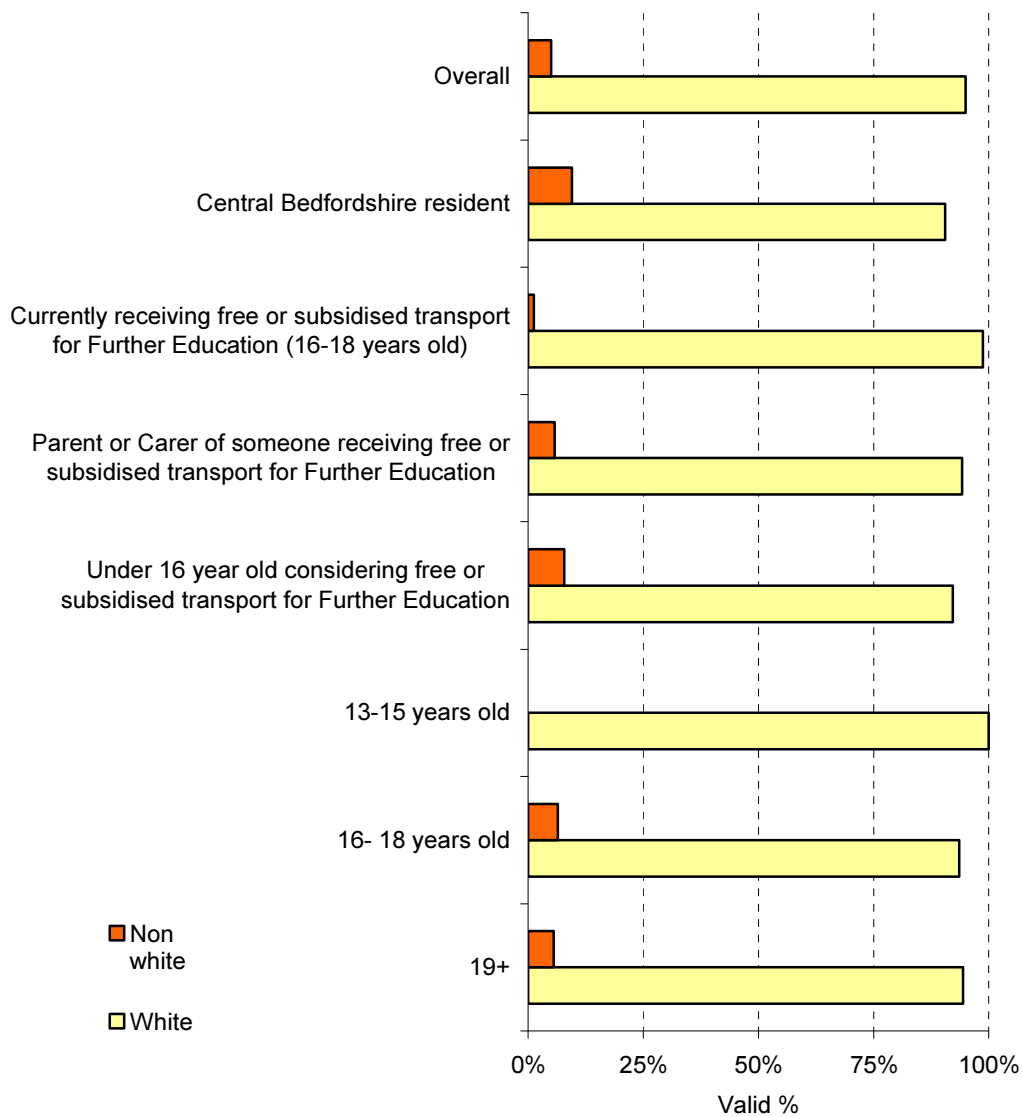
The majority of respondents were aged over 19 years old (85%). Where respondents have indicated they are an under 16 year old considering free or subsidised transport and their age as being 19+, it can be assumed these individuals are parents or carers of someone who is under 16 years old considering free or subsidised transport for further education.

Disability



7% of respondents overall considered themselves to be disabled. Only 6% of respondents currently receiving free or subsidised transport and 4% of under 16 year olds considering free or subsidised transport indicated they had a disability, suggesting young people with disabilities may be under represented in the survey response.

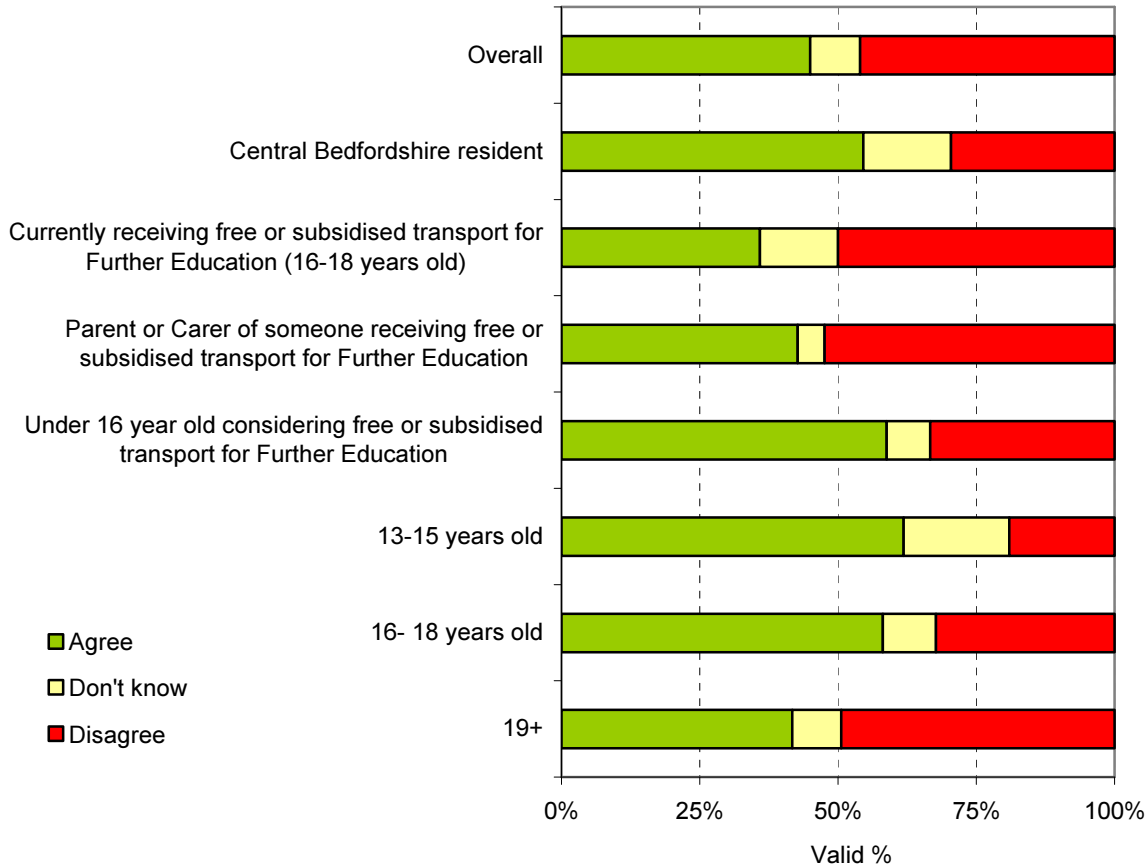
Ethnicity



The majority of respondents to the consultation were white (95%). This is broadly in line with the ethnic population of Central Bedfordshire overall.

Proposal 1 – Mileage

The Council proposes that irrespective of the criteria used to assess entitlement to subsidised transport, the maximum distance between home and school or college for which subsidised transport will be provided will be 15 miles.



There was no overall majority agreement or disagreement to the proposal of providing subsidised transport only for a maximum of 15 miles between home and school/college. (45% agreed and 46% disagreed).

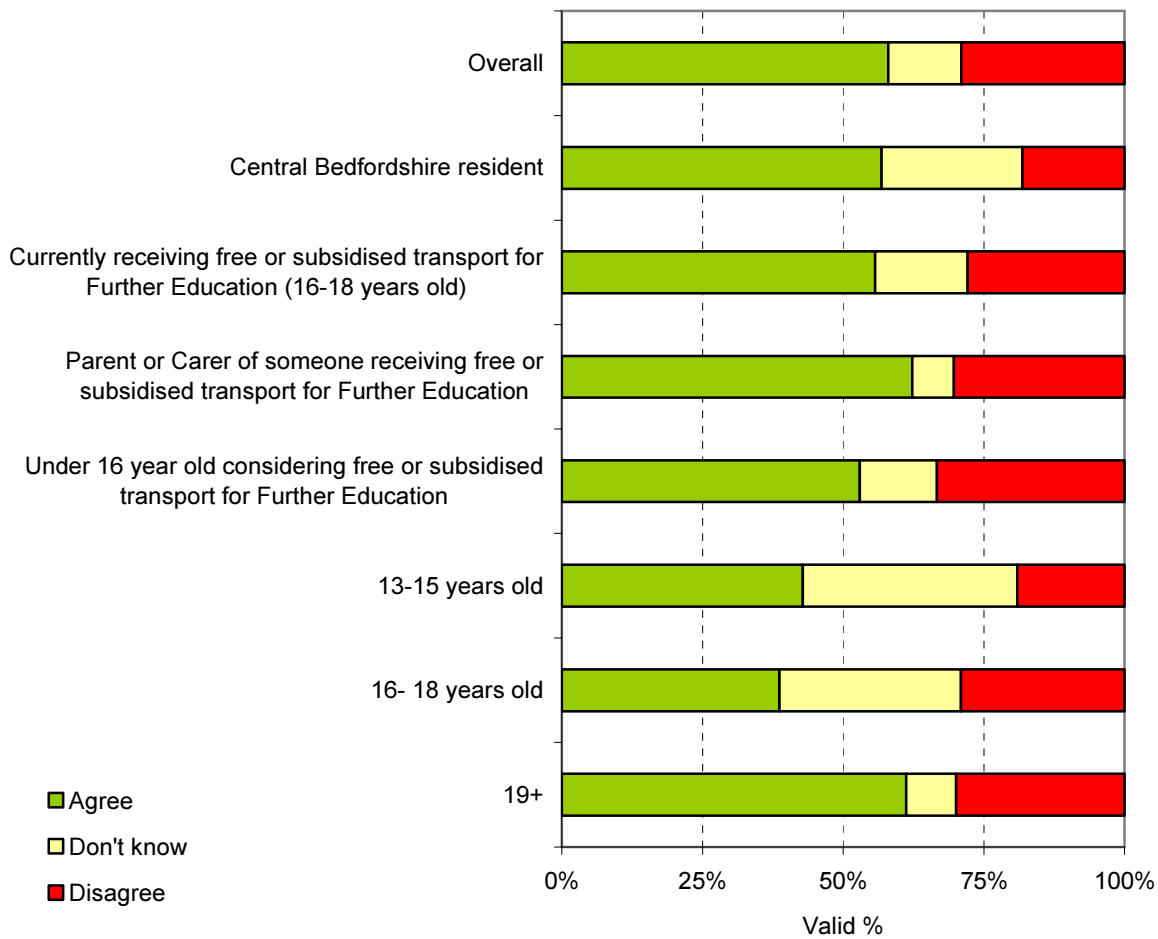
There is a clear difference between the views of those currently in receipt of free or subsidised transport compared to those who are not.

Parents or carers of someone receiving the service and 16-18 year olds receiving the service themselves were more likely to disagree with the proposals for change in entitlement by distance travelled (43% and 36% agreed respectively).

Under 16 year olds considering uptake of the service were more favourable to the mileage proposal (59% agreed) as were those responding as residents (55% agreed).

Proposal 2 - Low income

The Council proposes that the benefits taken into account when assessing entitlement to free transport should be the same as for under 16 year old pupils applying for transport on low income or concessionary grounds. Families with a low income are defined as those whose children are entitled to free school meals or whose family is in receipt of maximum working tax credit.

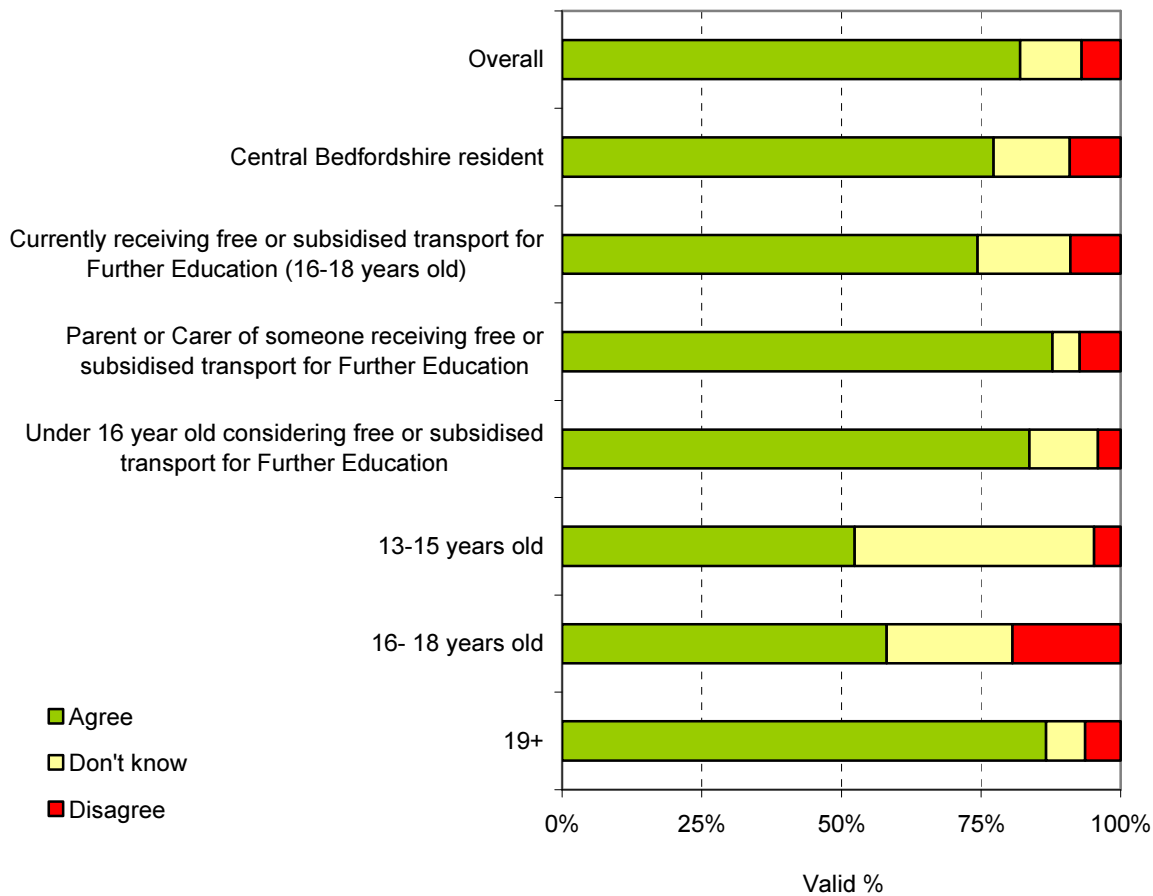


Around 3 in 5 respondents overall agreed (58%) with the proposal for assessment of eligibility to free transport to be based on low income or concessionary grounds and be the same as it is for under 16 year olds.

Non users (i.e. residents and 13-15 year olds and 16-18 year olds) were more likely not to have an opinion on this proposal with a larger proportion of residents indicating don't know (25%, 38%, 32% respectively answered don't know).

Proposal 3 - Medical needs

The Council proposes no change to the current arrangement for free or subsidised transport on medical grounds where a student attends the nearest school or college. Transport is considered on medical grounds, irrespective of distance between home and college. The medical condition can be temporary or long term and each application is considered on an individual basis.



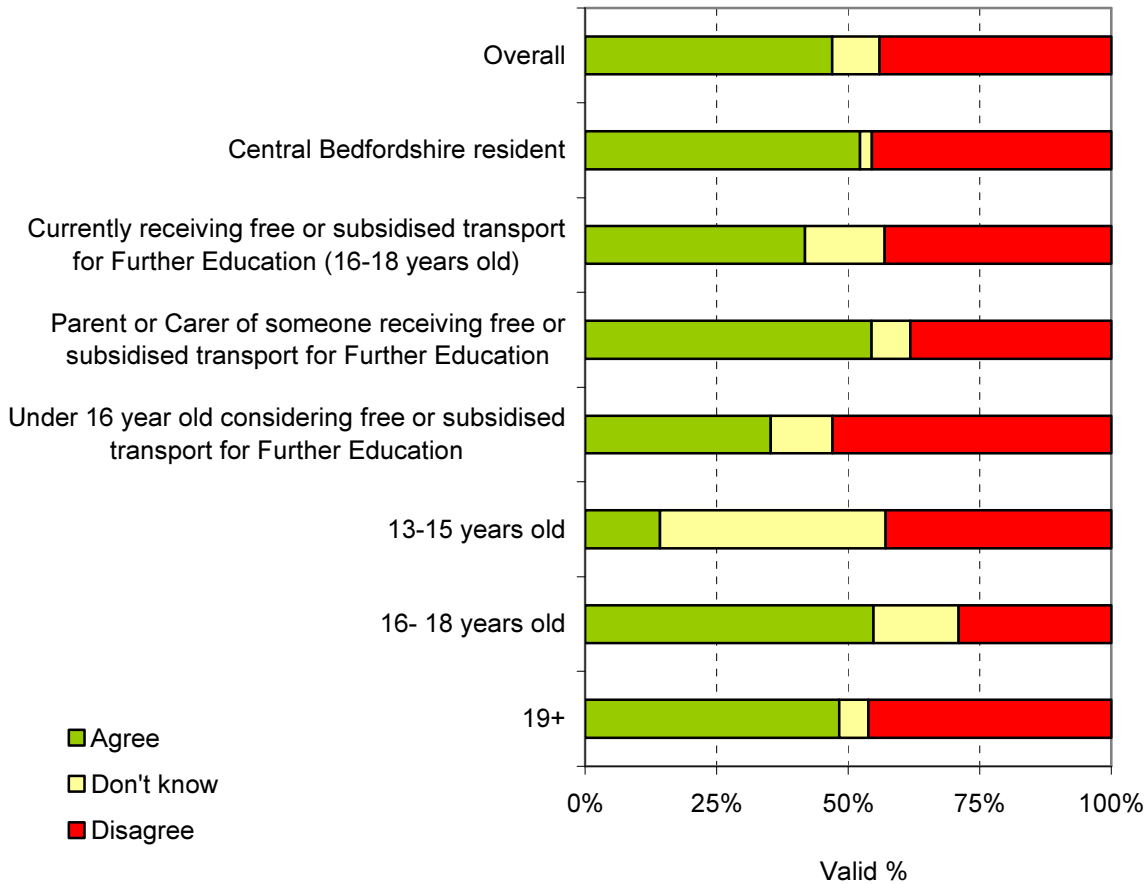
There was a strong level of agreement with the eligibility by medical needs, which proposed no change to the current arrangement in place (82% overall agreed).

Younger respondents were less likely to have an opinion on the eligibility to free or subsidised transport on medical needs (43% of 13-15 year olds and 23% of 16-18 year olds responded don't know).

This could suggest a lack of understanding around the aspects of this criterion amongst these respondents.

Proposal 4 - Road safety

The Council proposes to no longer provide subsidised transport for students on road safety grounds where the student is capable of travelling independently and living within a 3 mile distance of school or college.



There was no overall consensus of opinion amongst respondents on the proposal to no longer provide subsidised transport on road safety grounds to students who are capable of travelling independently and live within a 3 mile distance of school or college (overall 47% agreed and 44% disagreed).

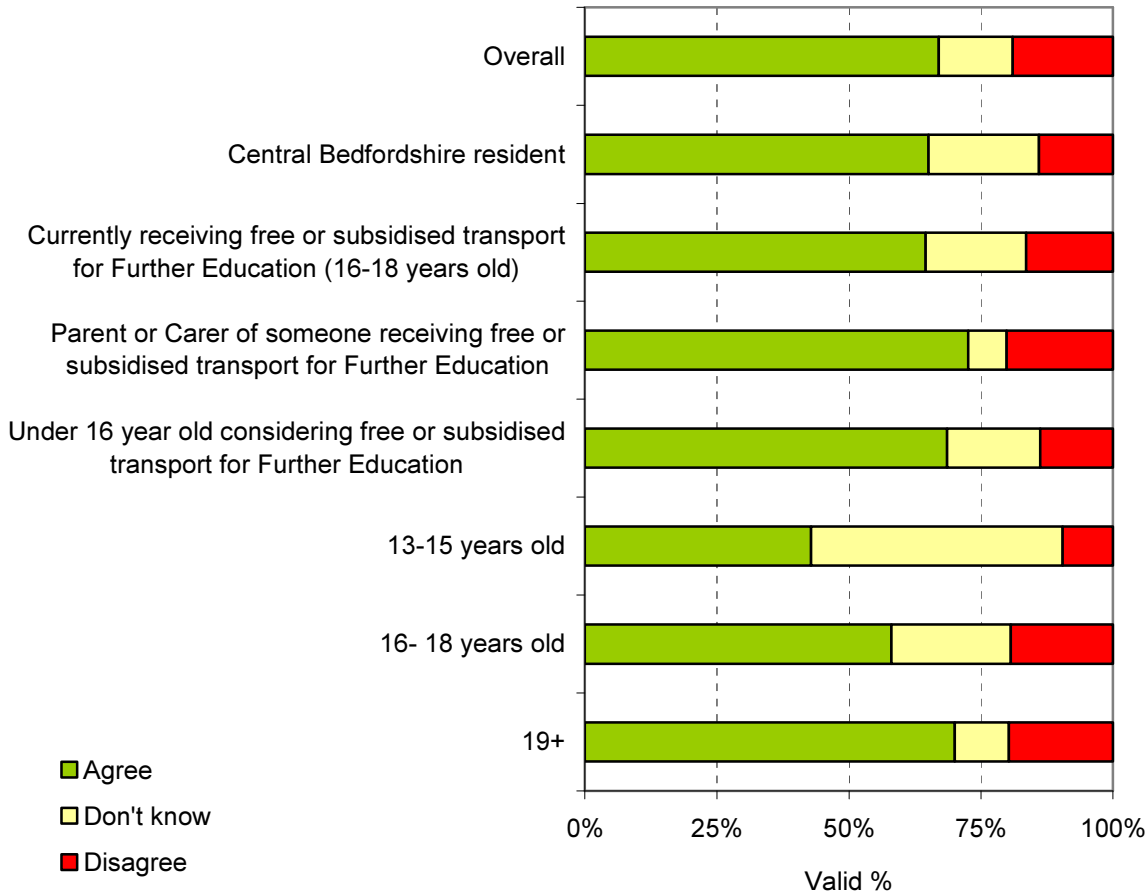
Agreement of this proposal was strongest amongst parents or carers of someone currently receiving free or subsidised transport (54%).

Under 16 year olds considering free or subsidised transport for further education were most likely to disagree with the proposed change to eligibility on road safety grounds (53% disagreed).

Under 16 year olds respondents overall were also much less likely to have an opinion on the proposals for a change in the eligibility to free or subsidised transport on the grounds of road safety (43% said don't know).

Proposal 5 - Special Education Needs

The Council proposes that post 16 students with special education needs will be eligible for transport if they attend the nearest school or college that is more than 3 miles from their home address or they have transport needs specifically identified in their statement of special education need, or within the assessment carried out under the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act (2009) relating to Further Education providers. Charges for transport for students with special education needs will be assessed in the same way as all other students.



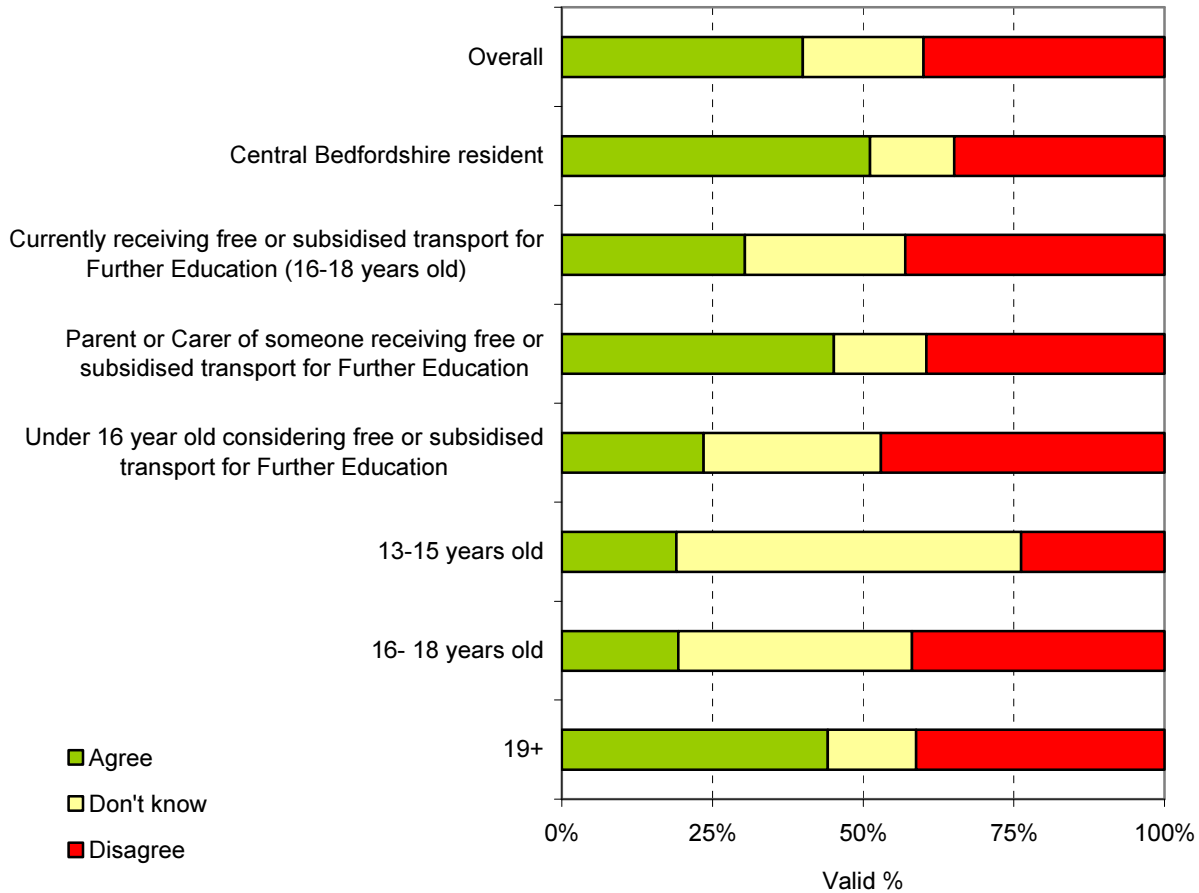
2 in 3 respondents overall agreed (67%) with the proposal to eligibility of transport where a post 16 student with special education needs attends the nearest school or college that is more than 3 miles from their home of if they have transport needs identified in their statement of special education need or the assessment carried out relating to further education providers under the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act (2009).

Parents or carers of someone currently receiving the service were even more likely to agree with this proposal (73%).

Overall there was general support for this proposal. The only group which did not have a majority supporting the proposal was the 13-15 year olds but this does not mean they were against the proposal as almost half (48%) said they don't know.

Proposal 6 - Looked After Children, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The Council proposes that Looked After Children including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children are supported to attend schools that best meet their needs. This may mean that transport will be provided to schools or colleges where the distance criteria are not met.



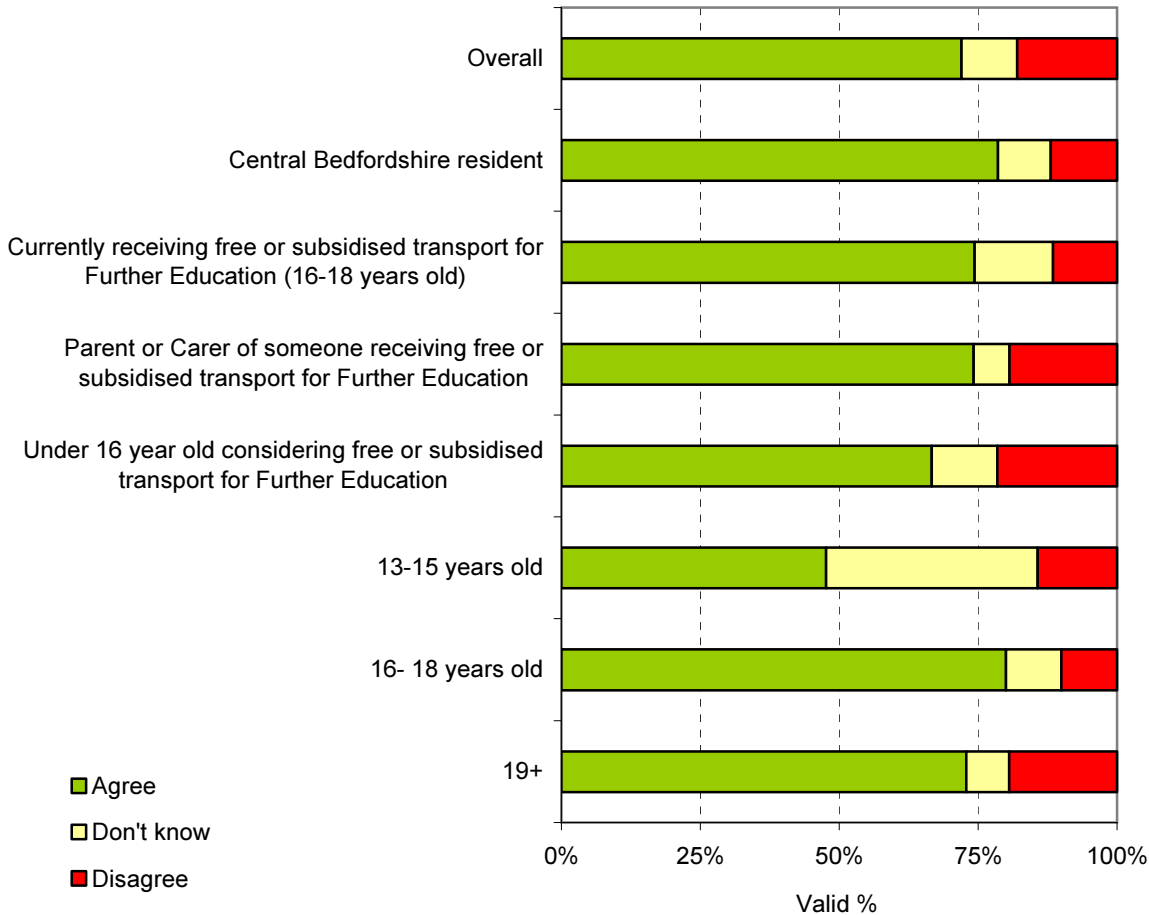
There was no overall consensus of opinion on the proposals for the provision of transport for looked after children (40% agreed and 40% disagreed).

Disagreement with this proposal was strongest in the under 16 year olds considering transport for further education (47%).

As with earlier proposals, younger respondents overall were less likely to have an opinion on this criterion (57% of under 16s and 39% of 16-18 year olds responded don't know).

Proposal 7 - Assessment of Course Content

The Council proposes that post 16 students will be eligible for free or subsidised transport where learners attend the nearest school or college which offers a qualification at the same level and in the same subject area as the course of choice.



The majority of respondents overall were in agreement with the proposals for eligibility to free or subsidised transport where the nearest school or college offering a qualification at the same level and in the same subject areas as per the individuals choice is attended (72%).

There was a general consensus with this proposal across all respondent groups, with the exception of respondents aged under 16 year old where there was a higher level of no opinion (48% agreed and 38% said don't know)

Comments about the changes to the post 16 transport eligibility criteria

125 respondents made comments about the proposed changes to the eligibility criteria for post 16 transport. These comments have been grouped into common themes and are summarised in the table below. Verbatim comments are provided in Appendix 3.

The table below provided a summary of the top comments.

		Count	%
Road Safety	Unsafe roads/ footpaths/ walking conditions	19	6
Low Income	Unfavourable to low income families receiving no or limited benefits	18	5
Mileage	Increase mileage entitlement - no suitable/ limited places for further education within rural areas	17	5
General	Proposals may deter young people from further education	13	4
SEN	Requirement of children with disabilities/ special needs to be protected	10	3
Mileage	Avoid disruption to school chain based on distance travelled	8	2
Mileage	Free travel for distance over 3 miles/ within catchment area/ nearest school	7	2
General	More buses/ public transport	7	2
General	Free transport for all 16-18 year olds	6	2
SEN	Assessment for children with SEN should not be the same as other students	5	2
Course	Could limit students to unsuitable courses	5	2

The most common area of comment was concerns around unsafe roads, footpaths and general walking conditions for students to travel to school or college (6%, 19 people).

Proposals being unfavourable to low income families not in receipt of benefits was also highlighted as a concern through comments made (5%, 18 people).

Changes to the eligibility criteria posing a deterrent to young people entering further education was another common area of comment (5%, 17 people).

All summarised comments around the eligibility criteria are provided below in accordance to the proposal topic.

Mileage

	Count	%
Increase mileage entitlement - no suitable/ limited places for further education within rural areas	17	5
Avoid disruption to school chain based on distance travelled	8	2
Free travel for distance over 3 miles/ within catchment area/ nearest school	7	2
Travel to further education too far without free/subsidised transport	3	1
Better calculation of distance between home and school/college; currently based on shortest distance, not on travel routes.	3	1
Students needs must be met despite distance	1	0.3
Provide subsidy for train travel	1	0.3

Low Income

	Count	%
Unfavourable to low income families receiving no or limited benefits	18	5

Free travel for distances of more than 3 miles between home and school/college for low income families	2	1
Unfavourable for family who provide free care for children	1	0.3
Clarity on entitlement and uptake of free school meals needed	1	0.3
Proposals will make travel for education unaffordable	1	0.3

Road Safety

	Count	%
Unsafe roads/ footpaths/ walking conditions	19	6
Proposals will increase road traffic (more cars)	2	1
Reduce traffic congestions	1	0.3

Medical needs and Special Education Needs

	Count	%
Requirement of children with disabilities/ special needs to be protected	10	3
Assessment for children with SEN should not be the same as other students	5	2
Criteria to better meet the needs of students with SEN	3	1
Free transport is vital to help SEN students to achieve their potential	2	1

Looked After Children, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

	Count	%
Same criteria for all students; no differences for looked after children, asylum seekers etc	1	0.3
Consider the needs of children in care with siblings in nearby schools	1	0.3

Course

	Count	%
Could limit students to unsuitable courses	5	2
Colleges to provide transport links for students	1	0.3

General

	Count	%
Proposals may deter young people from further education	13	4
More buses/ public transport	7	2
Free transport for all 16-18 year olds	6	2
Assessment of each students based on individual circumstances	3	1
Utilise spaces in existing buses	3	1
Should not apply to students currently in further education	3	1
No change to current policy criteria	3	1
Make transport cheaper for all students	2	1
Students contribute to cost	2	1
More cost effective travel options (alternative to private hire taxis)	2	1
Encourage independent travel	2	1
Agree with proposed criteria	2	1
More detail on level of current subsidy on home to school/college transport	1	0.3
More ways to make payments of travel costs. i.e. monthly direct debits	1	0.3
Provisions for students not attending nearest school because of bullying	1	0.3
Travel subsidy based on attendance of course	1	0.3