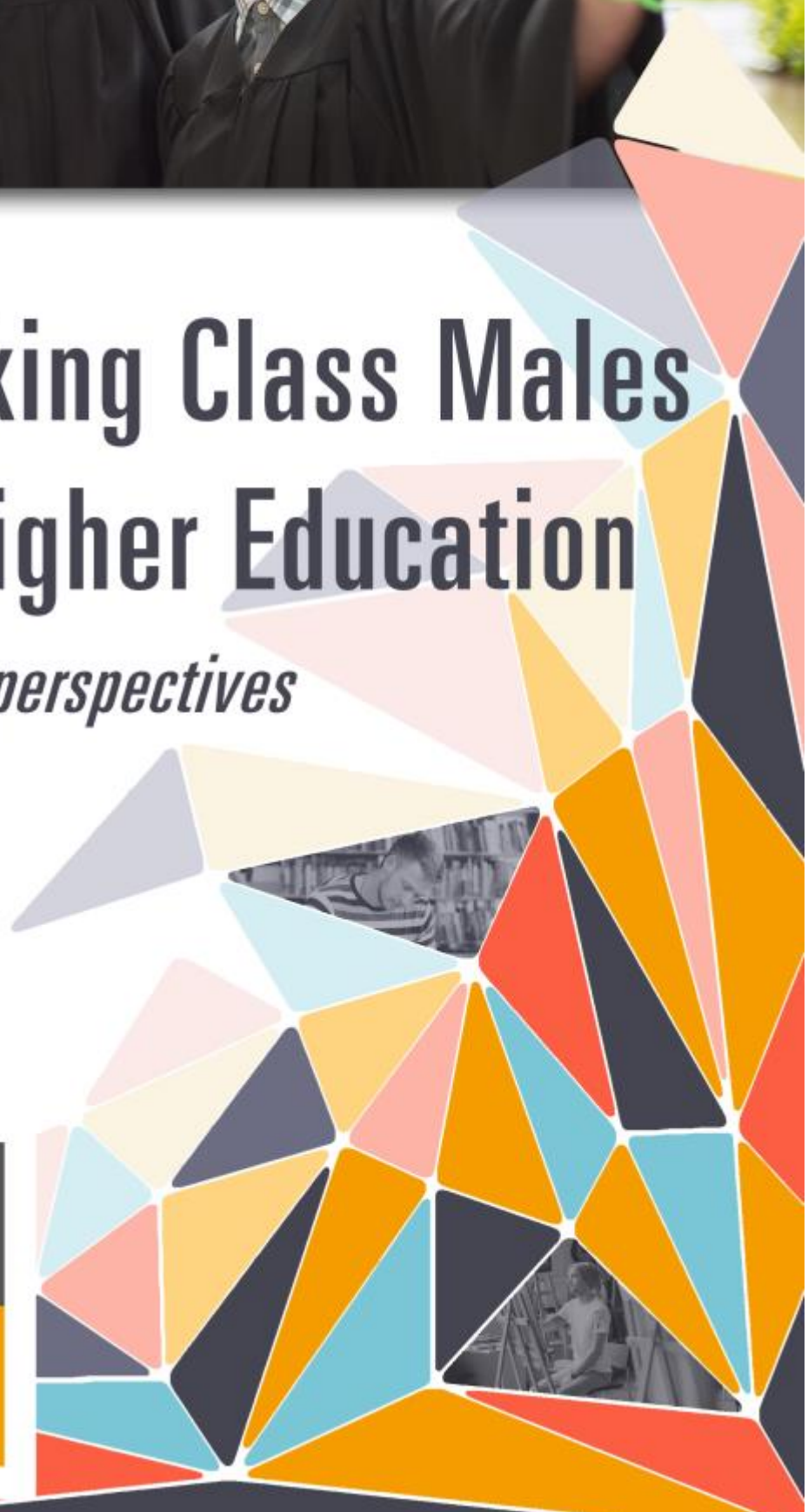




White Working Class Males in British Higher Education

Pre and post-entry perspectives



SUN SOUTHERN
UNIVERSITIES
NETWORK

commissioned by
UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH &
SOUTHAMPTON SOLENT UNIVERSITY

White Working Class Males in British Higher Education

Pre and post-entry perspectives

March 2017

Executive Summary

This report brings together findings from two research projects commissioned in support of the Southern Universities Network (SUN), which seek to explore the disadvantage experienced by white working class males in relation to their progression into higher education. The pre-entry study, undertaken by ARC Network and co-ordinated by Southampton Solent University, sought to examine the perceptions, barriers and enablers to HE progression from the perspective of white working class learners in schools/colleges across the city of Southampton. The post-entry research, undertaken by the University of Portsmouth, explored the participation of white working class men within an institutional context, with a particular focus on examining higher education entry and aspirations of current HE learners. The study therefore offers a unique understanding of white working class males across the both pre and post entry phase.

The two research projects took a similar methodological approach. Both used mixed methods, engaging young white males through both an online survey and through focus group discussions between October and December 2016. The resulting report is structured in a way that the pre-entry and post-entry findings remain distinct although a joint section on implications and recommendations is presented.

It is hoped that the findings from these two research projects will support members of the SUN Network, and other HEI providers, to improve the planning and delivery of both institutional and collaborative widening participation programmes thus increasing the number of white working class males progressing onto and through higher education.

Highlights of the findings from the pre-entry research project:

- Data suggests the choices being made by white working class males in Southampton at age 16 make their progression to HE less likely – they are more likely to be NEET and more likely to be in FE or work based provision.
- White working class males engaged by the study generally hold positive attitudes to learning and are happy to be viewed as hardworking. Some may not be fully engaged in their current learning but most are positive about future opportunities.
- Males from low HE participation areas appear less motivated by financial rewards than their peers from areas with higher HE progression rates, and more motivated by finding a career that suits their interests and skills.
- Males from low HE participation areas were less convinced in terms of their interest in HE at the pre-16 stage of education.
- They were also less likely to say that they would enjoy being a university student and that university is necessary for the career they have in mind. They were much less likely to view HE as affordable and post-16 learners were concerned about their ability to get in and fit in. Overall, HE is perceived as a risky strategy.
- Alternatives to HE, including progression to apprenticeships, were frequently viewed as a ‘better’ option by vocational learners, although this may well reflect the increased understanding they had about this route compared to HE.
- The majority of learners in the sample felt relatively supported by their parents, although many (particularly those in post 16 education) report that parental opinion is of no or little importance.
- The general consensus amongst the FE learners was that they had received limited information or encouragement regarding progression towards HE.
- Learners were interested in experiencing HE and talking to individuals who could help them find out more, including employers and students.

- Barriers to HE for white working class males in Southampton include – lower levels of attainment, different patterns of post-16 progression, levels of risk in choosing HE as an option, negative perceptions of HE and variable access to advice and support.

Highlights of the findings from the post-entry research project:

- Higher education is viewed as a risk that may not be worth taking, especially as this group expressed aversion to taking on student debt.
- Findings show that white, working class men are making decisions about whether or not to pursue university much later than their peers.
- The data shows that this group is more aspirational than their peers, which supports the conclusions of other scholars but contradicts popular discourses suggesting they are not aspirational.
- The research participants expressed their career aspirations along a spectrum of certainty, which may provide insight into recruitment and outreach strategies.
- This group is worried about transitioning into higher education and whether or not they will feel like they belong.

Highlights of the suggested strategies for outreach and recruitment include:

- Understanding and targeting white, working class males.
- Challenging 'low aspiration' discourses.
- Understanding the role of risk, real or perceived, in the decision making of this underrepresented student group.
- Supporting attainment of white, working class males at all educational levels.
- Supporting transitions of this student population at all levels.
- Recognising the importance of outreach and the age at which white, working class men decided whether or not to pursue higher education.
- Developing personalised/tailored outreach strategies to improve higher education participation rates for this group of underrepresented students.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the report

This report brings together findings from two research projects commissioned in support of the Southern Universities Network (SUN). Drawing on research undertaken with the University of Portsmouth and Southampton Solent University, the report seeks to explore the disadvantage experienced by white working class males in relation to their progression into higher education. It is intended that the research will support SUN members in planning and developing both institutional and collaborative widening participation programmes, including the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) due to commence in January 2017.

1.2 What do we mean by working class?

The research projects described in this report attempt to examine the perceptions and experiences of white males from a 'working class' background. It is clear from the review of existing literature that the definition of working class varies between different contexts and that a range of proxies are used by institutions and sector bodies hoping to target this specific group of learners (Baars et al, 2016; Soria and Bultmann, 2014). Baars et al (2016) identified a number of ways in which researchers and practitioners were identifying working class, including free school meal eligibility, parental occupation, parental income (including benefit eligibility), postcode (using the Index of Multiple Deprivation) and school progression data. Each of these approaches has its relative merits and were used to varying degrees within the research (the methodology below describes the approaches used by the two research teams), however it is suggested that data alone may not be an effective tool for defining working class and that a 'full definition of being a white working class boy includes particular attitudes, behaviours and locally-rooted culture that cannot be captured by survey and administrative data alone' (Baars et al, 2016, p. 11). Researchers have attempted to capture the complexities of defining working class as part of the study and have made recommendations about how the SUN might effectively target this group of learners in future.

1.3 Methodological approach

This report brings together two research studies, funded through the Southern Universities Network. The first study, undertaken by ARC Network and co-ordinated by Southampton Solent University, sought to examine the perceptions, barriers and enablers to HE progression from the perspective of white working class learners in schools/colleges across the city of Southampton. The second study undertaken by the University of Portsmouth, explored the participation of white working class men within an institutional context, with a particular focus on examining higher education entry and aspirations. The two projects took a similar methodological approach to the research, however there were distinct features. In each case the approach adopted is summarised below, with full methodological statements provided at Appendix A (Pre-entry) and Appendix E (Post-entry).

Perception, barriers and enablers: A pre-entry perspective

A mixed methods approach to the research was adopted. Qualitative data from 51 young, white males was gathered across six learner focus groups and semi structured interviews with parents were undertaken, although only three parents were engaged. In order to reach a larger sample of learners, focus groups were supplemented by an online learner questionnaire which generated data from 157 males. In addition to primary research, desk research was also undertaken. A brief review of recent literature was completed (in collaboration with University of Portsmouth Research team) and an analysis of KS4/KS5 destination data for local state funded schools and colleges was used to provide context for the study. Three school/colleges based in Southampton were identified by Southampton Solent University to act as partners in

the research, providing access to learners and their parents, although to increase the number of survey respondents, learners from other local school and colleges were also targeted.

Exploring the higher education entry and aspirations of white, working class men at the University of Portsmouth

Similar to the pre-entry research, the post-entry research was collected using a mixed-methods approach. A university-wide online survey of first-year undergraduate students was conducted in Autumn 2016, yielding 678 completed responses, which represents a 12 percent response rate. Among the 678 respondents, 97 identified as white, male, British, traditional age (17-19 years old), and first generation students. In addition to the qualitative and quantitative data gathered within the survey, three focus groups were conducted with 20 participants who were white, male, British, traditional age (17-19 years old), and first generation students. While identifying participants who are 'working class' is challenging for reasons discussed earlier in this report, first-generation students are more likely to be from working class households (Gardner and Holley, 2011), which is why this was one of the criteria for exploring the post-entry data. A review of recent literature was conducted to provide the national and local context for the research.

2. Context for the research

2.1 National policy context

The higher education white paper, presented to Parliament in May 2016, encouraged universities to update their access agreements to commit to increasing participation among particular underrepresented groups within higher education, "including increasing participation among young white males from lower socio-economic groups, who are five times less likely to go into higher education than the most advantaged white males" (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p. 14). The higher education Green paper, presented to Parliament in November 2015, revealed "Only around 10% of white British men from the most disadvantaged backgrounds go into higher education" (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015, p. 37).

Tackling the underrepresentation of white young men from areas with low HE participation rates is also a strategic priority for the new Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded NCOP initiative. The nationwide programme, which will run from 2016-17 to 2019-20, seeks to bring schools, colleges, HEIs and other stakeholders together to deliver collaborative programmes to learners in Key Stage 4 and 5. The programme is targeted in locations where 'HEFCE's analysis shows that participation in HE is particularly low overall, and lower than expected given the Key Stage 4 attainment levels in those areas' (HEFCE 2016c). The programme is aimed at making faster progress towards the government's widening participation goals, which includes challenging the under-representation of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.2 National HE participation rates

UCAS data (UCAS, 2015) indicates that 42 per cent of English young people enter Higher Education by age 19 which shows that 'young people are over a quarter more likely to enter higher education than in 2006.' (UCAS, 2015, p.12). However, despite entry rates increasing overall there are considerable variations in progression rates from different learner groups. In relation to ethnicity, the lowest entry rate in 2015 was for pupils in the white ethnic group, with an entry rate of 28 per cent compared to 41 per cent of young people from an Asian background and 58 per cent of Chinese young people. Perhaps most worryingly is that those from a white ethnic background had the lowest increase in entry rate, meaning the gap is widening between white young people and their peers from other ethnic backgrounds (UCAS, 2015).

UCAS data also indicates that entry rates are ‘increasing three times faster for women than for men’ with 18-year-old women ‘35 per cent more likely to enter HE than men, the highest difference recorded’ (UCAS, 2015, p. 13) and according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2016), the national average gender ratio for undergraduate populations at higher education institutions for the 2014/2015 academic year was 43.8 percent male to 56.2 percent female.

The participation figures for young men are worse when socio-economic status is taken into account. According to 2014 data, male students in the UK who were eligible for free school meals were only 13.1 percent likely to access higher education, compared with 19.8 percent of female students who were eligible for free school meals (Hillman and Robinson, 2016) and as at the January 2016 UCAS deadline, women in POLAR3, Quintile 1 locations (the most disadvantaged areas) within England were 58 percent more likely to have applied to university than their male peers in the same neighbourhoods (Thorne, 2016). The 2015 end of cycle report from UCAS suggests that in the least advantaged areas women were 50% more likely to go to university than their male peers. Figure 1 below (extracted from UCAS, 2015) illustrates entry rates of male and female 18 year olds from most and least advantaged areas.

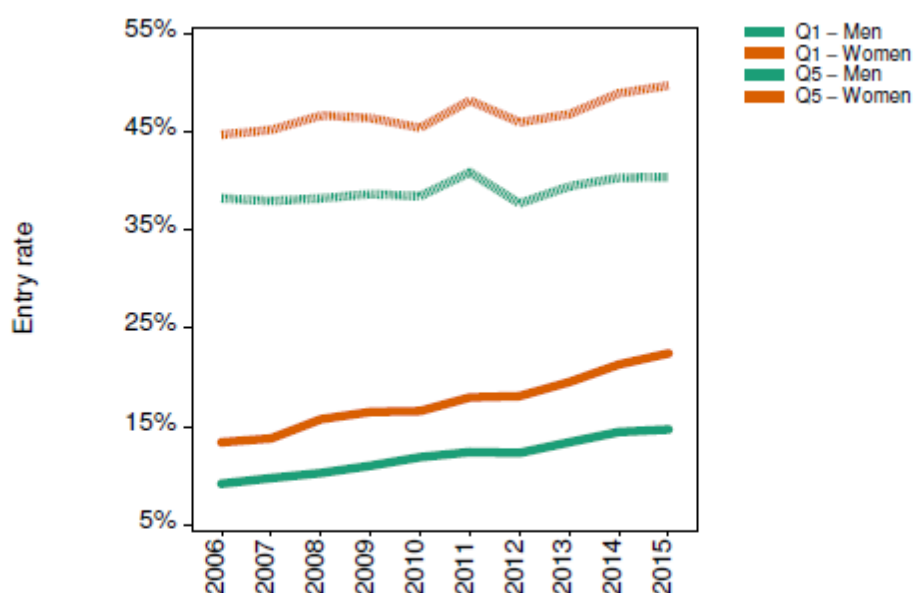


Figure 1: UK 18 year olds entry rates from most disadvantaged (POLAR3 Q5) areas and from most advantaged areas (POLAR3 Q1) by sex

While more women are accessing higher education than men, men are more likely than women to be accepted into higher ranking universities (Hillman and Robinson, 2016), however social class also has a strong impact upon which university a student is likely to attend (Milburn, 2012, p. 4):

The most advantaged 20% of young people are still seven times more likely to attend the most selective universities than the 40% most disadvantaged. Access to university remains inequitable. There is a strong correlation between social class and the likelihood of going to university generally and to the top universities particularly. Four private schools and one college get more of their students into Oxbridge than the combined efforts of 2,000 state schools and colleges.

Reay (2015, p. 19) explained that ‘In 2012, private school pupils accounted for 7 per cent of British children ... and 42.5 per cent of the new Oxford intake’. Overall, Russell Group universities accept a lower proportion of undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds (19 percent in 2011/12) compared to all universities in the United Kingdom (nearly 33 percent in 2013/14) (Ashley et. al., 2015). The latest figures from HEFCE (2016b, p. 17) echo the same findings, showing that students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds made up less than 7 percent of entrants at high status universities, as this table indicates:

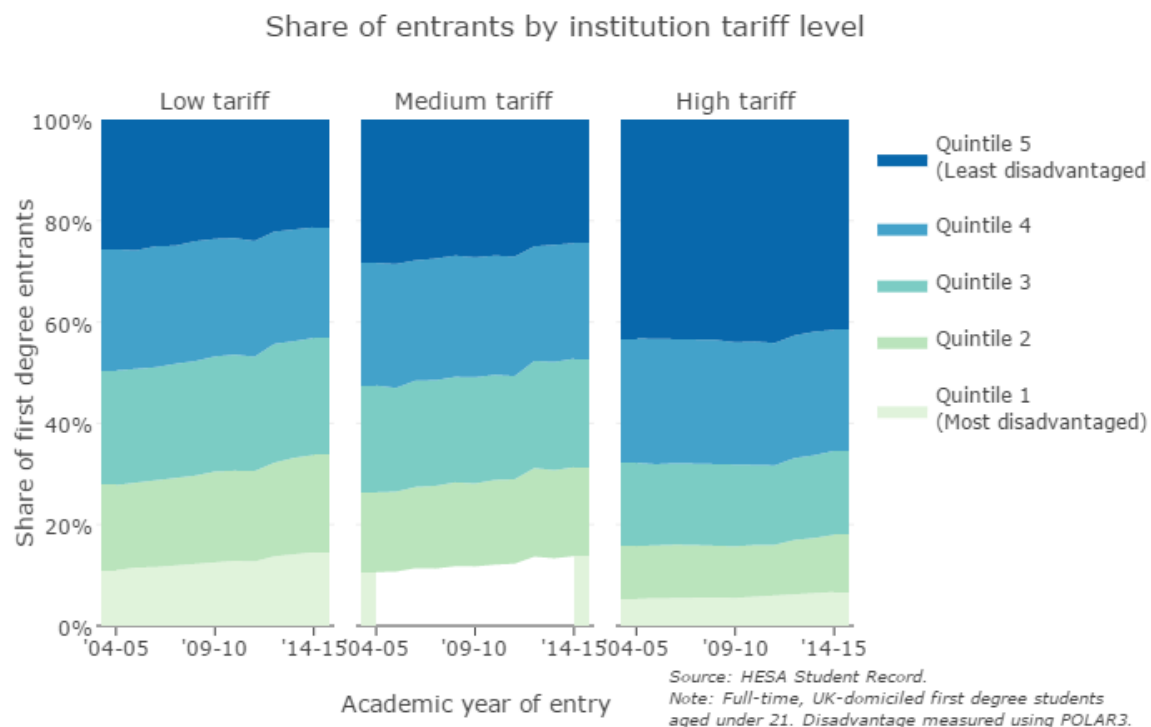


Figure 2: Share of entrants by POLAR quintile across institutions by tariff type

Overall data tells us that white working class young men appear to be disadvantaged in relation to their ethnicity, gender and social background, a finding which is confirmed by analysis of UCAS data (UCAS, 2015, p. 15):

Statistical methods that combine multiple equality dimensions show greater difference. For pupils in stage schools a multidimensional measure combining sex, ethnic group, area background and free school meal status showed that the most advantaged (in terms of entry rates) quintile was over three times more likely to enter higher education than the most disadvantaged quintile. In 2015, the entry rate of the least advantaged fifth of pupils on this basis was 14 per cent, an increase of 0.3 percentage points (+2 per cent proportionally). The entry rate for the most advantaged fifth of pupils on this basis was 45 per cent, an increase on 2014 of 1.1 percentage points (+3 per cent proportionally). The difference between these groups showed no change in 2015.

2.3 Characteristics of local area

Situated within the South East of England, the Solent region has ‘a population of more than 1.3 million and over 50,000 businesses’, and ‘is an internationally-recognised key economic hub anchored around the Isle of Wight, the two cities of Portsmouth and Southampton, the M27 corridor and the Solent waterway’ (Solent LEP, 2016). One of the key strategic priorities across the region, as defined by the Solent Local Area Partnership (Solent LEP), is ‘Skills for Growth’ - that is increasing levels of education amongst the local work force in order to drive forward economic growth. Solent LEP states ‘We want Solent to be defined by aspiration and achievement, both of which are critical to our economic success both now and in the future’. In terms of economic success, the LEP identifies four key sectoral clusters upon which the area can build, namely advanced manufacturing and marine, visitor economy (both in relation to marine and rural locations), transport and logistics and the low carbon economy.

Local councils across the Solent area have also identified skills and education as strategic priorities, for example Portsmouth City Council have made it a priority to encourage young residents to pursue educational opportunities in order to address unemployment rates and enhance the local community (Portsmouth City Council, 2012, p. 8):

Portsmouth's unemployment rates are higher than the regional average and most of the higher skilled jobs are taken by people that commute into the city for work. With high expectations for growth, Portsmouth will need to improve the opportunities for young people in education in order to meet the increasing demand for employment across the city. Portsmouth will need to raise aspirations and diversify the skills of the workforce in order to continue to strengthen the economy and ensure local people can make the most of new job opportunities that will arise in the city.

The 2011 census shows that the population of Southampton was approximately 236,900, which is an increase of approximately 8.9 percent since 2001 (Hampshire County Council, 2013). The population is approximately 50 percent male and 50 percent female, and 77.7 percent are estimated to be white British, with those in other ethnic groups increasing from 11.3 percent to 22.3 percent over the period from 2001 to 2011. Census data shows that there has been a decline children aged 5-14 from 11.6 percent to 9.9 percent and the recent growth in the population has been in the working age groups, with the those aged 16-44s increasing by 12.4 percent (Hampshire County Council, 2013).

According to the 2011 Census data, the city of Portsmouth included 205,056 residents. Among the residents, the gender ratio was nearly 50/50 (men accounted for 50.3 percent of the population) and approximately 88 percent of the population of Portsmouth were white (ONS, 2011). Among the population of Portsmouth accounted for in the 2011 Census, 6,623 were ages 12-14 (about 3 percent of the total population), who would now be ages 17-19, which is the traditional age for students to start an undergraduate course (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

Capacity to build the skills base needed now and in the future is deemed locally as strong (Solent LEP, 2016). The Solent area is home to three universities, the University of Southampton, Southampton Solent University and the University of Portsmouth, with the University of Winchester also within the county of Hampshire. Local higher education institutions work on a range of initiatives and programmes aimed at increasing the prosperity of the local area.

Aligned with the City Council's strategic goals of encouraging more young people to pursue higher education, the University of Portsmouth is committed to recruiting more young people from the community, as highlighted within the University of Portsmouth Access Agreement (University of Portsmouth, 2016a, p. 1):

Portsmouth continues to be a city with areas of significant deprivation and educational underachievement. Our commitment to aspiration-raising and widening participation is essential to the University's future success and viability, and to that of the City. The latest HESA performance indicators, published in March 2015, show our success in the key performance indicators selected in this Access Agreement; we outperformed locally-adjusted benchmarks for each of our four main indicators, demonstrating our success in recruiting and retaining young and mature students from low participation neighbourhoods.

The university have pledged to increasing the number of undergraduates from low participation neighbourhoods, indicating that "we aim to outperform our location-adjusted benchmark over the next five years" (University of Portsmouth, 2016a, p. 28) and have published the Education Strategy for 2016-2020, which includes what it means to be a "Portsmouth graduate", highlighting the strengths, qualities, and attributes that a Portsmouth student can expect to develop during the course of their studies (University of Portsmouth, 2016, p. 6):

Portsmouth graduates will be knowledgeable, informed, intellectually curious, responsible, self-aware and self-motivated, independent learners set for success in their future careers. We will support our students to acquire these Hallmarks of a Portsmouth Graduate through their engagement in courses that adhere to our strategic principles, and in the wider student experience.

Additionally, the Education Strategy reiterated the university's commitment to: "Continue and extend our commitment to a partnership approach to outreach activities, including through student ambassadors, and our role in raising educational aspirations in our city and region" (2016, p. 10).

Likewise, Southampton Solent University use their access statement to confirm their mission (Southampton Solent University, 2016a, p.1):

We are dedicated to the pursuit of excellent university education that enables learners from all backgrounds to become enterprising citizens and responsible leaders, while also promoting economic and social prosperity for the communities we serve.

In addition to institutional efforts to widen participation, collaborative work between local HEI providers is also prevalent and includes participation in the Southern Universities Network (SUN), a HEFCE funded partnership which seeks to provide schools and colleges across Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight with access to HE outreach activities.

2.4 Progression at the end of Key Stage 4

The key stage 4 destinations data for local authorities indicates that the share of school leavers going into or remaining in a sustained education destination is lower in Portsmouth and Southampton when compared to Hampshire and the South East as a whole. From this year the destinations data is based on the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes dataset which gives almost complete coverage of young people's destinations.¹ A relatively higher proportion of male school leavers in Portsmouth and Southampton compared to the South East have a sustained employment and/or training destination, and a higher share of leavers in these areas do not sustain a destination in the first two terms after leaving school.

	Number of students*		Any education destination**		Sustained employment and/or training destination		Destination not sustained		Activity not captured in the data	
	Total	% Males	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
England	548,280	50.6%	90%	91%	3%	3%	6%	5%	1%	1%
<i>South East</i>	86,750	50.7%	91%	92%	4%	3%	5%	5%	1%	1%
Hampshire	13,345	51.5%	90%	92%	4%	3%	5%	4%	1%	-
Isle of Wight	1,395	51.3%	90%	92%	4%	2%	X	X	X	X
Portsmouth	1,705	49.6%	87%	88%	5%	4%	7%	7%	1%	1%
Southampton	1,905	50.7%	84%	87%	5%	3%	10%	8%	1%	2%

X indicates percentage is less than 0.5% *Number of pupils in the 2013/14 KS4 cohort. Sustained destinations include pupils who have been in a combination of sustained education / employment / training for the first two terms (October to March).

**All students with sustained education are recorded in education lines, regardless of participation in employment. Individual lines may not add up to totals as a small number of pupils were identified in more than one education destination. Not recorded as a sustained destination includes students who did not sustain a destination from October to March but had some participation between August and July and students who had no participation in education or employment but had claimed out-of-work benefits or were recorded NEET by their local authority between August and July. Activity not captured in data means the young person wasn't found to have any participation in education or employment, had made no claim to out-of-work benefits and was not recorded NEET. Source: SFR47/2016.

Figure 3: KS4 Local Authority: Percentage of the 2013/14 KS4 cohort going to, or remaining in, an education or employment destination in 2014/15 by gender (provisional). State-funded mainstream schools

¹ Since employment and benefits data sources have been included in the tracking only 1% nationally remain unaccounted for. Possible reasons for this could be that the young person: was attending an independent school that wasn't captured in the awarding body data; was attending a Scottish or Welsh college or school; was undertaking activity other than paid employment or study in the UK; was living, working or studying overseas; was self-employed; was not successfully matched to a destination data source.

Figure 4 below shows the patterns according to disadvantage in the school leaver cohort, based on pupils eligible for the pupil premium. The DFE does not publish data to show gender by any disadvantage measures. Rates of disadvantage were much higher in Portsmouth and Southampton and the Isle of Wight compared to Hampshire and the rest of the South East. The share of disadvantaged school leavers going into education destinations was relatively high in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight but low in Southampton, which had a large share of pupils for who their destination was not sustained.

	Number of students		Any education destination		Sustained employment and/or training destination		Destination not sustained		Activity not captured in the data	
	Total	% Disadvantaged*	Disadv pupils	All other pupils	Disadv pupils	All other pupils	Disadv pupils	All other pupils	Disadv pupils	All other pupils
England	548,280	26%	84%	93%	4%	3%	11%	3%	1%	1%
South East	86,750	19%	82%	93%	5%	3%	11%	3%	1%	1%
Hampshire	13,345	17%	83%	93%	5%	3%	11%	3%	1%	-
Isle of Wight	1,395	27%	84%	93%	4%	3%	11%	3%	1%	-
Portsmouth	1,705	30%	81%	90%	4%	4%	14%	5%	1%	1%
Southampton	1,905	35%	77%	90%	5%	4%	16%	5%	2%	1%

*Disadvantaged pupils are those who were eligible for free school meals at any point in the previous six years or were looked after continuously for at least 6 months. These are the pupils who would have attracted the pupil premium at the end of the 2013/14 academic year. Source: SFR47/2016.

Figure 4: KS4 Local Authority: Percentage of the 2013/14 KS4 cohort going to, or remaining in, an education or employment destination in 2014/15 by disadvantage (provisional) from state-funded mainstream schools

Figure 5 below shows the shares going into different types of education destinations, reflecting the availability of provision locally. Proportionally more boys than girls go into an FE destination in all areas.

	Further education college or other FE provider*		School sixth form - state funded		Sixth form college		Other education destinations**	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
England	41%	35%	37%	41%	11%	14%	1%	1%
South East	36%	31%	38%	40%	16%	19%	1%	1%
Hampshire	41%	37%	7%	7%	42%	48%	1%	-
Isle of Wight	52%	45%	37%	45%	1%	1%	x	x
Portsmouth	50%	49%	x	x	36%	37%	1%	1%
Southampton	32%	25%	x	x	49%	53%	1%	2%

X indicates percentage is less than 0.5%. *Other further education providers include pupils with an equal amount of study in two or more further education colleges. It also includes students undertaking further education provision at a higher education institution. **Other education destinations include pupils progressing to independent schools, alternative provision, special schools, specialist post-16 institutions, UK higher education destinations and education combination destinations. Source: SFR47/2016.

Figure 5: Types of education destinations for KS4 2013/14 cohort

A student will also be reported as having an apprenticeship destination if they are in the 'Overall sustained education and/or employment/training destination' and are recorded as taking a funded apprenticeship at any time between August and July. The figure below shows that the shares on the Apprenticeship route on leaving school in Portsmouth and Southampton are above the average for the South East.

	Male	Female
England	7%	5%
South East	5%	5%
Hampshire	7%	5%
Isle of Wight	6%	5%
Portsmouth	10%	8%
Southampton	7%	6%

Source: SFR47/2016

Figure 6: Percentage of the KS4 2013/14 cohort progressing to an Apprenticeship

The underlying data for the KS4 destinations tables in 2013/14 at the institutional level includes a breakdown by ethnic groups for 98 schools and colleges across the four local authority areas. Figure 7 calculates the aggregate numbers and rates for all destinations recorded for white ethnic background students, based on the institutional level figures. Southampton has proportionally more non-white students across local schools and colleges included in the data compared to other areas. The proportional of white students recording a sustained destination is lowest in Portsmouth and Southampton.

	Cohort			Went on to a sustained destination	
	Number of students	Number of white students	% white students	Number of white students recording a destination	% of white students with a destination
Hampshire	13,640	12,800	94%	11,770	92%
Isle of Wight	1,450	1,350	93%	1,250	93%
Portsmouth	1,760	1,560	89%	1,370	88%
Southampton	2,020	1,680	83%	1,460	87%

Source: SFR05/2016

Figure 7: Summary of institutional level ethnicity data by local authority area (KS4 cohort in 2012/13, going into destinations in 2013/14)

Analysis of KS4 progression data suggests fewer males from Southampton state schools are progressing into a sustained education destination when compared to their female peers. Those that do progress are more likely to enter into employment or training, including apprenticeships and more of those that enter an education destination choose to study in the FE sector. Disadvantaged learners and those from a white background are also less likely to have a sustained destination after KS4. This suggests that white working class males have different patterns of progression after secondary education in compared to their peers. These differences are likely to have an impact on their overall chances of entering HE.

2.5 HE progression - Analysis of POLAR data

HEFCE (HEFCE, 2016a) has made extensive data available about participation in higher education by geographical location. The data reveals which postcodes have higher numbers of higher education participation among young people in undergraduate study, referred to as POLAR3 (Participation of Local Area, version 3) classification groups. The data is based on the participation rates of young people aged 18 between 2005 and 2009, who entered HE by the 2010-11 academic year. Analysis of the data (Southampton Solent University, 2016b) indicates that overall the South East is a high young HE participation area, with regional participation rates within Quintile 4 (between 33.8 percent to 36.6 percent).

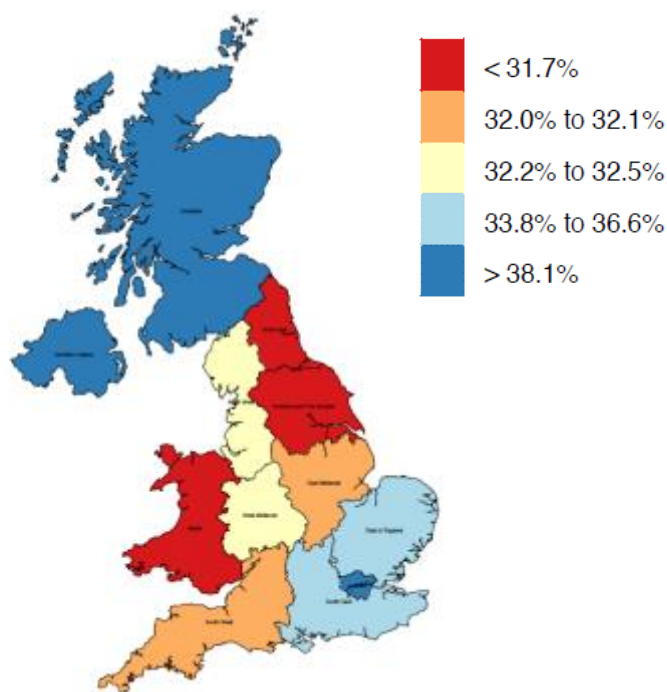
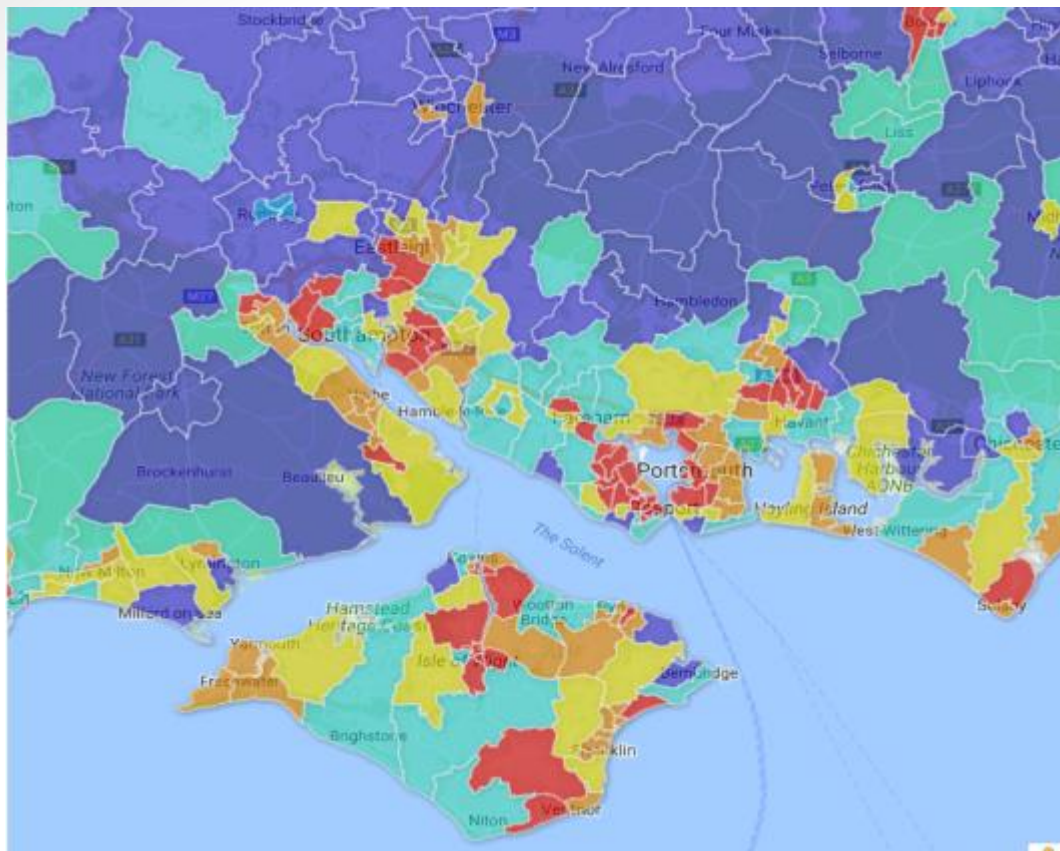


Figure 8: Proportion of 15 year olds who progressed into HE by age 19 during the 2005/06 and 2010/11 academic years by region

However, this masks the considerable variation in young participation rates across the region. The map below (extracted from HEFCE 2016a) 'shows an absence of level 5 Quintiles in the Solent region with lower levels of HE participation (Quintile 1-3) dominating the city areas of Southampton and Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, indicating lower levels of HE participation in these areas' (Southampton Solent University, 2016b).



About the map

This map shows how young participation in higher education varies across the UK.

For each 2001 census ward we have calculated the young participation rate.

This rate is defined as the proportion of young people (15 year olds) who entered HE by the age of 19 during the 2005-06 and 2010-11 academic years.

We have used these rates to assign wards into five groups: the POLAR3 'quintiles'.

We have shaded each quintile with different colours. Areas in red are those in quintile 1 (and have the lowest participation rates) while areas in dark blue are those in quintile 5 (and have the highest participation rates).



Figure 9: Local young HE participation using POLAR3

The vast majority of wards within the city of Southampton have lower than average rates of HE progression compared to local and regional averages, with 8 wards within Quintile 1. The lowest rates of progression were seen in Bitterne, with a HE participation rate of 11.7 percent. Coxford (13.1 percent) and Redbridge (11.9 percent) also had some of the lowest rates across the city, with Portswood (51.3 percent) being the only ward in the highest quintile (Quintile 5).

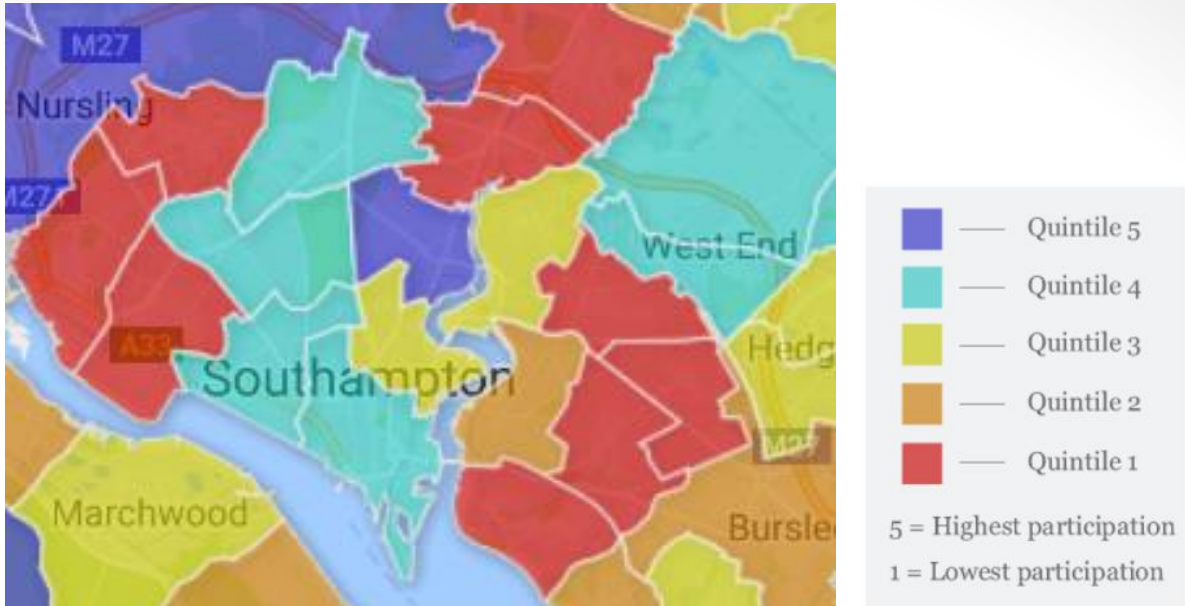


Figure 10: Young HE participation in Southampton using POLAR3

Most of the wards within Portsmouth and the surrounding areas are Quintile 1 or Quintile 2, the lowest two quintiles for rates of participation within higher education. “Progression to HE [Higher Education] is under 26% in much of our local area [Portsmouth], with progression from some local wards as low as 8%” (University of Portsmouth, 2016, p. 6).

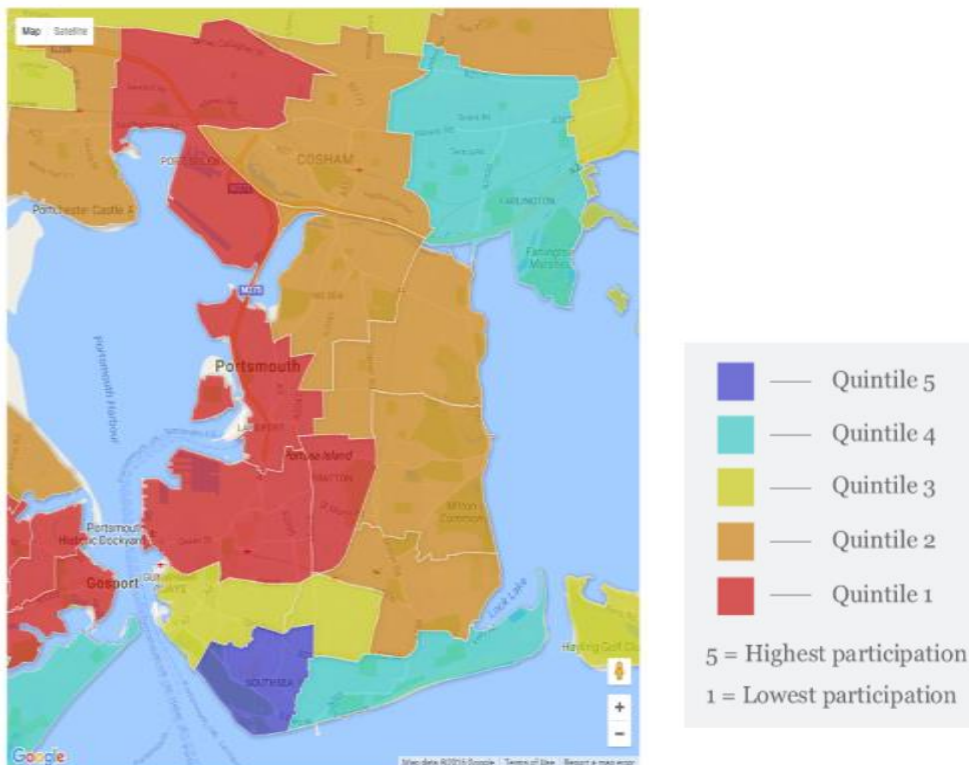


Figure 11: Young HE participation in Portsmouth using POLAR3

The University of Portsmouth has used POLAR data to strategically target outreach to wards in and around Portsmouth that are especially disadvantaged, with very low higher education participation rates among the young residents, as highlighted by the following table:

Ward	Quintile	Participation Rate
Portsmouth Area		
Charles Dickens	1	10.8%
Fratton	1	16.7%
Nelson	1	15.5%
Paulsgrove	1	8.3%
Alton Area		
Alton Eastbrooke	1	18.0%
Whitehill Chase	1	17.8%
Whitehill Deadwater	1	16.4%
Whitehill Hogmoor	1	20.4%
Whitehill Pinewood	1	15.3%
Gosport and Fareham Area		
Bridgemary South	1	13.1%
Brockhurst	1	19.5%
Elson	1	20.7%
Forton	1	12.3%
Grange	1	9.2%
Leesland	1	18.9%
Peel Common	1	13.4%
Rowner & Holbrook	1	10.1%
Town	1	14.7%
Havant Area		
Barncroft	1	7.6%
Battins	1	9.3%
Bondfields	1	10.2%
Stakes	1	16.7%
Warren Park	1	6.8%

Figure 12: Target wards for HE outreach at the University of Portsmouth

2.6 Attainment & progression at the end of Key Stage 5

Figure 13 below shows the latest Level 3 results of young people² at state-funded schools and by gender and local authority. It covers students at the end of advanced level study who were entered for at least one substantial level 3 qualification in the 2014/15 academic year, and includes results achieved in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years. Substantial advanced level academic or vocational qualifications are defined as qualifications that are at least the size of an A level (180 guided learning hours per year), such as a BTEC subsidiary diploma. If a vocational or academic qualification is similar in size to 2 A levels it will be counted as 2 substantial level 3 qualifications. England figures include all schools and FE sector colleges. Nationally, boys do not perform as highly as girls in some areas in terms of the average point score achieved per student. Where attainment is generally low, the gaps between Males and Females tend to be narrower. In Portsmouth the share of boys achieving at least 2 substantive level 3 qualifications is above the share for girls, although the average point score per student is lower.

² Covers students aged 16, 17 or 18 at the start of the 2014/15 academic year, 31 August 2014.

	Students entered for at least one substantial level 3 qualification*			Average point score Per Student			Percentage of students achieving at least 2 substantial level 3 qualifications		
	Total	Males	% Males	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
State-funded schools and colleges									
England	366,621	170,931	46.6%	676.6	721.6	700.6	89.9	91.6	90.8
South East	63,109	29,729	47.1%	688.6	736.3	713.8	90.5	91.8	91.2
Hampshire	12,390	5,776	46.6%	711.6	757.4	736.0	92.3	92.9	92.6
Isle of Wight	691	323	46.7%	631.1	675.2	654.6	92.3	96.2	94.4
Portsmouth	496	236	47.6%	567.7	597.1	583.1	75.0	73.5	74.2
Southampton	1,045	489	46.8%	583.4	648.0	617.8	84.5	84.9	84.7
State-funded schools									
England	182,919	84,844	46.4%	754.2	787.3	771.9	97.9	98.6	98.3
South East	29,196	13,845	47.4%	757.3	795.9	777.6	97.6	98.5	98.1
Hampshire	749	326	43.5%	740.9	785.0	765.8	98.8	100.0	99.5
Isle of Wight	384	172	44.8%	634.8	682.3	661.0	96.5	95.8	96.1
Portsmouth
Southampton	89	21	23.6%	575.6	732.0	695.1	95.2	97.1	96.6

*Covers all state-funded mainstream schools, academies, free schools, city technology colleges (CTCs), state-funded special schools and FE sector colleges. Excludes pupil referral units (PRUs), alternative provision (AP), hospital schools, non-maintained special schools, other government department funded colleges, independent schools, independent special schools and independent schools approved to take pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Source: SFR03/2016

Figure 13: Level 3 results of young people in state funded schools in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years

The use of the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset to gather destinations data for the first time this year means that the coverage of the key stage 5 destinations data has improved, which is an important development, although it means the data is less comparable with previous years (although education destinations are less affected than employment outcomes). Also the definition of disadvantage changed this year (from eligibility for FSM to include FSM and LAC). The tables at figure 14 and figure 15 give the destinations overview for the last two sets of data. These are students who were mostly academic age³ 17 in their final year of key stage 5 study (but there are also a number of students of academic age 16 and 18 in the cohort). A student is only included in the cohort if they have been entered for at least one A level or other level 3 qualification. AS level and vocational qualifications are included as level 3 qualifications if they've entered qualifications of a similar total size to at least one A level.

Local Authority	Number of students		Overall education or employment /training destination		Any education destination		UK HEI	
	Total	% Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
England	362,930	46.7%	86%	90%	65%	66%	47%	49%
South East	63,025	47.8%	87%	90%	60%	60%	43%	44%
Hampshire	12,380	47.3%	88%	91%	57%	58%	43%	44%
Isle of Wight	770	47.4%	84%	86%	60%	61%	44%	43%
Portsmouth	550	44.5%	80%	85%	47%	53%	25%	30%
Southampton	1,170	47.0%	82%	92%	51%	60%	28%	38%

Source: SFR47/2016.

Figure 14: KS5 Local Authority: Percentage of 2013/14 level 3 students in state funded schools and colleges, going to, or remaining in, an education or employment destination in 2014/15 (provisional)

³ At August 31

	Number of students		Overall education and/or employment / training destination		Any education destination		UK HEI	
	Total	% Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
England	358,970	46.8%	73.0%	74.0%	65.0%	66.0%	47.0%	49.0%
South East	60,370	47.7%	67.0%	69.0%	59.0%	61.0%	42.0%	45.0%
Hampshire	12,110	47.3%	61.0%	62.0%	55.0%	56.0%	40.0%	42.0%
Isle of Wight	710	50.7%	69.0%	69.0%	66.0%	66.0%	46.0%	48.0%
Portsmouth	410	46.3%	51.0%	52.0%	49.0%	52.0%	28.0%	29.0%
Southampton	980	44.9%	61.0%	57.0%	56.0%	55.0%	33.0%	40.0%

Source: SFR05/2016

Figure 15: KS5 Local Authority: Percentage of 2012/13 level 3 students in state funded schools and colleges, going to, or remaining in, an education or employment destination in 2013/14 (provisional)

The size in the level 3 cohorts varies across the local areas. The table below shows the numbers of students represented in the underlying data (rounded).

	UK Higher Education		Further Education College		Other education		Sustained employment and/or training destination*		Not recorded in a sustained destination		No activity captured in the data	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
National	80,250	95,415	25,150	26,765	4,940	4,720	35,990	46,305	16,530	15,035	6,720	5,135
Hampshire	2,495	2,840	665	680	175	235	1,795	2,155	525	445	200	170
Isle of Wight	160	175	35	45	20	20	90	100	50	45	10	10
Portsmouth	60	90	40	50	15	25	80	100	30	30	15	15
Southampton	155	240	85	75	45	55	170	200	65	45	35	10

*Employment destinations include students with sustained employment recorded in the Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs data for the first two terms (October to March) and students with a combination of education and employment making up the participation criteria.

Source: SFR47/2016 underlying data

Figure 16: Number of level 3 students in state funded mainstream schools and colleges, in 2012/13, going to, or remaining in different destinations in 2013/14

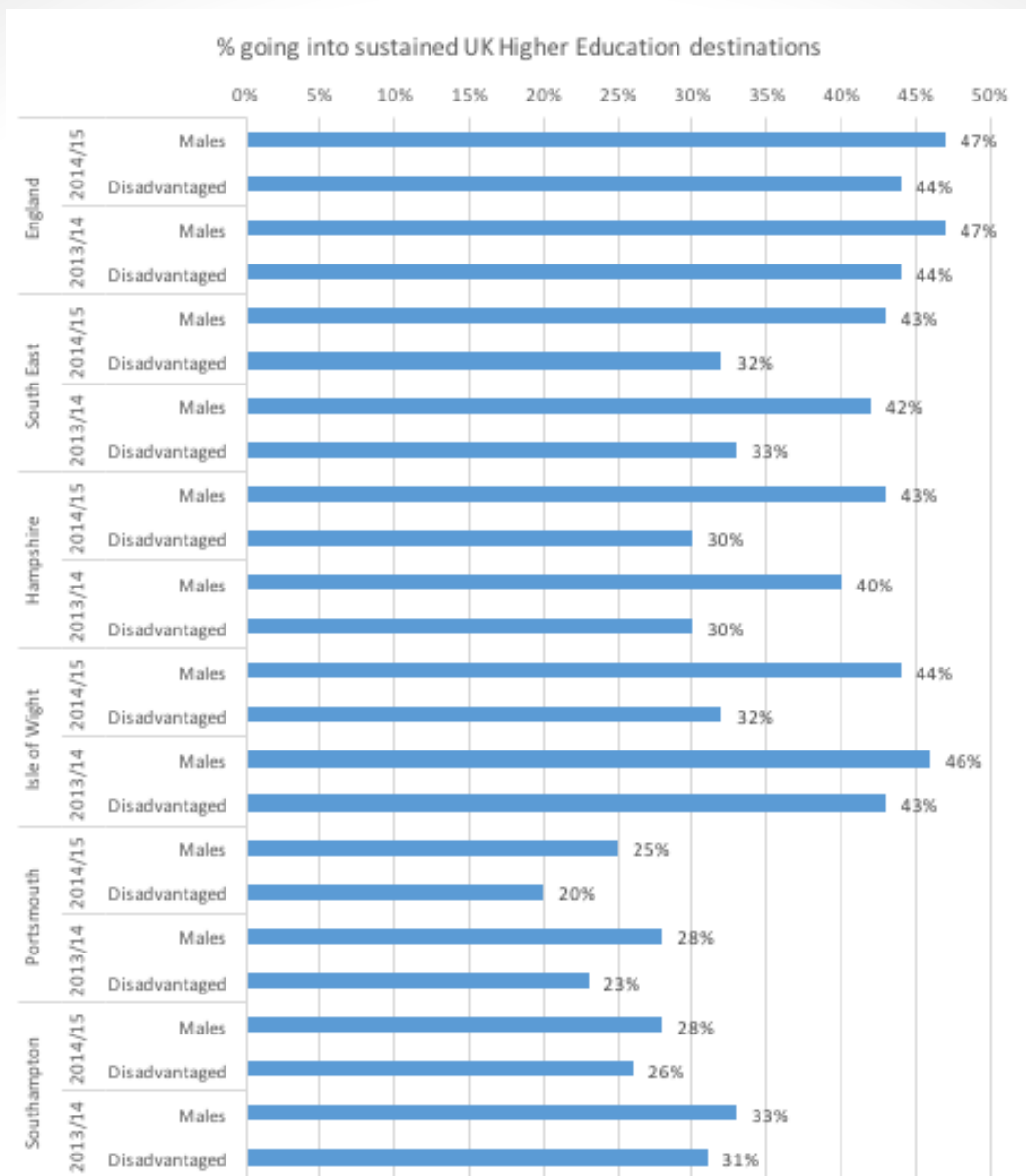
The number and share recorded in the Level 3 cohort as having an Apprenticeship outcome in 2014/15 is given in Figure 17. Proportionally more males than females had an Apprenticeship destination in Southampton.

	Males		Females	
	No (rounded)	%	No (rounded)	%
Hampshire	505	9	380	6
Isle of Wight	25	7	30	7
Portsmouth	30	13	40	13
Southampton	55	10	50	8

Source: SFR47/2016 underlying data

Figure 17: The share of level 3 cohort progressing to Apprenticeship in 2014/15

Students are considered disadvantaged if they have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years, have been looked after by the local authority, or have been adopted from care. Disadvantage status for key stage 5 students is shown for the first time this year. This is because pupil premium funding was introduced in April 2011 and this is the first year students completing key stage 5 can be identified as having been within this definition of disadvantaged. Students eligible for free school meals are a subset of the wider disadvantaged group. Both disadvantage and free school meal eligibility are based on information recorded when students were in year 11.



Figures for 2014/15 are provisional (SFR47/2016). Figures for 2013/14 are revised (SFR05/2016)
Figure 18: Shares going into UK Higher Education

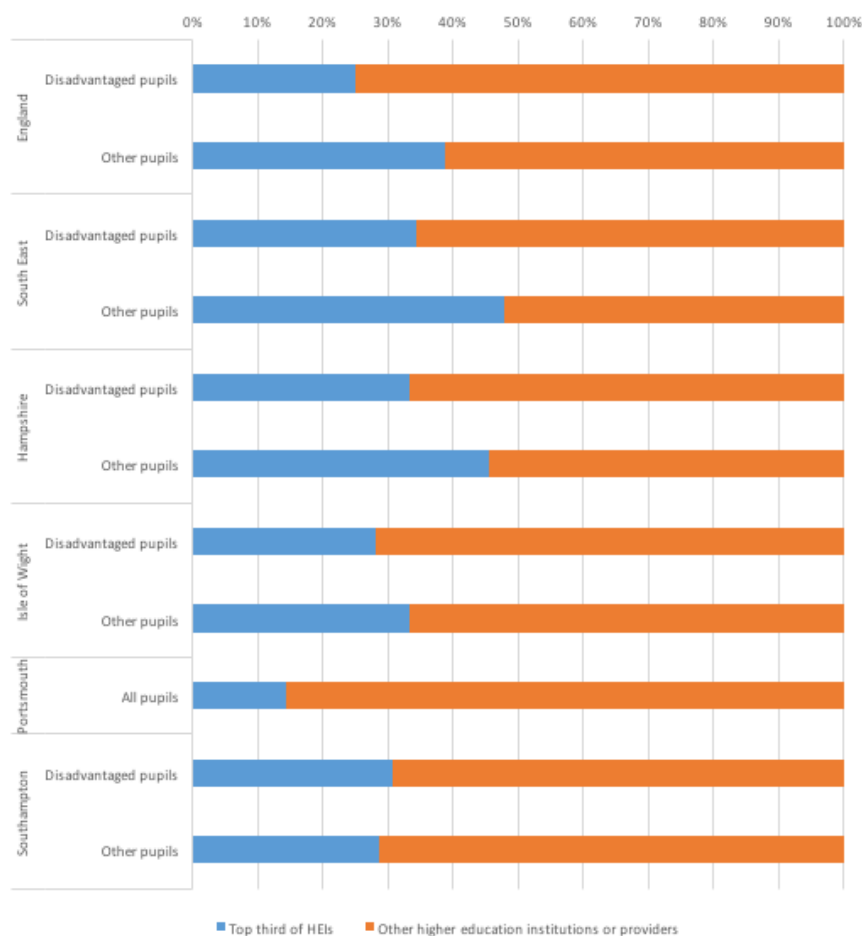
The table at figure 19 below shows the shares in the destination data cohort by different types of higher education. Relatively low shares of boys go into the ‘top third’ of HEIs in several of the local areas. Top third of higher education institutions (HEIs) can differ slightly between years. Other higher education institutions are those not in the top third, and other providers includes students undertaking higher education provision at a further education college.

	Males						Females					
	Top third of HEIs		Other higher education institutions or providers		Russell Group (incl. Ox. and Cam.)		Top third of HEIs		Other higher education institutions or providers		Russell Group (incl. Ox. and Cam.)	
	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014
England	18%	18%	30%	29%	11%	11%	18%	17%	32%	32%	2%	11%
South East	20%	20%	23%	21%	11%	12%	20%	21%	23%	24%	3%	12%
Hampshire	18%	18%	24%	22%	10%	10%	20%	19%	24%	23%	4%	12%
Isle of Wight	15%	13%	30%	32%	8%	6%	14%	14%	29%	33%	5%	5%
Portsmouth	2%	4%	23%	24%	X	X	6%	6%	24%	22%	7%	X
Southampton	8%	7%	20%	25%	4%	4%	12%	12%	27%	28%	9%	8%

X indicates percentage is less than 0.5%.

Figure 19: Level 3 destinations in 2014/15 (provisional) share by HE type: Mainstream schools and colleges (state-funded only)

As Figure 20 shows below, leavers who are classed as being disadvantaged are proportionally less likely to go to a top third HEI. The differences between disadvantaged and other students tends to be narrower in areas where overall progression to HE after Level 3 is relatively low. Figures were suppressed in the case of Portsmouth due to data protection because of the small cohort size.



Source: SFR47/2016

Figure 20: Split between types of HEIs for L3 leavers from disadvantaged groups in the L3 destinations cohort compared to all other leavers in 2014/15 (provisional)

The underlying data for the Level 3 destinations tables in 2013/14 at the institutional level includes a breakdown by ethnic groups for 34 schools and colleges across the four local authority areas. The table below calculates the aggregate numbers and rates for all destinations recorded for white ethnic background students, based on the institutional level figures. Southampton has proportionally more non-white students across local schools and colleges included in the data compared to other areas.

	Cohort*			Went on to a sustained destination	
	Number of students (sum of school cohorts)	Number of white students (sum of white school cohorts)	% white students	Number of white students recording a destination	% of white students with a destination
Hampshire	12,710	10,530	82.8%	6,410	61%
Isle of Wight	680	630	92.6%	410	65%
Portsmouth	410	340	82.9%	170	50%
Southampton	960	760	79.2%	440	58%

*Level 3 cohort in in 2012/13, who entered an A Level or other Level 3 qualification, going to, or remaining in destinations in 2013/14

Source: SFR05/2016

Figure 21: Summary of institutional level ethnicity data by local authority area

Attainment at Level 3 is generally lower across the area for males than females, although differences tend to be smaller in areas where attainment is lower overall. Tracking of the Level 3 cohort beyond KS5 suggests that fewer males in Southampton and Portsmouth are progressing into a sustained destination and overall most recent figures suggest that rates of progression for male learners into UK HEI destinations are significantly lower than their female peers and other males in parts of Hampshire and the South East. Data also suggests that progression rates of male learners are falling. Disadvantaged males (for example, FSM recipients and LAC) are less likely than their more advantaged peers to progress into HE, although in Southampton the difference between the two groups is smaller than in other local areas (however, progression rates for both groups are low overall). Overall in the area disadvantaged males are less likely to progress to a top third HEI, however in Southampton the reverse is true. HEI progression is lower overall for white students compared to non-white peers.

3. Why are white working class males underrepresented in HE?

There is abundant data to show that white working class young men are facing significant disadvantage in relation to HE progression. There is less evidence available as to the underlying causes for these differences, with much of the literature available focusing on the impact of class more broadly. However, from a brief review of recent literature the following are likely to be at least some of the root causes for the growing under-representation of this target group.

Attainment

There is clear evidence that the progression and attainment of white British disadvantaged males lags behind their peers. “Once all other socio-economic factors have been taken into account, white British Boys from low socio-economic backgrounds make the least academic progress during secondary school” (Impetus, 2014, p. 5). “Among those pupils eligible for FSM [free school meals], white British pupils were the lowest attaining group in 2013” (Stokes et al, 2016). Indeed, for the last decade, white British boys who receive Free School Meals have been “either the lowest or second lowest performing ethnic group” (Kirby and Cullinane, 2016, p. 1). As this table from Strand et. al. (2015) indicates, white British students who receive Free School Meals have the lowest attainment rates compared with their peers from similar socio-economic backgrounds:

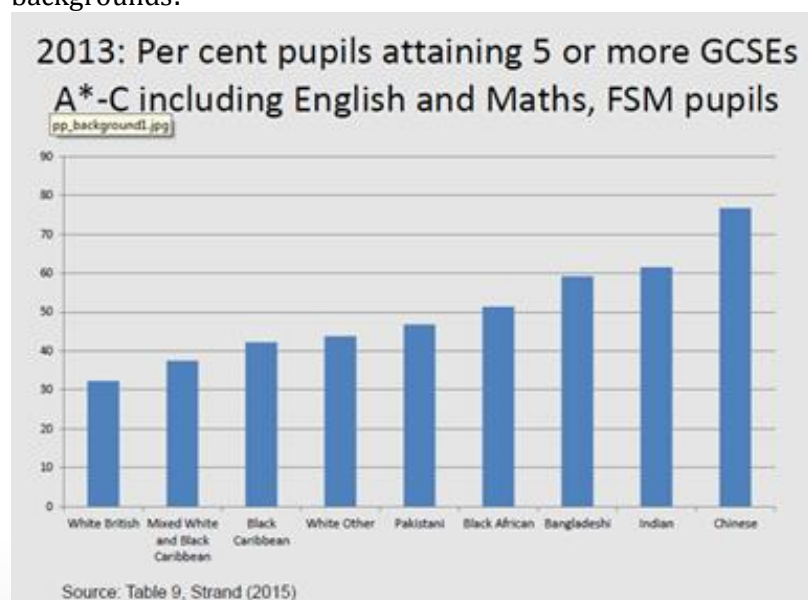


Figure 22: Attainment at GCSE level in 2012-2013 for FSM pupils by ethnicity

For white working class children, their lower educational outcomes in school have been previously overlooked, as Demie and Lewis (2011, p. 263) found within their research:

The worryingly low-achievement levels of many white working class pupils have been masked by the success of middle class white children in the English school system. ... The root causes of underachievement have also been identified within factors such as low-literacy levels, feelings of marginalisation within the community, low level of parental education and lack of targeted support to raise achievement and to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage, a legacy of low aspiration and a disinterest in learning that prevents pupils from fulfilling their potential across a range of areas.

The reasons for lower academic achievements among working class white pupils are challenging and complex. In addition to the success of middle class white children overshadowing the systemic underachievement of their working class white peers, the achievements of female white working class students could be obscuring the lower attainment of their male white working class peers.

It is however argued that differences in educational attainment alone cannot fully explain the differences between HE progression rates of white British working class young men and their peers. There is evidence that even where attainment is high, those from a lower socio economic background are less likely to progress (Marshall, 2002) and it is argued that in the United Kingdom, young peoples' futures are still largely determined by their background rather than by their academic aptitude. As Ball (2010, p. 157) explained, "The UK remains low in the international rankings of social mobility when compared with other advanced nations. Parental background continues to exert a very powerful influence on the academic progress of children".

Aspirations

There is significant evidence that young people from lower socio economic backgrounds are less likely to aspire to higher education and there is a suggestion that low parental aspirations, or at least low parental expectations, influence the aspirations of young people. Goodman and Gregg (2010), as reported by Baars et al (2016), found that '37% of low-SES mothers wanted their 9-year-old to go to university compared to 81% of high-SES mothers.' Furthermore, Strand (2014) suggests that white pupil's lower aspirations (when compared to ethnic minority groups) were likely to be contributing to their lower HE participation rates. However, recent work (Stahl, 2016) suggests identifying poverty of aspiration as a cause of under-representation in HE is an inadequate and overly simple approach to a complex issue, with the suggestion that a greater understanding of how this group constructs their identity is required.

Perceptions of HE

It is argued that white working class males may hold more negative perceptions of HE compared to their peers. In their review of recent literature Baars et al (2016) identify a range of evidence that suggests working class students and males in particular have a more negative and potentially less accurate picture of HE than their more advantaged peers. There is also a suggestion that higher education is 'incompatible' with working class culture and in some instances may be associated with 'femininity'. It is further suggested that, for working class students, higher education is perceived potentially as a risk rather than 'a natural step on their pathway to professional level work' (HEA, 2011).

Costs and benefits

The year tuition fees increased to £9,000, "the percentage of state-educated pupils going on to universities and colleges in 2013/14 fell to 62%" (O'Carroll and Fishwick, 2016). As Jones stated (2016): "The 2012 rise in student fees, from £3375 to £9000 per year, made England one of the costliest places to attend university in the world". Recent research suggests that academically promising young people from working class backgrounds may be more "debt averse" and less likely to see the value of attending university (Jones, 2016). "Public discourse assumptions that lifestyle gains, identity gains and enhanced future earnings will outweigh the deferred price of participation may not always hold" for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Jones, 2016, p. 290). As Giroux (2002, p. 445) wrote:

For many young people caught in the margins of poverty, low-paying jobs, and the casualties of the recession, the potential costs of higher education, regardless of its status or availability, will dissuade them from even thinking about the possibilities of going to [university].

The same conclusions were reached within research with white, working class boys by Stahl (2015, p. 167): “The boys knew the value of education, but the majority of the participants saw education as a risk rather than a certainty, whereas their educators saw education as the certainty and low-skilled employment as the risk”. As recent research has found (Ashley et. al. 2015; Wakeling and Savage, 2015), working class students were less likely to be employed in as high paying jobs as their middle class peers even after completing their undergraduate degrees, so the perceived rewards may not outweigh the risks for working-class students.

Belonging

In addition to the rise in tuition fees, working class students’ sense of belonging at university, or lack thereof, has also been explored as a factor discouraging academically capable students from applying to university (Jones, 2016). Even for students who do pursue an undergraduate degree, their sense of belonging can impact their overall university experience (Curran, 2016; Evans, 2010; Leese, 2010; Mangan et. al. 2010; Ingram, 2009).

Decision making

Baars et al (2016) suggest that there is evidence that ‘white working class boys’ decision-making may make them less likely to progress to HE’ (p. 15). Their report commissioned by Kings College London, suggests that differences in access to relevant cultural capital, reduced access to information through role models and lower use of official sources of information reduces the effectiveness of the decision making process of white working class young men.

4. Retention and success of white working class males

4.1 The national picture

The 2014 National strategy for access and student success in higher education developed jointly by HEFCE and OFFA (BIS, 2014), emphasised that efforts to widening participation relate not only to HE access but also to improving students’ progression through their programme and on to further study or employment. The need to consider widening participation within a student lifecycle framework is driven by national evidence that HE outcomes differ between different groups and for the case of white working class males the evidence is that they are disadvantaged in relation to their class. Zimdars et al (2015, p. 11) states that:

Analysis of HE outcomes for different student groups shows some consistent patterns, with the least-advantaged students (those from low socio-economic groups) having consistently lower attainment and progression outcomes even after controlling for other factors such as type of institution. HEFCE has shown these differences to be statistically significant with regard to attainment and employment outcomes. ...77% of students from areas of very low HE participation (fifth quintile) gain a degree, compared to 85% for the most advantaged students (first quintile); a difference of over 8 percentage points (HEFCE 2013/15). There is a similar pattern in the attainment of ‘top’ degrees with only 45% of the least advantaged gaining a first or upper second class degree, while 59% of those from the most advantaged quintile did so. Students from the lowest HE participation areas (POLAR3 quintile 1) are least likely to get a degree and go into a job. Only around two-fifths (41%) got a degree and went on to a graduate level job or further study.

In addition to disadvantage related to their socio-economic group, there is strong evidence that white working class male students are disadvantaged in relation to their gender. The evidence is that overall male students are less likely to continue on their studies than their female counterparts: in 2013-2014, 91.8 percent of UK domiciled female students compared with 89.7

percent of males continued. The data also shows that female students are more likely to achieve a first or a 2:1. HEFCE (2014) report that when all other factors are considered there is an unexplained difference between the genders of an approximately five percent points. In relation to ethnicity the data suggest there is a positive difference between the outcomes of white students (including but not limited to white British) and their peers from BME backgrounds. It is suggested that, when other factors are controlled for, the proportion of BME students achieving a first or 2:1 is approximately 15 percentage points lower than white students.

4.2 Southampton Solent University

Male students

Most recent figures from the university (Southampton Solent University, 2016c) suggest that in 2014/2015 there were 17.6 per cent more males than females studying at the university (58.8 percent compared with 41.2 per cent). These figures are a reverse of the national picture which shows that within the UK HE population as a whole there are 12.2 percent more females than males and comparing data from 2014-15 and 2013-14 shows there the proportion of males studying at the University is growing, whilst nationally evidence is that the proportion of females is on the rise. The institutional figures mask significant gender differences within individual schools. For example, 'The School of Art, Design and Fashion had 66.8% females, whilst the School of Maritime Science and Engineering had 86.8% males' (Southampton Solent University, 2016c, p.70) and although the university population was disproportionately male 'a higher proportion of females continued with their studies (91.1% females compared with 86.9% males, a difference of 4.2%)' (p.70). The university has also identified an attainment gap for male students 'At Solent there was an attainment gap of 13.7% for firsts/2i's in favour of females (76.7% compared with 63.0%)' (p.70).

Working class students

2014-15 data shows that on average the continuation rate for home UK domiciled students on first degree courses was 88.8 per cent (Southampton Solent University, 2016c). This compares with a continuation rate for students from low participation neighbourhoods (LPN) of 87.7 percent, representing a difference of 1.1 percent (down significantly from 4.1% in the previous year). Data further shows that on average 69.8 percent of students achieved a first/2i degree, compared with 70.2 percent of LPN students, representing a difference of 0.4% above average (compared to 1.3 percent below average in 2013-14).

White working class males

An examination of POLAR3 low participation neighbourhood data (Southampton Solent University, 2016b) showed that the proportion of white working class males applying to Southampton Solent University 'increased over the five-year period from 5.5% in 2011-12 to 6.8% in 2015-16. In addition, the proportion of applicants accepting a place increased over the five-year period from 6.0% in 2011-12 to 7.1% in 2015-16.'

White working class* males	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
% of Applications	5.5%	6.4%	6.7%	6.3%	6.8%
% of Acceptances (participation)	6.0%	6.4%	7.2%	6.9%	7.1%

*defined as living in a POLAR3 Quintile 1 postcode area

Figure 23: Percentage of white working class males applying or accepting a place at Southampton Solent University

The report further identified that the participation gap between white working class males and the most advantaged white male students was narrowing. It is reported that in 2011-12 'the participation gap between the acceptances by white working class male and the acceptances of the most advantaged white male students at the University was 5.8%, but by 2015-16 this gap reduced to 3.2%. This shows the University was attracting greater proportions of white

working class males' although clearly a gap does remain (Southampton Solent University, 2016b)

In summary, Southampton Solent University are attracting more male students when compared to the performance of the sector as a whole and the participation gap between white working class males and their advantaged peers is narrowing. Figures suggest that on course there appears to be a gender gap in relation to retention and attainment, a gap which favours female students. However, figures on ethnicity suggest that white students are more likely to continue in their studies and have higher levels of degree attainment than their non-white peers.

4.3 University of Portsmouth

Male students

The most recent University of Portsmouth Equality and Diversity report (Ross, 2016) provides demographic data for the undergraduate student population for the 2014/2015 academic year. Overall, the university had over 18,000 undergraduates with a gender ratio of 57 percent male to 43 percent female. As per Southampton Solent University, this ratio is significantly different from the national average for the 2014/2015 academic year, which was 43.8 percent male to 56.2 percent female (HESA, 2016). According to HESA data (Ratcliffe, 2013), only 6 higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (out of 161 institutions for which data was available) had undergraduate populations that included 57 percent (or higher) male students.

During the 2014/2015 academic year, out of 16,706 UK/EU undergraduates, 758 out of 9,355 UK/EU male students (8.1 percent) withdrew from the University of Portsmouth, compared to 398 out of 7,351 UK/EU female students (5.4 percent) (Ross, 2016). Among the UK/EU students who withdrew that year, male students were more likely to indicate their reason for withdrawal as academic failure than female students (36 percent compared to 22 percent) (Ross, 2016). Related, among the UK/EU students who progressed to the next stage of their course during the 2014/2015 academic year, 77 percent of male students progressed compared with 84 percent of female students (Ross, 2016). With regards to degree attainment, 74 percent of male graduates achieved a 'good degree' (a First or 2:1), compared with 78 percent of female graduates.

Overall, while the University of Portsmouth has higher numbers of UK/EU male students, they are more likely to withdraw from their course, less likely to progress to the next stage of their degree, and less likely to earn a First or a 2:1 degree compared with their female counterparts.

White, working class students

Within the University of Portsmouth Equality and Diversity Report, the UK and EU undergraduate students for the 2014/2015 academic year were 73 percent white. HESA (2016) statistics for the same academic year (2014/2015) indicate that UK undergraduates included 77.5 percent white students. However, this is not a direct comparison as the University of Portsmouth data includes EU students while the HESA data is for UK students only.

During the 2014/2015 academic year, 822 out of 12,160 UK/EU white students (6.8 percent) withdrew from the University of Portsmouth, compared to 271 out of 3,613 UK/EU Black Minority Ethnic (BME) students (7.5 percent) (Ross, 2016). For white students who withdrew, the most selected reasons for withdrawal were personal (33 percent), academic (27 percent), and financial (21 percent) (Ross, 2016). White students were less likely to indicate their reason for withdrawal as academic failure than BME students (27 percent compared to 46 percent) (Ross, 2016).

At the University of Portsmouth, among white students from UK neighbourhoods in which higher education participation is low, 89 percent progressed to the next stage of their course, compared with white students from high participation neighbourhoods among which 81 percent progressed and compared with BME students, 83 percent from low participation

neighbourhoods and 73 percent from high participation neighbourhoods progressed to the next stage of their degree (Ross, 2016).

With regards to degree attainment, overall, 79 percent of white students achieved a 'good degree' (a First or 2:1), compared with 63 percent of BME graduates. Among graduates from low participation neighbourhoods, 76 percent of white students from low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR3/Quintile1 neighbourhoods) achieved a First or 2:1, compared with white students from high participation neighbourhoods, among which 80 percent earned a First or 2:1 and compared to BME graduates, 65 percent from low participation neighbourhoods and 64 percent from high participation neighbourhoods earned a First or 2:1. Among the 2015 graduating class, 2,623 white students (93 percent) were from high participation postcodes, while just 197 white students (7 percent) were from low participation postcodes (Ross, 2016).

In summary, white students from low participation neighbourhoods at the University of Portsmouth are more likely to progress to the next level of their course than any other group. They are more likely to earn a First or a 2:1 degree than their BME peers. However, they are marginally less likely to earn a First or a 2:1 degree than their white peers from high participation postcodes (Ross, 2016). However, the available demographics data for the University of Portsmouth fails to account for intersectional characteristics. Data about gender and race are accounted for separately. While white students from low participation postcodes are progressing within their courses and earning 'good degrees' at high rates, the data available about male students indicates that the specific progression and degree outcomes of white, male students from low participation postcodes may not be as favourable as the averages stated in the University of Portsmouth Equality and Diversity report for white students from low participation neighbourhoods in general.

Examination of data from both universities taking in part in the research suggests that an intersectional understanding of educational experiences and outcomes is necessary to address the inequalities faced by working class white young men. As Strand (2014, p. 164) made clear within his research on white working class educational achievement: "Interpretations of educational success and failure based exclusively on social class, ethnicity or gender do not explain the complexity in the data". This recognition of the impact of multi-faceted identities and diverse life experiences on students' educational experiences is echoed in Stahl's research on white working class male students in education (2015, p. 87):

Learner identities are regulated through many overlapping and competing fields that lend considerable weight to the intertwined relationship between social class, aspiration and neoliberalism. How these young men perceive the structures of social inequality remains an important access point for understanding why they engage or disengage with their education.

The intersections of identity categories have complex impacts upon higher education entry, aspirations, and participation of working class white young men.

5. Pre-entry findings

5.1 Attitudes to learning

Survey data suggests that the vast majority of male respondents hold positive attitudes to learning. Figure 24 below shows the percentage of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with a range of statements. Respondents overall were most likely to agree that it was good to be seen as hardworking at school/college but least likely to agree that they worked hard in their current studies. Differences between learners from high and low POLAR3 groups do emerge. Those in the lowest quintiles gave more positive responses to all statements. The biggest difference is observable in the percentage of learners saying they were keen to learn new or different things, with 100% of learners from POLAR3 quintiles 1 and 2 agreeing with this statement (15 percentage points higher than POLAR3 quintiles 3-5). The pattern of responses

suggests that respondents can see the value of education but are not as engaged in their current learning as they could be.

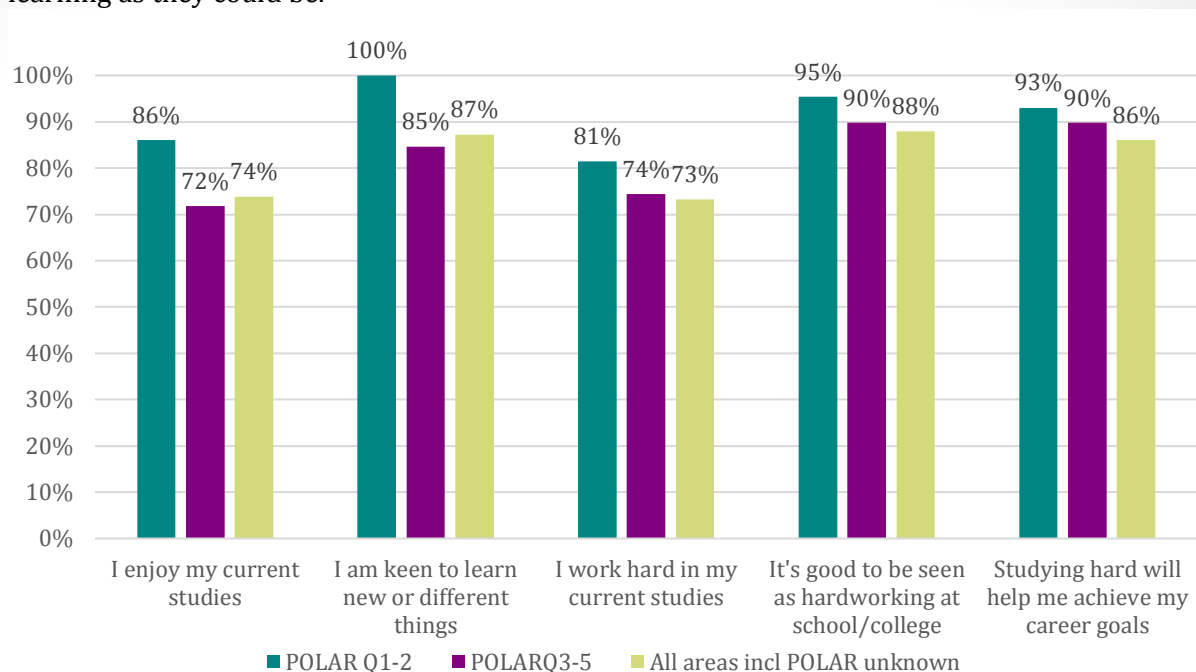


Figure 24: Attitudes to learning - agreement with statements (% who agree/strongly agree) by POLAR3 quintile

The majority of learners in the focus groups also demonstrated a positive attitude to learning and their studies, although this was not the case for all. As part of the sessions learners were asked to discuss their response to the statement ‘It is good to be seen as hardworking at school’ and it was striking that all year 10/11 (FG2) participants moved towards the strongly agree end of the line, with several expressing enjoyment in learning:

I'll get a better job; I want to learn.

I want teachers to notice that I'm improving; The more work you put in the more you get out.

FE college participants also generally agreed that it was positive to be seen as a good student at college. However, when asked about their enjoyment of learning they tended to be more neutral and some actively disagreed:

I can't stand it.

I like the practical side.

The data suggests that this group of learners generally hold positive attitudes to learning and are happy to be viewed as hardworking. Some may not be fully engaged in their current learning but most are positive about future opportunities.



“I want teachers to notice that I'm improving; The more work you put in the more you get out.”
--focus group participant

5.2 Attitudes to next steps

Across all survey respondents there were a lot of similarities between attitudes to what is important when taking their next step, although some differences between learners from different POLAR3 groups were identified. Both groups were most likely to say they wanted a job that suited their interests and skills, although this was a much bigger motivator for those in lower POLAR3 quintile areas. Respondents from higher HE participation areas were more likely to say they wanted a well-paid job or wanted to provide financial support for their family. They were also more interested in a route that provided them with independence.

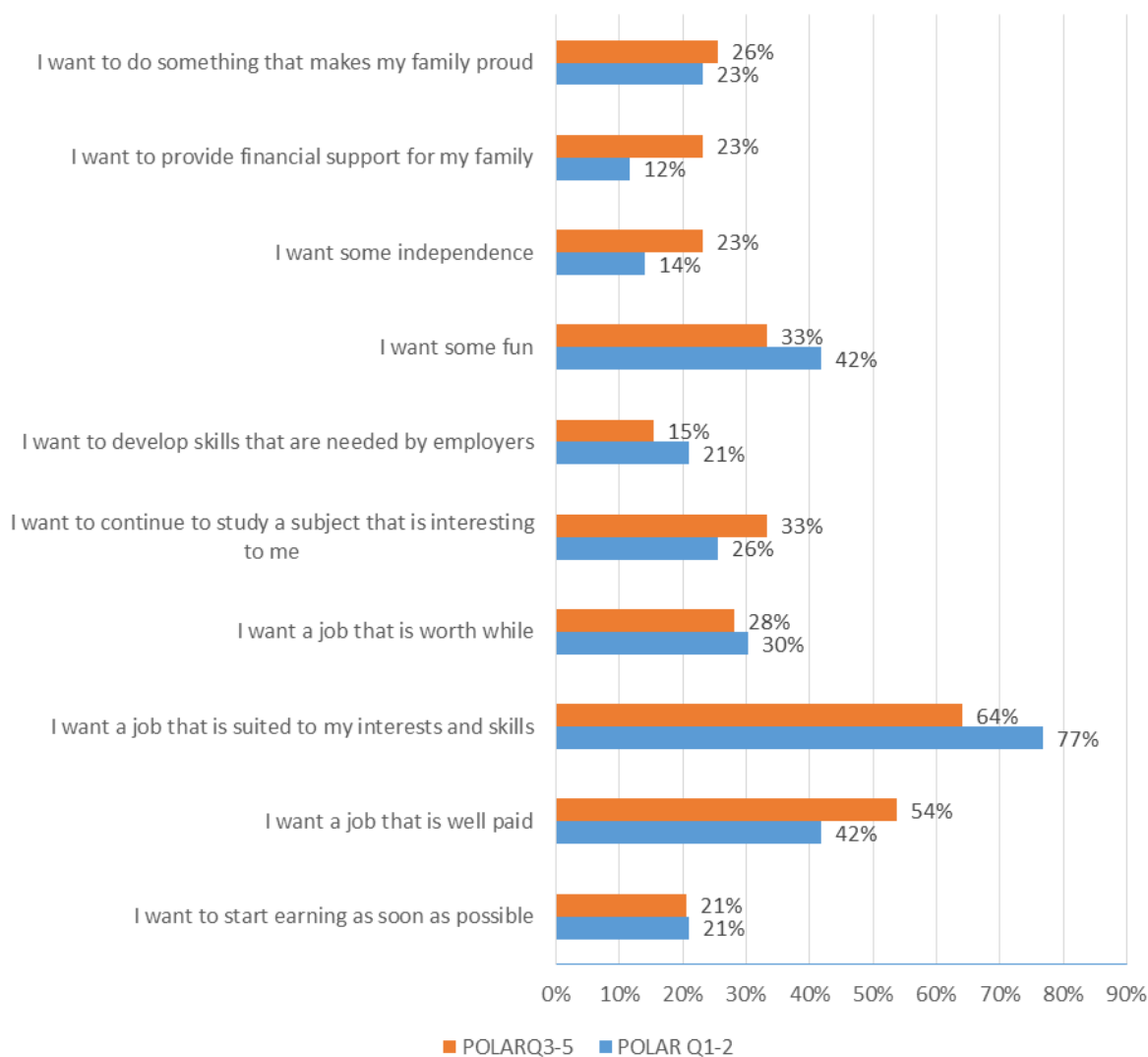


Figure 25: Attitudes to next steps (% selecting each option as important factor in taking their next steps) by POLAR3 quintile

5.3 Interest in university as an option

Most survey respondents (75%) were in post-16 education provision and the vast majority of the remainder were still in the compulsory education stage. At the post-16 level respondents were mainly studying within a sixth form college, although 14% were at a school sixth form and 11% were studying in FE. Figure 26 shows how the respondents who are currently in education were broken down according to what they would most like to do next. Overall 15% of those currently in education said they wanted a job next, 11% wanted employment with training/apprenticeship and 3% wanted to start a business. Most of the remainder said HE was their preferred choice, indicating a high level of interest amongst the sample.

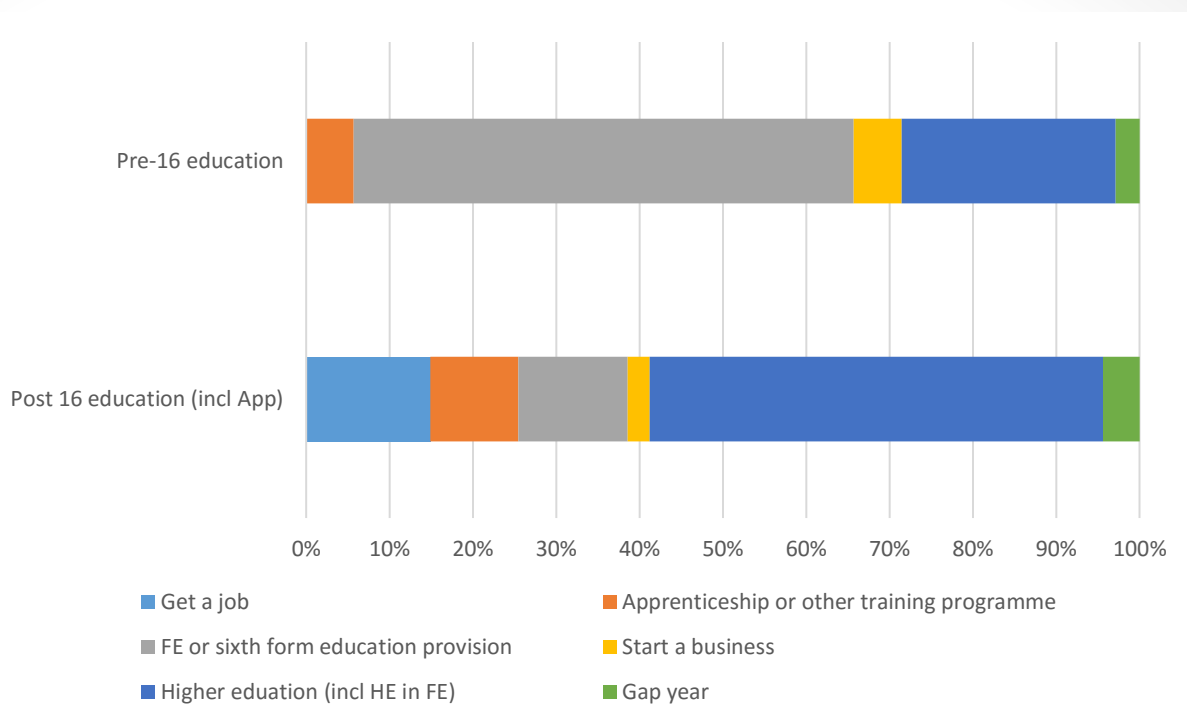


Figure 26: What would you most like to do next? Responses from post 16 level survey respondents

The questionnaire sought to test levels of interest in HE further by asking respondents to rank their agreement against certain statements. Subject to the caveat that the numbers of responses are very small (particularly in the pre-16 cohort), the sense emerged from the responses that males from areas of traditionally lower HE participation were less convinced in terms of their interest in HE at the pre-16 stage of education. However, at the post-16 level the gap between people who say ‘yes’ they are interested in HE was reversed. This reinforces the view that continuation in education at age 16 is a major constraint to HE progression amongst educationally disadvantaged pupils.

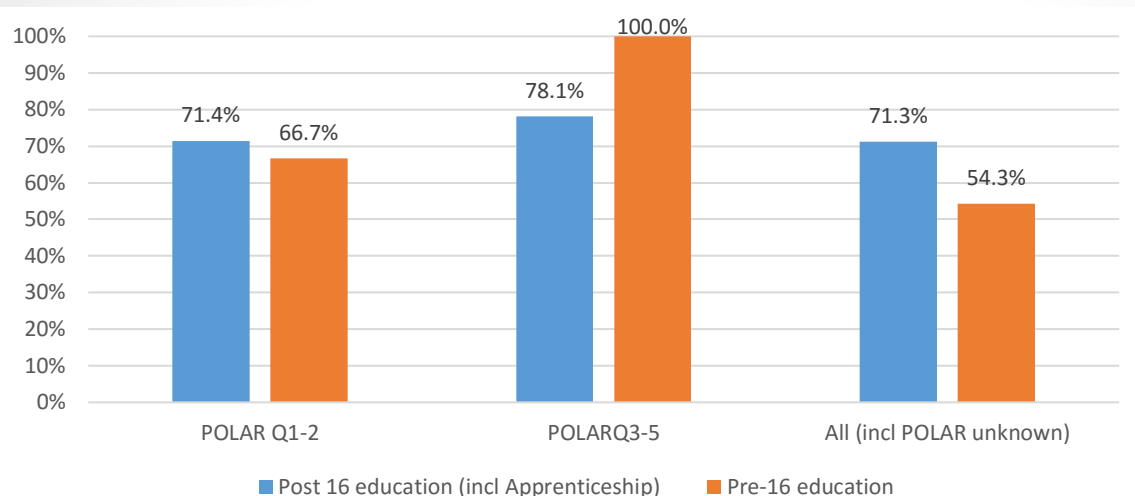


Figure 27: Are you interested in studying a course at university? - % of all respondents who said 'Yes'

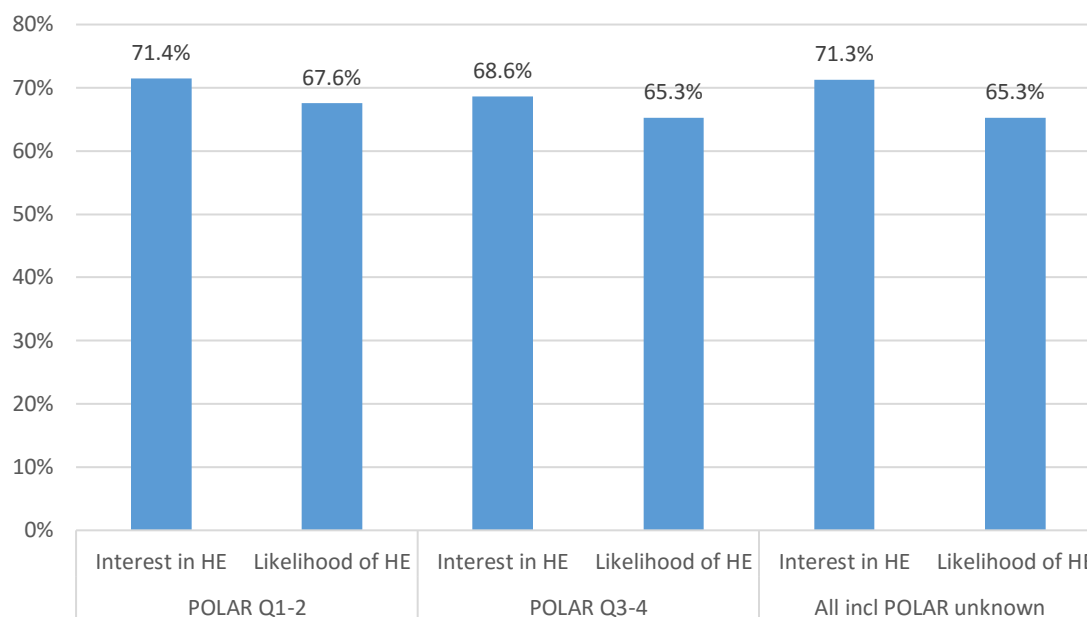


Figure 28: Reported interest and likelihood of studying in HE (Survey respondents currently in post-16 education only)

Likelihood of progressing to HE was also measured by focus group participants, who rated themselves on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being a high likelihood of progressing. The average score across all participants was 6 but there were significant variations between the learner groups. FE learners rated themselves by far the most least likely to progress to HE (with an average score of just 3) and 6th Form learners had the highest ratings (an average of 8.5 out of 10).

Survey respondents were also asked to select up to three types of university provision that would most interest them (Figure 29). Most said they were interested in full time courses, although respondents from low participation areas were least likely to say this. Respondents from low participation neighbourhoods were more likely than those from higher participation areas to say they would be interested in doing a sandwich course, getting sponsorship from an employer and taking a gap year. Those from the least disadvantaged areas were more likely to be interested in Degree apprenticeships.

	POLAR Q1-2		POLAR Q3-5		All	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Full time course	26	61%	28	72%	98	62%
Part-time course	6	14%	8	21%	36	23%
Distance learning	4	9%	2	5%	17	11%
Sponsorship from an employer	14	33%	7	18%	32	20%
Degree Apprenticeship	4	9%	7	18%	22	14%
Sandwich course	9	21%	3	8%	25	16%
Going after a gap year	8	19%	5	13%	25	16%
Going later on in life	3	7%	2	5%	11	7%
Total	43	100%	39	100%	157	100%

Figure 29: Percentage of survey respondents interested in different types of HE provision by POLAR3 quintile

5.4 Perceptions of university

In order to gather perceptions of HE, survey respondents were asked about their agreement with a number of statements about university as an option (Figure 30). Respondents overall showed high levels of agreement with three statements in particular – ‘My family thinks university is a good option for me’/‘There are plenty of places to get advice about university’/‘The courses and subjects available at university are suitable for me’. Perhaps not surprisingly the statement that had the lowest levels of agreement was ‘University is affordable’.

There was a good deal of similarity between respondents from different POLAR3 areas although respondents in low participation neighbourhoods were less likely than those from high participation areas to say that they would enjoy being a university student and that university is necessary for the career they have in mind. They were also slightly less likely to say they’d get a job as a result. The biggest difference was in the share who agreed that university is affordable which was much lower amongst low participation neighbourhood respondents. Interestingly, this group were more likely to say university is open to everyone, and that they’d be accepted if they applied. However, it is important to note that the differences may be related to where respondents are currently studying as findings from the focus group suggest FE learners and 6th Form students differ in their views towards the accessibility of HE.

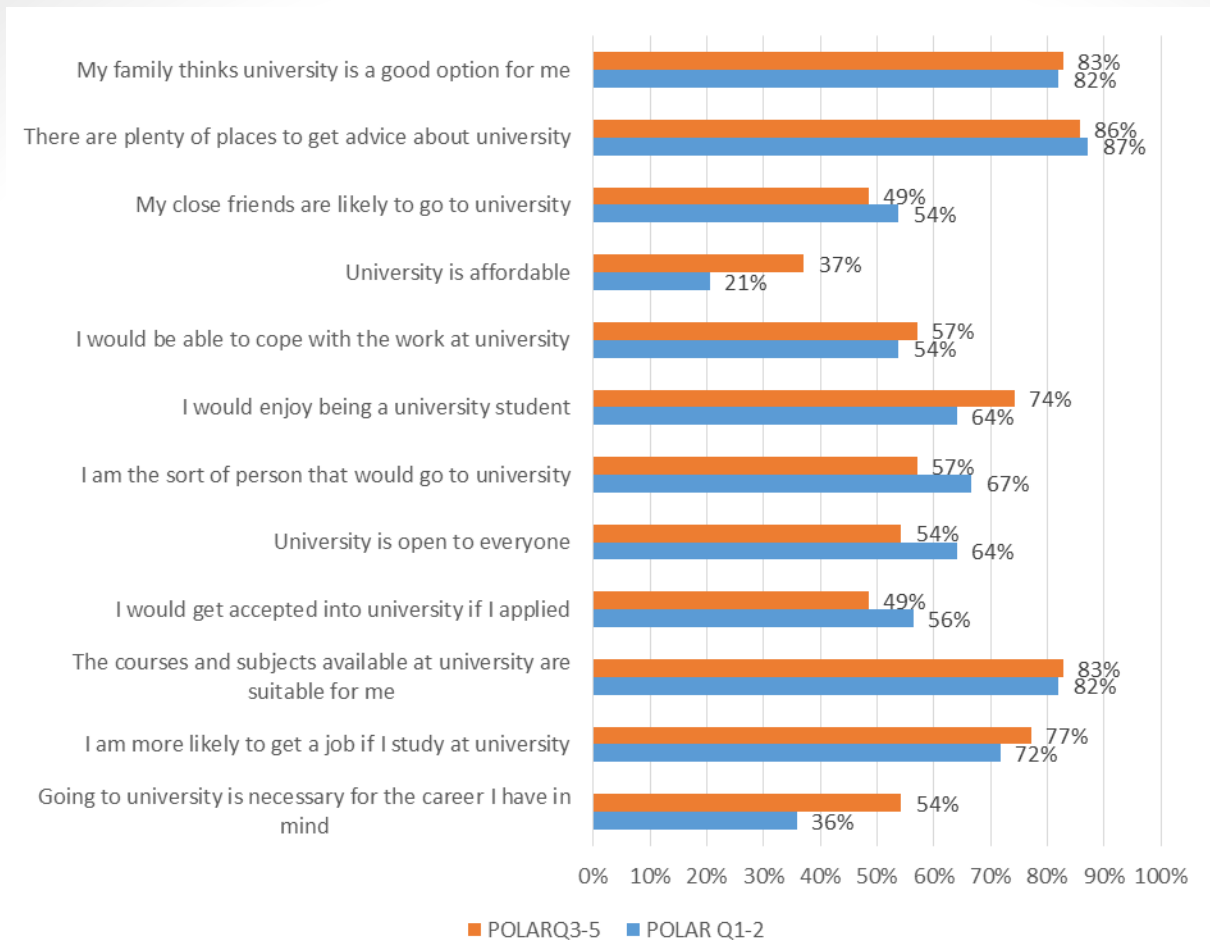


Figure 30: Perceptions of HE - agreement with statements (% who agreed or strongly agreed) by POLAR3 quintile

To gather a deeper understanding of perceptions held, focus group participants were asked to explore their views of university in a number of different exercises. To start to share their thoughts the groups were asked to write down their initial associations with the word ‘university’, to which they provided a range of words and phrases with both positive and negative connotations.

Words related to the cost of studying and specifically the debt incurred were routinely and quickly identified (*‘the fees and expenses seem a bit daunting’*) as well as the more positive perceptions of the educational opportunities offered by university (*‘I would like to better my knowledge’*) and the potential access to a better career (*‘A route to better jobs’*). Some respondents identified that it would involve more learning and the learning would be harder (*‘like school’, ‘hard work’*) and for some this was viewed negatively (*‘More education – in a bad way’*). Others saw university as offering independence (*‘the chance to be my own person and move forward with life’*) and access to new friends (*‘It’s also the chance to make new friends, different people and getting more opportunities’*). Overall the majority of initial thoughts and feelings were clustered around costs/debt, the chance to learn



“It’s the pressure - now at college you don’t know if you’ll get the grades, then at university will you enjoy the course and keep up, and then having to look after yourself, budget, cook and clean. It’s dealing with it all. The stress.”
 --focus group participant

and access to jobs and careers. There were some differences in the general tone between the groups, with the 6th Form students more positive overall.

Perceptions were explored a little further with small group discussions and participants were able to identify a wider range of possible advantages and disadvantages of university as an option. The descriptions of university provided by the respondents have been broadly categorised as follows:

Positive features of university	Negative features of university
<p>Access to (well-paid) employment <i>You can get top level jobs and more choices in where you want to work.</i> <i>My father has a good job in a garage and earns more than his manager but he cannot progress because he doesn't have a degree.</i> <i>Earn more when you leave.</i> <i>You get more qualifications and then get the job you want.</i> <i>A degree which leads to a better future.</i></p>	<p>Costs/debt <i>Poor people can't go.</i> <i>If you're poor, it will be difficult.</i> <i>Paying all that money and not enjoying it.</i> <i>It costs too much; I've seen it on the news about the costs.</i></p>
<p>Higher social status <i>Stature.</i> <i>That you're able to get a better job and be looked up to, some social standing.</i> <i>If you go to university, people look at you better.</i></p>	<p>Long term commitment <i>It's a lot time to dedicate to one thing and you might be stuck in that profession.</i> <i>It's a lot of commitment and time – do I want to do it?</i> <i>It's hard to get into, is more pressure than college and will take years for me to do what I want. Then will I get a job?</i> <i>You have to plan so far ahead and put in all that time, the years and then it could be years wasted.</i></p>
<p>Improvements to quality of life <i>It's about helping you get the job that you want and a better life.</i> <i>University sets you up for life.</i></p>	<p>Separation from home and family <i>I wouldn't want to move away.</i> <i>My mum is a single parent and I wouldn't want to leave her.</i> <i>However much your family annoy you and even if you're going to the pub lots, you will miss your mum and mucking around with your little brother. I think it will be lonely.</i> <i>Spending too much time away from family and friends; you have to stay away from them – you're going to miss them.</i></p>
<p>Friendships <i>It's also the chance to make new friends, different people and getting more opportunities.</i> <i>It'll be good – meeting new people, doing new things will make you more confident.</i> <i>Have fun, meet new people.</i></p>	<p>Requires confidence <i>I find it hard speaking up in a group and doing presentations; it'll be hard.</i> <i>Having to meet new people puts me off.</i></p>
<p>Opportunity to learn/further interests <i>It will be hard work but worth it.</i> <i>Learning something you enjoy.</i> <i>Working in a positive challenging environment – feeling passionate about it.</i></p>	<p>Academic & personal pressures <i>All the emotions – stress and anxiety – workload, exams and pressure to succeed.</i> <i>It's the pressure - now at college you don't know if you'll get the grades, then at university will you enjoy the course and keep up, and then having to look after yourself, budget, cook and clean. It's dealing with it all.</i> <i>The stress.</i></p>

	<i>Stress links to, like debt and time and travelling, it might all get on top of you and you end up with mental health problems.</i>
Independence/personal growth <i>The chance to be my own person and move forward with life.</i> <i>Growing to be your own person, exploring new cultures and having fun.</i> <i>You get more knowledge – you learn more things about your course but also life.</i> <i>It would make you more mature, more independent.</i>	Competition for graduate jobs <i>Lots of people have degrees; it's the normal thing to do. You might not get the job you want because of the competition.</i> <i>A degree is a good thing, but with fees of £9000 and the costs going up every year the stakes are high. What if you spend all those years, are in debt and you don't get a job?</i>

Figure 31: Positive and negative features of HE as identified by focus group participants

In addition to identifying general advantages and disadvantages of university, participants were asked to reflect on what they perceived to be the pros and cons of progressing on to HE for them as an individual. Analysis of their written comments shows that although many of the same issues were identified as in the group exercise, more participants started to identify concerns about the potential negative impact on their well-being and their ability to cope with the demands of becoming a HE student. There were also new disadvantages identified by some individuals that clustered around being independent, for example potential homelessness, not having enough food and having to travel.

There were differences between the focus groups, for example the younger learners were most concerned about being separated from their family and feeling unable to cope with living independently. Post 16 learners were most concerned about the financial implications, with those in the 6th Form college more likely to say the costs were outweighed by the benefits. In terms of advantages vocational FE learners were less likely to emphasise access to a specific career, they tended to see university as a way of generally increasing their level of education and this probably relates to the fact that many of the participants felt that university was not necessary for the job they had in mind.

The most regularly identified advantages and disadvantages of university at an individual level were categorised as follows:

Focus Group	Personal advantages	Personal disadvantages
Year 9-11 pupils (FG1 & FG2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased level of education 2. Be successful in life 3. Better job prospects 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Separation and loneliness 2. Becoming independent 3. Costs/debt
Sixth Form learners (FG3 & FG4)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Independence and social life 2. Access to better/chosen career 3. Increased level of education 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Costs/debt 2. Separation and loneliness =3. Coping with stress, pressures =3. Long term commitment
FE College learners (FG5 & FG6)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased level of education 2. Independence and social life 3. A new opportunity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Costs/debt 2. Coping with stress, pressures 3. Separation and loneliness

Figure 32: Categorisation of individual pros and cons identified by focus group participants

5.5 Perceptions of the alternatives

Focus group participants were asked about their perceptions of the alternatives to university. The younger participants (FG1 and FG2) had limited understanding of different routes available to them, particularly with regard to vocational or work based learning. Participants based within the 6th Form were aware of apprenticeships and work based training and could see the benefit of learning and earning and getting a chance to try out an occupational area. However, most saw the biggest barrier as low pay and possibly limitations on the level of job you might be able to progress to.

Apprenticeships are really variable – they completely depend on the specific employer, where it is and how they do it as to whether they're worth anything.

Participants in the FE based focus groups were more readily versed in the alternatives to university, they could see that finding work, doing further courses at college and finding an apprenticeship were all open to them.

You can get a job and work your way up, you don't have to be stuck on the tills.

You could do more at the college – level 2 or 3.

Most were knowledgeable about apprenticeships and many learners appeared more comfortable discussing this route than HE. Participants identified low pay as the main disadvantage to apprenticeships and paid work but they understood that this varied between employers. They readily identified a range of advantages and overall their tone was most positive about apprenticeships as an option.

You get paid while you work.

Get experience in the industry.

You have a better chance of getting a job – if you've been there 3 years, they might want to take you on.

Learn new things, don't need to go to college – or just one day a week.

Some FE based participants highlighted the fact that they had received information about apprenticeships and jobs and this had increased their understanding and awareness. This however appeared in contrast to the lack of information they had received about university.

They're [apprenticeships] talked more about here.

Our sort of subjects are around apprenticeships – you never hear anyone say 'I'm going to Uni after this'.

This is our first thing about university.

5.6 Sense of belonging

In order to test whether participants felt they might belong at university, groups were asked to take part in a positioning exercise. Group members were asked to place themselves along an imagined continuum from strong disagree to strongly agree in response to specific statements and then discuss the reason for their choices. The statements were nuanced depending on the age of the learners and not all statements were used in every session due to time constraints.

'University is open to everyone'

Most year 10/year 11 (FG2) participants felt that university was open to everyone – they tempered this by saying that it was possible for most people if they worked hard and got the required grades. Most also felt that they would cope well at university though they shared more nuanced feelings about this:

I don't know if I'll cope as I don't like crowds.

I'm nervous about presentations.

I like learning and think it'll be ok.

Most of the 6th Form students (FG3 and FG4) felt that university was open to everyone emphasising that they felt that if someone really wanted to go then they could:

If I really want to go, to make it, I can.

However, several felt that this was not the case. A couple felt that university might not suit some people and also that some people might be prevented from attending for personal reasons:

You may not be good at working in the way that university requires.

People may have personal issues at home e.g. you may have to look after your mom.

Some felt that university was not open due to inequality of educational opportunity. These learners appeared to be aware of the impact of background on HE progression:

They will accept an application from anyone but it doesn't mean you'll get in. There isn't equal opportunity, even though we say there's free education, some schools give a much better education and if you're in the North of England the schools aren't as good.

It's not just about the grades, some universities want a certain sort of person with a certain background. It doesn't mean that every university will say no though – different universities want different sorts of people. Some are just interested in the grades, intelligence and others look at the sort of person, like if you're determined.

If you're from a working class background you might not apply.

In addition, most of the 6th Form learners felt that university would be hard work and would bring a lot of pressure, but they varied in terms of how they individually responded to this. Some participants felt, to varying degrees, that they would cope with the work at university:

It will be really tough but if I put my mind to it I can do it.

Some were more neutral and some felt unsure:

I don't know if I could cope, until I try I won't know.

I don't know yet if I want to go – if I decide that I want to, that it's the best thing then I think I will be able to cope.



*"I don't know anyone who's gone. It could be welcoming but I'm from a council estate and I could feel out of place."
--focus group participant*

When asked how well they thought that they'd fit in to university, it was noticeable that none of the participants in one of the 6th form sessions (FG3) were very confident. Several were neutral on it and several expressed reservations:

I don't know anyone who's gone. It could be welcoming but I'm from a council estate and I could feel out of place. It might be snobbish. I'll probably stay at home and commute.

It depends on the situation – there'll be different sorts of people and it may be hard to fit in.

I think I'll fit in on the social side but it depends on my classmates. Basically I hold views that other people don't like and it might make it difficult to stay. I've heard from friends that students with different political views e.g. about Brexit are really pushed away by professors and students.

Overall participants from the FE college were less positive as to whether university was open to all, although some were more neutral and one thought it was achievable 'if you put the time and effort in'. Those who disagreed highlighted barriers relating to costs and grades needed. Several felt that HE was not equally accessible due to the sorts of people who were accepted. Those who disagreed suggested:

It's not for the less fortunate.

It's if you have the money to do it.

It's about your background, your grades.

They don't really accept all different sorts of people, so if you've gone through normal education that you haven't paid for they don't always accept them.

Survey respondents were also asked to rate their agreement with the statement that 'university is open to all'. Overall approximately half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement but respondents from low participation neighbourhoods were more likely to agree than those in areas with higher HE participation (a difference of 10 percentage points). However, respondents were less likely to agree that they would enjoy being a university student, with 74% of POLAR3 quintile 3-5 learners agreeing in contrast to 64% of those in Q1 and Q2.

Overall qualitative data suggests that younger learners were more likely to think university was open to all but that older learners were more concerned about their ability to get in and fit in. Survey respondents from low participation neighbourhoods were significantly less likely to agree they would enjoy being a HE student.

'I'm the sort of person that would go to university'

Survey data suggests that overall approximately 60% of respondents would agree that they are the sort of person that would go to university, although a quarter were unsure. Those in low participation neighbourhoods showing higher rates of agreement (see figure 30 above).

Focus group data confirms that males are relatively split in their response to this question. In the positioning exercise, Year 9 participants (FG1) placed themselves fairly evenly between strongly agree, neutral and strongly disagree. Those who disagreed did so for various reasons:

Cause I'm dumb

I don't need a degree for what I want to do

I can be but I don't know if I want to go yet



“Maybe it’s about social standing. Because of sexism and feminism girls may get the feeling that if they don’t go to university it’s perceived as not achieving. There’s a push for them to go. There’s not that sort of focus aimed at boys.” --focus group participant

Cause I’m from a council estate.

More like posh people, who are stuck up their own xxx.

The second group of FE learners (FG6) were generally more positive about fitting in, however concerns remained particularly in relation to the need to mix on a social level:

It’s something different that I’ve never done it before so I might be a bit worried, a bit overwhelmed by the responsibility.

It depends on what sort of person you are – if you’re not the socialising type you might not make friends.

Participants across all focus groups were asked to think about whether there was difference between genders and whether girls or boys were more likely to want to progress into HE. Many felt that gender was irrelevant (*We’re all the same; what’s gender got to do with it?*) but certainly not all. In all of the focus groups at least some of the participants felt there were differences and that meant that girls had a strongly likelihood of progressing. It was suggested that girls are more likely to plan, to achieve better at school and possibly be encouraged more:

Girls are more mature – they plan more and work harder.

Girls do better at school so maybe they’re off to a better start.

People think girls are smarter.

Since women have become more independent, historically and it’s not just men going out to work then there’ll be more Uni applications from women.

Some participants felt that males were more attracted into work and apprenticeships, which is played out in the destination data reviewed as part of the research:

Those who agreed did so as they linked it to getting a job that they wanted. The majority of participants felt that they would be able to cope with the work at university but stressed the need to ‘*put the effort in*’.

The year 10/11 participants (FG2) also had a mixed response. A couple decidedly thought not as they had already decided to do an apprenticeship; a few thought that they definitely were the sort of people to go and the others were less clear. Their reasons appeared to be related to a lack of clarity about the grades they’d need for certain courses and whether they would want to go:

I don’t know if I want to go yet. It depends on the grades I need.

The participants from the FE college also varied in their responses, although the learners on level 2 motor vehicle course (FG5) were more negative overall, with most placing themselves towards strongly disagree:

I wouldn’t get the grades.

Boys go where the jobs are.

Girls are more likely to want to do education because they don't do jobs like building.

'My parents think university is a good option for me'

Survey respondents suggest that overall parents are supportive of HE as an option, with just over 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. There were no observable differences between the respondents from different POLAR3 quintiles. However, there was much lower agreement with the statement 'I want to do something to make my family proud', with only a quarter agreeing with this statement. Findings that were echoed in the focus group sessions.

In the year 9 focus group (FG1) when asked about whether families thought that university was a good option for them, four of the group agreed strongly saying their parents encouraged them, several were neutral and a few edged towards disagreeing:

My parents didn't finish uni and they leave it up to me.

My parents want me to do better in life.

I'm naughty but my mother thinks I can do it if I work so she really wants me to go.

I'm more practical and my mom said its ok for me not to go.

Most of the year 10/year 11 participants (FG2) said that their parents thought that university would be a good option for them, with only one saying it was very much his decision:

My dad is pushing me – he wants me to do better than them.

My parents want me to go – it's clear; They leave it up to me really.

Interestingly, parental support was the topic that prompted the most strength of feeling in one of the 6th Form focus groups (FG3). Several participants felt very strongly that they paid no attention to what their parents thought, a feeling that was echoed with some learners in the second of the 6th Form focus group (FG4):

I will do as I please. I like some of my family and not other members and I don't give a damn what they think.

My parents don't say much, they are encouraging but I failed one year and I think they're worried for me that I won't be able to do it. But I will make my own choice.

I'm the only one who's going to decide.

For others the views and wishes of their parents still clearly mattered. For some, it was a matter of expectation since parents and siblings had all gone to university. In the words of one boy *it's a requirement*. For others, without a family history of going to university, there was a sense of wanting to make their parents proud and achieve in ways that their parents had not had the opportunity to do:



"I know my parents want me to go, they've always thought education is important but it's kind of been in the background. They don't really say it but it's in the back of my mind – I want to make them proud."
--focus group participant



Neither of my parents went so they'd be happy if I went. They think that I can do better than them.

It's up to me what path I take, but I want to make my parents proud.

6th Form participants (FG3) also debated the impact of background on HE progression:

People do get messages from parents – if you live somewhere like Oxford or Winchester and are from a certain family then you're going to go to the best universities.

A similar pattern emerged in the focus groups with FE learners. Some learners felt that their parents encouraged them to go to university, others disagreed with this but in discussion it became clear that parents were encouraging them to study but they were adamant that the decision was theirs, for others the subject of university had just never really been discussed:

I just do what I want. They do have a view -- they'd want me to study better, but it's my life. I'll decide.

They want to see me do well but it's up to me.

"You get into debt and you don't know what will happen at the end of the three years. You hear about other people, like at work, that have done a university course and they find it difficult to get work in the subject they have done and so they have to do something different. They end up being overqualified and have to look at other careers." --parent interviewee

They have their opinion but it's up to me – I don't know what they think.

Although limited data was collected from parents those interviewed were supportive of university as an option for their Son:

He is the first to even go to college from either my family or my husband's family, university is all new to us. He will be the first in the family to go. I want for him what I never did.

And, although there was a general concern about the cost of studying and the possibility of incurring substantial debt without promise of a job the parents interviewed all felt they would encourage university if their Son's desire was strong enough.

The research suggests that overall the majority of current learners feel relatively supported by their parents, although learners (particularly those in post 16 education) report that parental opinion is of no or little importance.

5.7 Advice and support

It was evident from the focus groups that learners vary in their knowledge and understanding of different options open to them, including HE. The biggest difference appeared between the participants from a 6th Form and those based in the FE college. The general consensus amongst the FE learners was that they had in the past received limited information or encouragement regarding progression towards HE and they identified this as a potential reason for their limited interest in university as an option:

You don't really know anything about it and people don't really go to something they don't know about.

Focus group participants discussed what kinds of help might help young males to make informed decisions about whether to progress to university. Although many participants identified specific information needs (for example entry requirements and costs) many of the ideas and responses were about allowing learners to get a better understanding of what it is like to be a HE student and to experience the university environment. Contact with people (students and employers) was often suggested. Perhaps surprisingly, given the differences in prior understanding of HE as an option, responses across all of the focus groups were relatively similar and their responses can be broadly categorised as follows:

Real experience of HE	<p><i>A tester week to experience what it's like and not have to 'go in blind'.</i></p> <p><i>The university could just pay someone to tell us it's great, they could just lie – I'd prefer to go and see for myself, to see a lesson, where you live...To experience it first.</i></p> <p><i>Taster days at university where you are an actual student for a whole day.</i></p> <p><i>Have full on lessons so you know what it will actually be like.</i></p> <p><i>Find out how snobby the people are.</i></p>
Contact with current students	<p><i>Can we hear from students who come independently, not sent by the university, as they'll be more honest?</i></p> <p><i>Being able to interact with students in small groups so we can ask them questions and get the details from them.</i></p> <p><i>Hear from students – both those who think it's good and those who don't to balance it.</i></p> <p><i>Meet people from the same background</i></p>
Information about HE as an option	<p><i>University prospectuses, websites.</i></p> <p><i>Going to open days at universities.</i></p> <p><i>Make open days better – make them interactive, hands on and with more information about the courses not about the whole university. At the moment you're going into a course that you don't know much about. With A levels you've had years of doing GCSEs so you know exactly what you're choosing but with universities it's different.</i></p> <p><i>To know how the days are going to be.</i></p> <p><i>For someone to come in and talk to us about what it's like – what the lessons are like, how you live, how you study.</i></p> <p><i>Knowing the grades needed.</i></p> <p><i>Start giving us information earlier as its thrown at you all together and it's too much pressure.</i></p> <p><i>You need to know everything about it because it's one of the biggest decisions of your life and you don't want to get it wrong and be in debt after.</i></p>
Information about costs	<p><i>Knowing how costs of uni are covered.</i></p> <p><i>Exact price of courses.</i></p> <p><i>The cost, do you actually have to move into that house?</i></p>
Advice about how individual learners might be supported	<p><i>To have help from other people when you're there – so you help each other out.</i></p> <p><i>Not to get bullied – to know there was an adult that you could go to if you were bullied.</i></p>
Contact with employers	<p><i>Speak to those doing the job.</i></p> <p><i>Experience the job that you want to do by visiting a company or shadowing.</i></p> <p><i>Improve information on apprenticeships - whenever companies come in to give a talk they're really competitive. They don't treat you as a person; It's like a sales pitch.</i></p> <p><i>Speak to some businesses and find out what they recommend.</i></p>

Careers related information and advice (Inc. alternatives to HE)	<i>To know what areas you have to study for different jobs. Information on apprenticeships.</i>
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Figure 33: Types of support required to make informed decisions about HE identified by focus group participants

It is evident from their responses that information about university is not viewed in isolation, although many identified specific topics they would like to know more about they felt that wider information (about jobs and apprenticeships specifically) would be helpful in their HE decision making process. As well as information respondents were interested in experiencing what it is like to be a HE student, thus perhaps helping them to judge if they were a 'match' with the university environment. The issue of impartiality of information was raised by a number of participants (*You don't want representatives of the university because they're biased*) and they were keen to get access to people who could offer real insights rather than deliver a 'sales pitch'. Ensuring that information was provided in a timely fashion was also identified as important, with one group of 6th Form students highlighting that earlier information might reduce the feeling of being under pressure to make decisions. Not all learners felt further information and advice was necessary, although this view was limited and it wasn't clear without further exploration whether this view reflected low aspirations or informed career choice:

I don't want to go to uni, I don't really want anything high up so I don't want to find out about it. The job I want to do doesn't need it.

5.8 Barriers to higher education for white working class males in Southampton

In summary, the pre-entry research suggests that the following may all contribute to lower rates of HE progression for white working class males in the Southampton area:

Prior attainment: National and local school/college data suggests that this group of learners are less likely to have the levels of prior attainment required to make the transition to HE.

Patterns of post 16 progression: Evidence is that locally this group are less likely to make a secure transition into post 16 education and those that do progress into this route are more likely to go into the FE sector. Although progression is possible from vocational and work based provision, the route from sixth form to university is more well established and it is here that males are under-represented. Males are more likely to choose to undertake an apprenticeship and although Higher and Degree apprenticeships are set to grow the opportunity to take higher level qualifications through this route are more limited.

High level of risk: The research suggests that university is a high risk strategy for many of this learner group. Learners are very aware that university is now an expensive option and in most instances the chances of employment are not guaranteed. Although all learners will be 'gambling' by taking a university course, learners from working class backgrounds may perceive the risk to be higher and indeed they may well be right. Lower household income may mean less financial support from parents, thus increasing the levels of debt and worry about managing their money on a day to day basis. Lower levels of attainment generally amongst white working class males means for some learners their HE options may be limited and access to the highest tariff university may be restricted, which in some instances will impact on graduate employment outcomes. Given the low levels of HE progression in the area it is likely that this group of learners have fewer examples of HE success and therefore the risk may seem elevated as they are not surrounded by family and friends that have taken the gamble and won. At the same time, they are faced by regular messages in the media about financial costs of university. In contrast to the risk of university, vocational and work based routes are seen as more secure. Although there is less potential to earn it provides a less risky, more comfortable strategy which appeals to some of the learners we meet.

Negative Learner Perceptions: Individual learners all hold differing perceptions of HE as an option, influenced by their own experiences and set of personal circumstances. Almost all

learners could see real positive benefits from HE, however alongside worry over costs, there appears to be a whole range of thoughts and feelings about university that might dissuade some learners from taking this route. These perceptions appear to fuel the belief that HE is a risk.

HE – a stressful option

It was striking how many focus group participants characterised university as potentially a highly stressful experience. Some of this related to the impact of debt and living on a tight budget, but largely this was about their own ability to cope with the pressures that came with being a HE student, both academically and socially. Even in a group setting a good number of participants discussed the potentially negative impact on their health and well-being if they went on to university. Many respondents felt that the ‘requirement’ to move away from home and to live independently could lead them to feel isolated and unsupported and thus reduce their ability to cope with the pressures.

HE – an inaccessible option

The research suggests that university is viewed by some as relatively inaccessible to them. Much of this relates to not having the right entry requirements however many, particularly those studying in FE, characterised university as ‘not for people like us’. Some felt that their class was a particular barrier to getting in and fitting in.

HE – an irrelevant option

Some learners saw university as completely irrelevant to them as it was not the path they needed for their intended career. It is not clear whether their career choice was well informed or whether they had the potential to aim higher but there was a sense that these learners had closed the door on university at what was a relatively young age and couldn’t see why it would need to be opened.

Variable access to advice and support: There is evidence that learners have access to variable levels of advice and support and this may relate to where they are studying as much as their individual interests and needs, and although schools and colleges have a duty to provide advice and guidance on a range of options it is likely that institutions will be targeting support in a number of different ways which may mean some learners miss out. This impact of differential levels of support was felt during the qualitative research, with some learners and parents able to describe how their school or college was supporting them and others unable to recall any HE focused interventions.

6. Post-entry findings

Findings from the data collected for the post-entry research project are presented thematically within five subsections titled: Higher education: a risk worth taking?; Deciding to apply to university; Exploring aspirations; Career-certainty spectrum; and transitions into higher education. The data from the 678 first year survey respondents provides a rich opportunity to compare and contrast the experiences of the 97 survey respondents who specifically identify as white, male, British, first-generation, and traditional age (17-19). However, the primary focus of the findings is on the responses of the 97 survey respondents and 20 focus group participants that provide insight into the white, working class, male experience in higher education in the United Kingdom. Understanding their path to higher education and their aspirations provides insight into how to shape outreach and recruitment strategies to encourage students like them to pursue a university degree.

6.1 Higher education: a risk worth taking?

Findings from the focus group discussions revealed that white, British, traditional age males who are first generation students consider the choice to pursue higher education a risk that may not be worth taking, which echoes findings from other research focused on working class students (Jones, 2016; Archer, Pratt, and Phillips, 2001; Reay, 2001; Archer and Hutchings,

2000). Focus group participants shared the concerns they had whilst they considered whether or not to pursue a university degree, providing insights into the ways higher education may be seen as a risk for them.

Financial concerns were at the forefront of discussions with participants, including: understanding and taking on student debt; whether or not they could afford basic living expenses during their three years at university (even if they receive the maximum amount of student loans); and the fear that they might not find gainful employment upon graduation. This echoes findings from UCAS (2016, p. 23):

Financial issues were a recurrent theme and it was clear that cost and fear of debt are perceived to be deterrents to HE progression. This view comes not just from the most disadvantaged groups, but also from a 'squeezed middle' who do not qualify for any financial aid. Some talked about worrying that their parents would struggle to support them financially, and/or about paying back loans. There was a lot of feedback about debt. If debt was the reality, they questioned if it would be worthwhile.

From the post-entry focus groups, these quotes highlight a few examples of financial concerns:

I know a few people who don't come uni because their student loan [would be] just minimal and it just wouldn't be affordable ... So I think that's another thing that either puts people off ... is the money situation, especially with student loans.

A lot of my friends from college, they were always saying, 'Can't go to university 'cause we can't afford it' and in some cases that was very real. ... At an open evening for universities, where a parent put up their hand and said, 'The maintenance grant alone that they get isn't going to cover their first year. Could we possibly get some more 'cause we just can't afford it' and the guy just said, 'Unfortunately not.'

It's not that parents don't want them to go uni, it's the practicalities of they literally can't afford it. ... So [some students] will have to work during university. I didn't personally want to work during term time. ... I try to be really frugal, like don't spend a lot of money. ... People who are on that ... minimum [loan] and their parents can't support them, they're going to have to work at uni, which is gonna put extra stress on or just they will be too put off the idea [of going to uni].

For me [a major concern] was going there, not liking it and still having to have the debt. I didn't mind the debt per se, but it was more getting there, not appreciating the experience and having to go through it still accumulating all the debt.

In addition to the financial risks, some participants felt that it was risky to commit three years of their life to a university and/or to a degree programme that they may not enjoy or where they may not fit in, as highlighted by these quotes:

Like first day of moving it was like so scary, like I was 'Oh, what if I hate my flatmates? What if they don't like me? What if I can't live by myself?' But then you think 'I can do



"For me [a major concern] was going there, not liking it and still having to have the debt. I didn't mind the debt per se, but it was more getting there, not appreciating the experience and having to go through it still accumulating all the debt."
--focus group participant

whatever I want whenever I want to, can choose what I eat, can choose if I wanna go out and what time I can come home', so it's definitely positive and negatives but after 18 years ... of living with your parents it's definitely scary.

Like when I was at [other University] I went there and I was like 'No, I'm not feeling this, I don't see myself here', and then I came here and I was like 'Yeah, yeah, I can see myself here.'

We [my friends and I] were talking about uni, we were like 'Oh, what if you're just alone in your room and no one talks to you?' Oh, I can just picture like mad anxiety levels, and then there's also a fact like you are going on your own.

Some participants talked about considering apprenticeships or full time employment rather than going to university. Additionally, some participants shared stories about their peers from school who chose not to go to university. Their perspectives are illustrated through these quotes:

One of my friends actually was going to go to university but he didn't get into his first choice and his second choice was a proper back-up choice as it was low-down in the league tables, very low, and so he just simply said, 'Never mind, I'll just restudy for a year and try and get better grades, 'cause no way I'm paying over £27,000 to study there!'

I think circumstances have to be right 'cause two of my friends did go in through UCAS and did get places, but then ended up deferring them 'cause they didn't want to go at that time, so now they're spending the year working and then they're going to go. So I think it's to do with the debt as well and so when they actually go, they've got enough money to be comfortable and be more independent.

Some of them [friends] have gone into apprenticeships. My girlfriend's in an accountancy apprenticeship. University didn't really appeal to her.

People that are in the middle [on the fence about higher education] are probably mostly thinking about employability instead of uni life. People who are doing apprenticeships, they obviously want to earn money first and they know that uni's not worth doing -- the debt, and they want a job -- so people in the middle are more likely going to wanna be told that if you come here you can get a job as well as you'll have a good time.

I think there was like two types of people [who do not go to university]: one was the people that knew what they wanted to do and knew that they didn't need a degree for it, like some of my friends have gone into carpentry or things like that, where they can just go and get an apprenticeship, which will be better for what they wanna do because they'll just be learning on the job. Then you have the other people that had absolutely no idea what they wanted to do, and so I don't wanna go to uni and spend all the money that it costs on something that I'm not even sure if it's what I wanna do myself.

Participant: *One of my friends ... was going to go and do renewable energy somewhere, but instead he found an apprenticeship with [Energy Company] and he's gone through that path, so he chose that really, rather than university.*

Researcher: *So he's still pursuing the same career path but without the debt?*

Participant: *Yeah, exactly.*

Some participants also talked about parents who expressed concerns about higher education, as illuminated by these quotes:

Participant: *Throughout my entire life I've been told 'Don't get a degree, don't go get a degree. It's a lot of debt. You don't need that debt. Don't get a degree.'*

Researcher: *From whom?*

Participant: *My parents, teachers at school, teachers at college.*



*“Throughout my entire life I’ve been told ‘Don’t get a degree, don’t go get a degree. It’s a lot of debt. You don’t need that debt. Don’t get a degree.’”
--focus group participant*

My parents, my family [were not encouraging]. I had a sister who went to university and didn’t really use the degree she had. ... I think that’s one of the main reasons my family were quite -- [pause] They’re not against it now but they were against the whole idea of it, because of the amount of money you spend doing it and all that.

I’m a really indecisive person and my dad’s the same, so when I initially didn’t want to go to uni he was like, ‘No, you should go’ and then when I got in he was like, ‘Are you sure you wanna go?’ and then when I got here, he was like, ‘You should maybe think about dropping out if you don’t like it.’

While many of the focus group participants discussed the concerns they had about going to university, they all made the choice and took the risk to apply and enrol, committing three years of their life and taking on student debt to earn their degree and pursue their career goals. It is important to note that the data for

this research is collected from higher education participants, whose views of the benefits of higher education are likely to be different from non-participants because they have chosen to invest their time and future earnings into the university system. They have already decided that the benefits of higher education outweigh the risks. Other researchers have explored non-participants’ views of higher education (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Archer and Hutchings, 2000), which are worth reading in order to better understand those who have decided that the risks are too significant to bear. In the next subsection, the findings related to how the survey and focus group participants chose to pursue a university degree are explored.

6.2 Deciding to go to university

In a recent UCAS report (UCAS, 2016) titled *Through the Lens of Students*, findings related to the age at which young people become certain about their decision to pursue university are explored. The data shows that the younger a student decides that higher education will be part of their future, the more likely they are to actually apply to university (UCAS, 2016).

There is evidence that the earlier a learner engages, at least with the concept of progression to HE, the more likely they are to go on and apply to HE. When applicants were asked at what age they felt sure they would apply to university, 43 per cent said between the ages of 16 and 19, with disadvantaged applicants 19 per cent more likely to select this option. ... Almost half of the disadvantaged group were aged 16 or older before they felt sure they would apply to university (UCAS, 2016).

The report explored gender differences in the ages at which students become confident that they will apply to university, with nearly half of Male students indicating that they became certain about their higher education plans between the ages of 16-19. The figure below is from the report and shows that young people from POLAR3, Quintile 1 neighbourhoods, the most disadvantaged postcodes in which rates of higher education are the lowest, were more likely to indicate that they became sure they would apply to university when they were 16-19 years old (UCAS, 2016, p. 23). In contrast, one in four young people from the most advantaged neighbourhoods (POLAR3, Quintile 5) became certain that higher education would be part of their future by or before the age of 10.

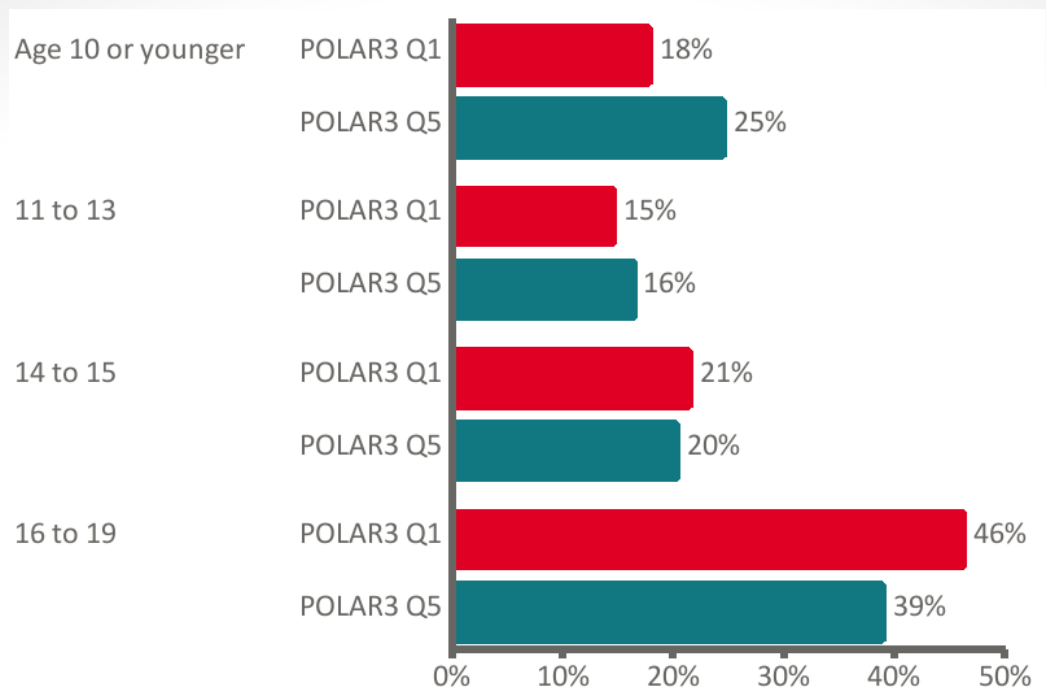


Figure 34: Proportion of respondents (weighted) indicating the age at which they felt sure they would apply to university (UCAS, 2016, p. 23).

Within the survey conducted for the post-entry research project, the same question that was utilised for the UCAS (2016) report was asked of all respondents: ‘What age were you when you felt sure that you would apply to university?’ The only adjustment made was an additional age category was included (20 or older) to account for the mature students who are first year undergraduates at the University of Portsmouth. The figure below represents the responses of all survey participants (n: 678). While the UCAS (2016) report indicated that, on average, 43 percent of students from all neighbourhoods indicated that they became certain about their higher education plans when they were 16-19 years old, 51 percent of the survey respondents for this study selected 16-19 years old as their response and only 11 percent selected age 10 or younger.

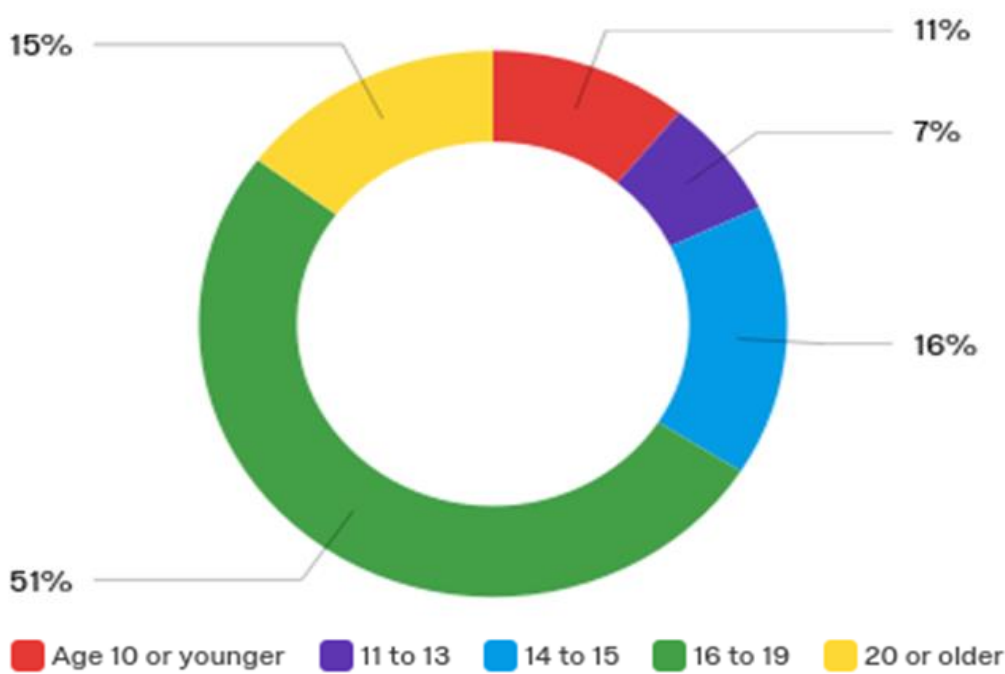


Figure 35: What age were you when you felt sure that you would apply to university? Entire survey population (n: 678)

Narrowing down to just explore the answers provided by traditional age respondents (those who are 17-19 years old) provides a more direct comparison with the UCAS findings. The figure below reveals the distribution of responses from traditional age respondents (n: 484). When the responses from mature students are removed, the percent of the respondents who selected 16-19 years old as their response is even higher, at 58 percent.

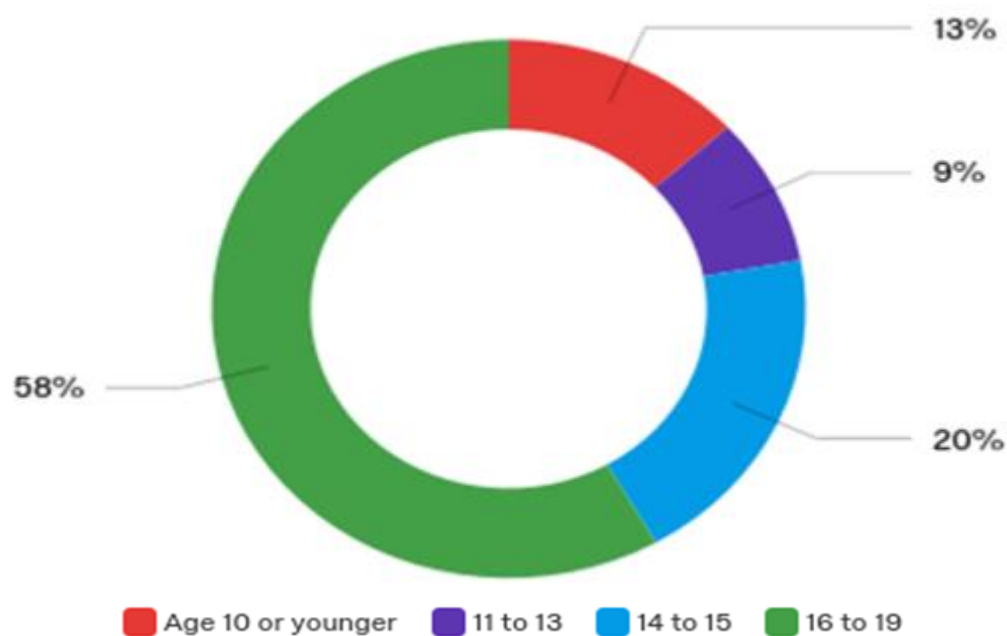


Figure 36: What age were you when you felt sure that you would apply to university? Traditional age (17-19 years old) survey respondents (n: 484)

Considering that the UCAS (2016) findings revealed that 46 percent of students in low participation neighbourhoods, who are likely to be working class, are deciding that they will apply to university between the ages of 16-19 and that 45 percent of all male students decide between 16-19, it was unexpected that the data from this research project suggests that white, working class males may be significantly more likely to make decisions about higher education later than their peers. As the figure below shows, 66 percent of the survey respondents who are male, British, first-generation, and traditional age students indicated that they became certain about applying to university between the ages of 16-19. That 66 percent figure is significantly higher than the 58 percent indicated by all traditional age peers who completed the first year survey at the university and even higher than the 46 percent of respondents from low participation neighbourhoods indicated in the UCAS (2016) report.

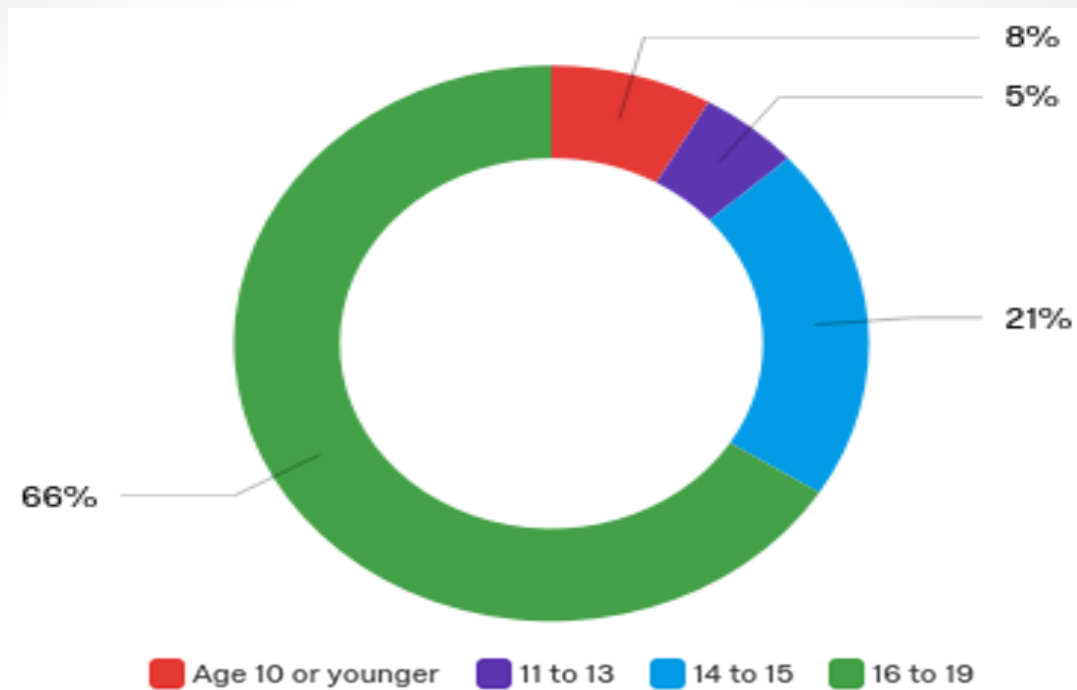


Figure 37: What age were you when you felt sure that you would apply to university? White, male, British, traditional age (17-19 years), and first generation students (n: 97)

The contrast between when white, working class males are likely to become sure that they would apply to university and when their peers are likely to be sure could be explained by different factors, perhaps especially: at what age students hear about higher education as an option and at what age they become confident in their decision to apply to university. The UCAS report suggested that students from disadvantaged backgrounds may not hear about university as an option until much later than their advantaged peers (2016, p. 29):

If most of the information about university is not given until students are in sixth form, many people have already left to pursue other options by then. This is particularly true in schools without a strong tradition of university progression.

Schools serving high populations of students from working class families may not be giving their students space to consider higher education as an option for their future until much later than schools in high income neighbourhoods. If students from higher income households learn about higher education before the age of ten, then they have many more years to consider and plan for their educational and career path than their working class peers, which further disadvantages and disenfranchises working class students. If they are not learning about higher education as an option for their future in school, they may also not hear about university as a choice at home. As some of the focus group participants discussed, as indicated in the previous section, some parents may suggest other options or may try to discourage their child from applying to university.

Another factor to consider is student confidence in the decision to pursue a university degree. Since the question asked respondents to consider when they 'felt sure' about applying to university, even if a student does learn that higher education is an option, they are not becoming certain about their decision to apply to university until much later than their peers perhaps because of the concerns and possible risks explored in the previous section. There is an opportunity for outreach and engagement efforts to provide the information and support for students to develop confidence and certainty in the decision to pursue higher education.

The survey respondents and focus group participants indicated that there were a number of factors that contributed to their decisions to apply to and accept a place at university, including (but not limited to) the ranking of the university, the ranking of the course to which they've applied, the location of the university, the opportunity to undertake placements, and the social

events and activities. A number of students highlighted the support available at the university as influential in their choice to attend, as illustrated by these three quotes:

The large amount of support that's available if you start falling behind say in the work, there's a vast amount that you can get to help you catch up, do better, learn the stuff in the lectures in a different way to make it sink in better. There's so much support for that kind of thing that it really does ... I didn't know about it until I came to an applicant day and spoke to some of the current students, and they said 'Yeah, there's Maths Café, there's office hours, you can speak to the lecturers directly after the lectures, you can email them; all of this is available to you'.

I think a community aspect, like I like Portsmouth's idea of everyone supporting each other and everyone coming from different walks of life, meeting different people. ... I think the societies and the stuff uni can offer is a really big highlight for me ... So that was a real attraction for me, is all the societies and the sports clubs as well as the employability. It's what the uni can offer itself in terms of how it comes across by supporting you and doing the best it can for you.

The university offers a range of help to all students; financial, social, health and course specific. ... My course has everything I wanted/expected and more and so was the only university I wanted to go to, otherwise I would have likely [chosen] employment or an apprenticeship.

Since this group may see attending university as a risk, as discussed in the previous section, and since this group is concerned about making the transition into university life, as will be discussed later in this report, highlighting the support services available during recruitment and outreach efforts may help make students more confident in their decision to pursue higher education.

For participants in this research project, the most discussed reason for choosing to pursue an undergraduate degree was employability. For most of the students in this study, higher education was viewed as a necessary part of improving their job prospects. This is further explored in the next section, which is focused on the role of employability on the higher education decision-making process for this group of students.

6.3 Career-certainty spectrum

For the majority of the participants in this research project, employability was the biggest factor in their decision to pursue university. These quotes from focus group participants highlight the importance of their post-graduation career prospects:

As well as uni experience and a degree, it's all about employability and this course had 91% employability, so that's the main reason why I came.



"The main thing I thought about was the percentage of people that get a job related to the degree, because ... I don't want to be spending all the money and just be getting the same job that I'd be able to get without actually having a degree."
--focus group participant

Employability is definitely the main thing [reason for going to university] for me. ... Because obviously we see facts all the time about how graduates have more chance of getting a job, that's the main reason for me.

I did look at 'Which?' as well and there's over 90% of students are either in employment or further education.

Better job prospects. Seems like these days a hell of a lot of people have a degree, so I think that if you have one, then you can compete as well. If you don't have one, then it's almost a disadvantage.

Specifically, a number of students mentioned the prospect of earning a higher salary as a university graduate as a factor in their decision to pursue a degree:

There's many statistics on line that suggest there's a higher salary at the end of it with a degree rather than without.

Having a degree just makes you a bit more employable, you normally go in at a higher pay grade than if you didn't, so just generally better to come out with a degree.

Having a degree just makes you a bit more employable, you normally go in at a higher pay grade than if you didn't, so just generally better to come out with a degree.

A few students discussed choosing university over an apprenticeship, focusing on the broad skills that could be acquired at university, as illustrated by this quote:

If I were to go into the world of work [as an apprentice] then I would only be taught what that company need from me, whereas with a degree I'm taught the broadest spectrum of stuff.



Within the survey, respondents were asked “What are your career goals?”. The question included the guidance statement: “Whether you are still developing or thinking about your career goals or you have a specific career plan in mind, please write about where you are in the process of considering your future career.” An answer to the question was required and responses fell within three categories: uncertain, in which students wrote things like “no idea” and “not sure”; deciding, in which students indicated that they knew in which field or industry they hoped to work but were still exploring specific job options; and certain, in which students specified the exact job they intended to pursue after graduation. Student responses are explored below within the sections of the spectrum of career certainty. Understanding prospective students’ process of career exploration and which point they have reached along the spectrum of decision-making, may contribute to more targeted, more specific, and more meaningful recruitment and outreach strategies.

Among the 97 survey respondents who identified as white, male, British, traditional age, and first generation students, 30 students' responses to the question about career goals indicated that they were uncertain, as illustrated through these examples:

Not sure what I want to do yet.

No idea what career I want to pursue yet. At the moment, I'm trying to gather skills I think would look good to any employer.

To get a job which has a good income and I enjoy.

At the moment I am in a state of not knowing what my career goal should be.

Career uncertainty was also mentioned by a few of the focus group participants, as highlighted by these quotes:

I'm a bit different to everyone else 'cause when these people have known what they wanted to do, I've changed five times what I want to do. I knew I wanted to get to uni but I didn't know what, so I've gone from science to policing to forensics, then to games design as well, games technology, so completely changed but I haven't regretted it since.

It's [higher education] gonna hopefully help me find what I wanna do as a career, so rather than knowing what my goal is, right now I don't know what that is, but if I can find the goal that I want to pursue, then for me that's enough.

I think it just helps keep your options open as well because a lot of employers just want a degree really, so if you get a degree in something that you're really interested in but then can't find a career in [that field] then at least you've still got the degree.

For participants who are on the uncertain end of the spectrum, they still discussed wanting to choose a university and a degree that will help them increase their employment prospects. However, unlike some of their peers who are more certain, this group of students focused their higher education decision-making process on universities and courses that offer opportunities to explore different career options and that provide support for students who may need more guidance and advice as they make future career decisions.

Further along the spectrum of career certainty, 34 survey respondents indicated that they knew in which field or industry they wanted to work after graduation, but were still exploring the specific career options within their chosen area. Those responses are highlighted by these examples:

I don't know currently but I know I want to work in the media.

I know I want to pursue a career in the computing industry. I have a couple of specific areas that I am interested in but my course is helping me decide which areas of computing I like most



To get a successful job in the field of computer science

Not sure yet, just in the area of music

Something which will allow me to have an impact on how the world is treating the Biosphere.

Some of the focus group participants talked about their process of career exploration and the fact that they were still deciding what they would like to do with their degree, as illustrated by these quotes:

*“Even if you don’t go into the field that you’ve got the degree in, say if you did a degree in banking, you could still get work in something different because it’s still a degree at the end of the day, shows skills.”
--focus group participant*

I just wanted to maybe find something that I love. ... I know what field I love, but I don’t know what specific bit within that field, so I’m hoping that from my degree I’ll find something where I’m like ‘Yeah, this is what I wanna do as a job’.

My aspirations have also changed quite a bit, but in a similar field. ... Now what I’m hoping to do is maths and cryptography.

I [chose] quite a wide degree in Business Management. ... I just want to be successful in that field and have a long career, but yeah, I don’t know at all [what job I want].

Even if you don’t go into the field that you’ve got the degree in, say if you did a degree in banking, you could still get work in something different because it’s still a degree at the end of the day, shows skills.

For students in the middle of the career certainty spectrum who are certain about the field but still deciding which kinds of jobs might interest them, they want to know that there is support available, through their course, in their department, and at the university level, for exploring the different choices available to them. In terms of recruitment, it may be especially helpful for this group to highlight the different kinds of jobs available to them in their field of interest and what kinds of positions alumni of their courses are working in after graduation.



Among the survey respondents, 33 indicated that they were certain about their future career and they chose to pursue their university degree to specifically enable them to achieve their career goals, as highlighted by these examples:

Being a head of a marketing department.

I plan to complete my master's degree, then gain a job as a software engineer and progress up the career ladder. I'm keen to work!

Become a RIBA Architect and set up my own practice.

Chartered sport and exercise psychologist.

Working in the forensic computing industry within a police department.

A number of focus group participants discussed their career goals with certainty as well, as illustrated through these quotes:

[After already discussing the exact job he wanted]: I specifically want to go into a defence company, which means ... to get a position there you need a degree, specifically my degree is one of the better ones to get in there.

I knew what I wanted to do from I would say probably when we picked our options in secondary school. I knew what area I wanted to go in and then from then onwards I learned what I really wanted to do. So the University of Portsmouth had a really specialist course for me, computer games technology. Since I wanted to go into developing games I could actually take a course like that and not just computer science.

I wanted to be a part of the film or TV since about the age of ten, and originally I wanted to be an actor and then I started writing films and TV shows and shorts down, and then started filming them and realised I liked being behind the camera more than being in front of it, so I decided to do a media studies degree and hopefully get into directing afterwards.

I kind of require it [a university degree] ... since I'm doing law and I'd like to be a barrister.

For prospective students who are certain about the career they want to hold after completing their degrees, they may be more interested in the specific ranking of their chosen course than in the overall university ranking. The employment prospects of alumni who have completed their chosen course may be one of the most important factors in their decision as well.

While recruitment strategies cannot be individualised for each and every prospective student, it is possible to develop three outreach strategies tailored to appeal to each section of the career certainty spectrum: one for those who are uncertain, one for those who are deciding, and one for those who are certain. Developing tailored strategies will enable outreach and recruitment professionals to address the specific concerns and questions students within each category are likely to have while they are deciding where to apply to university.

6.4 Exploring aspirations

In order to understand the higher education and career aspirations of white, working class men, it is important to consider the discussion in the first section of the post-entry findings. Since this population may be likely to view higher education as a risk that may or may not be worth taking, their plans for the future cannot be viewed through the same lens as their privileged peers for whom higher education is not a risk. This can be illuminated through quotes from focus group participants that highlight the enormity of the decision to apply to university and commit both to the burden of student debt and to three years of their life:

I didn't want to go uni and spend all this money and then come out at the end and just not have a good job.

The main thing I thought about was the percentage of people that get a job related to the degree, because ... I don't want to be spending all the money and just be getting the same job that I'd be able to get without actually having a degree.

Additionally, while the survey data indicates that this population may still be exploring career options after entering university, even the respondents who are unsure about what they want to do for work after graduation have made the decision to invest in higher education as a means to open doors for their future. Therefore, it could be argued that all of the participants in this research project are aspirational on some level.

Moreover, some of the data from the post entry research suggest that this population of underrepresented students may be more aspirational than their peers. Within the survey, students were asked: “What were your main reasons for choosing to pursue an undergraduate degree?” Respondents were encouraged to select all that apply out of these eight options:

1. Because it is necessary in order to achieve my career goals
2. Because a degree will make me more employable or will expand my career prospects
3. Because a degree will lead to a higher salary
4. Because it’s the next step in my formal education
5. Because my peers/friends were going to university
6. Because my parent(s) expected me to go to university
7. Because I am passionate about the subject I have chosen to study
8. Other (please specify)

The responses of the 97 participants who identify as white, male, British, traditional age, and first generation were mostly aligned with the rest of their first year peers who completed the survey. However, while 56 percent of all respondents (n: 678) selected the option “Because it is necessary in order to achieve my career goals”, 67 percent of the white, male, British, traditional age, and first generation respondents selected “Because it is necessary in order to achieve my career goals”. With an emphasis on higher education as a means to realise career aspirations, the difference between the full survey population responses and the responses from the participants for which this research is the focus suggests that this group may be more aspirational than their peers. White, working class men may be more aspirational than the dominant higher education policy discourses would suggest, which is echoed by other scholars (Grant, 2016; Stahl, 2016; Burke, 2011; Spohrer, 2011; St Clair and Benjamin, 2011; Burke, 2006) who have critiqued the ‘low aspiration’ and ‘no aspiration’ rhetoric that positions underrepresented students, including white, working class males as if they are in deficit. In discussing the findings of their research, St Clair and Benjamin (2011, p. 502) articulated:

Contrary to the current policy discourse, we found that young people of both genders, from deprived and non-deprived neighbourhoods and from different ethnic groups all have high educational and occupational aspirations.

It is important to note that the post entry findings are from first year undergraduates, so they have already made the decision to apply, enrol, attend, and persist through at least the first term of university. Therefore, the findings are not generalizable for all White, working class men. However, recruitment and outreach strategies focused primarily on raising aspirations may be alienating to those who are aspirational. After all, if this population views higher education as a potential risk, developing aspirations for the future provides students a means by which to justify their choice to pursue a university degree.

6.5 Transitions into higher education

Findings from the focus groups for the post-entry research project indicate that white, working class men are concerned about the issues they may face when they transition into university. Those concerns were part of their decision making process when they were trying to decide whether higher education was the best choice for them and for their future. Students are considering questions related to transitioning into higher education, focused around topics like: belonging (Will I make friends? Will I fit in?); academic challenges (Am smart enough for university? What if I am struggling?); living independently: (Will I find my way around? Can I learn to cook and do laundry?); managing finances (Will my student loan be enough? Can I balance a part time job with my studies?) and so on. Underrepresented students, including white, working class men, may seem to have more questions or to need more support than their middle class, continuing generation peers. However, those peers can seek guidance from their parents about what to expect at university and how to prepare for the first year and/or they can

rely on their access to social, cultural and economic capital to make their transition easier, smoother and stress-free.

Prevalent discussions about transitions to HE position working-class students as needy, in the sense of personally inadequate and unable to cope with the rigours of transition. In rejecting this position, we should talk more of rights: the right to enter university successfully and succeed. This is a common right of all students, but structural disadvantage ensures that many students require support if they are to take up this entitlement (Quinn, 2010, p. 125).

Echoing the point Quinn made, that providing support to students in their transition into higher education should be part of the efforts universities are making to ensure that the student experience is equal and inclusive for all students, one of the focus group participants made clear that they are at a disadvantage when compared to their peers who have parents who have gone to university:

When I applied to come to university my mum and dad had absolutely no idea how to even begin to go about it. ... They just don't have the knowledge of how to actually go about applying or what universities to look at or just anything like that, just don't really have the knowledge 'cause nobody ... has done it before.

For white, working class male students like this student, the process of transitioning or becoming a university student begins with the daunting task of figuring out how to enter university without the guidance of his parents. The topic of transitions into higher education, and the impact it has on recruitment, progression, persistence, retention and completion, have been explored in existing literature (Gale and Parker, 2014; Lehmann, 2014; Quinn, 2010). This is not a new area of interest, since 'student transition – i.e. change navigated by students in their movement within and through formal education – has a long history of examination in the international research literature' (Gale and Parker, 2014, p. 734). While the issue of transitioning into higher education was not explicitly written into the semi-structured focus group guide, the theme emerged in the data mostly through the responses given to these questions:

- What concerns do you think some students have when they consider whether or not to go to university?
- How did you decide to go to university? What was that process like? What did you consider?

Additional data relevant to this theme emerged from the qualitative survey responses to the question:

- What were the main reasons you chose to attend the University of Portsmouth and not another university?

Many of the survey respondents and the focus group participants indicated that their university choice was influenced by the university's proximity to home, specifically close enough, but not too close, as illustrated by these quotes:

Not too far away from home but a good distance to experience a completely new place.



*"You find that being independent isn't as hard as you thought and especially when everything's within reach. It's definitely not as bad as I was expecting."
--focus group participant*

Not so far from home.

The university was close and I knew the area.

The location of the university - not too close that my parents were with me, but also not too far that I felt isolated from them.

The location was good and not too far from home and the area in general was very pleasant.

Location, atmosphere, far enough distance from home but close enough, not too far from home.

I didn't look at anywhere further than probably about 50 miles from home, so probably looked to be in that kind of radius, just mostly to keep costs down really, for me, like travelling back and forth.

It's close enough to be able to go home if I want to but it's also far enough away that I'm not going to bump into anyone I know or anything like that.

For this group of students, who may view higher education as a risk, as discussed in a previous findings subsection, choosing a university that is closer to home, but not too close, may make transitioning into university life an easier, smoother process.

Focus group respondents discussed the concerns and anxieties they had about facing the unknown, especially leaving their families and committing three years of their lives to pursue an undergraduate degree, with more of the unknown waiting for them after graduation. Some of their concerns are highlighted by these examples:

A less talked-about area of that [concerns about going to university] is the transitions and just cutting yourself off from friends and family for a long period of time, to pursue study.

I thought it would have been more of a struggle to live independently, live on your own, but I found it flowed quite well. I thought cooking and washing up and the whole living alone thing would have been more of a ... [struggle] but for me it just went normally.

Fear of not making friends. <laughs> You just get here and you're just on your own and it's quite a long time, and especially as it's a completely new process.

You find that being independent isn't as hard as you thought and especially when everything's within reach. It's definitely not as bad as I was expecting.

For many of the focus group participants, the process of becoming a university student was not as frightening or insurmountable as they had thought before beginning their first year. Without guidance and advice about higher education at home from their parents, it is unsurprising that the process of transitioning was more challenging in their imagination than it was in reality.

In addition to concerns about living independently, making friends and fitting in, some participants discussed frustration with the lack of communication and support provided for them to navigate their first few weeks, as illustrated by this longer quote:

In the first week or so I found ... or like just before we got here I found it was very unclear what preparation stuff we had to do, like if there was any forms that we had to fill in or anything. ... There wasn't an email that gave us a checklist of, 'Before you arrive to halls, this has to be done. Before you have your first day on your course, this has to be done.' It was very -- a piece of information in one and a piece in the other and you had to try and work it all out for yourself, but it was still in the back of my mind that had I done everything that I needed to do? And it wasn't just me, it was a load of people that I made

friends in halls with that said the same, that it wasn't totally clear what the whole procedure was, to make sure that everything was done before we got here.

While some of this student's peers might have learned what is expected in the first few weeks from their parents, some of the most basic and yet most vital information students need about transitioning into university may not be shared or easily available for students because it is assumed they would or should already know. There is an opportunity to make explicitly clear information and resources about navigating university life that, for some, may be taken for granted as common or implicit knowledge.

Within the existing literature, Lehmann (2014, p. 13) suggested that universities could provide stronger support for working class students as they transition into higher education through 'mentoring programs or counselling and support services'. Those mentoring programs could include academics who came from working class backgrounds.

The experiences of working-class academics suggest that these faculty members could actually serve as an important resource for current working-class students, both through their pedagogy, but also as active role models or mentors (Lehmann, 2014, p. 13).

While those opportunities to support students are important and should be developed, for working class students, the transition begins before they enrol. The transition into higher education begins when they start to consider going to university as an option. Providing guidance and support for working class students as they prepare to transition into higher education can begin when outreach activities begin. The earlier a student understands what to expect when they enter higher education and what kinds of support systems are in place at the university to enable and empower them to make that transition, then perhaps the more likely that student might be to become confident and certain that they belong in higher education and that a university degree should be part of their future.

7. Implications and recommendations

To summarise, the primary findings of the pre-entry data include:

- Data suggests the choices being made by white working class males in Southampton at age 16 make their progression to HE less likely – they are more likely to be NEET and more likely to be in FE or work based provision.
- White working class males engaged by the study generally hold positive attitudes to learning and are happy to be viewed as hardworking. Some may not be fully engaged in their current learning but most are positive about future opportunities.
- Males from low HE participation areas appear less motivated by financial rewards than their peers from areas with higher HE progression rates, and more motivated by finding a career that suits their interests and skills.
- Males from low HE participation areas were less convinced in terms of their interest in HE at the pre-16 stage of education.
- They were also less likely to say that they would enjoy being a university student and that university is necessary for the career they have in mind. They were much less likely to view HE as affordable and post-16 learners were concerned about their ability to get in and fit in. Overall, HE is perceived as a risky strategy.
- Alternatives to HE, including progression to apprenticeships, were frequently viewed as a ‘better’ option by vocational learners, although this may well reflect the increased understanding they had about this route compared to HE.
- The majority of learners in the sample felt relatively supported by their parents, although many (particularly those in post 16 education) report that parental opinion is of no or little importance.
- The general consensus amongst the FE learners was that they had received limited information or encouragement regarding progression towards.
- Learners were interested in experiencing HE and talking to individuals who could help them find out more, including employers and students.
- Barriers to HE for white working class males in Southampton include – lower levels of attainment, different patterns of post-16 progression, levels of risk in choosing HE as an option, negative perceptions of HE and variable access to advice and support.

The primary findings of the post-entry data include:

- Higher education is viewed as a risk that may not be worth taking, especially as this group expressed aversion to taking on student debt.
- Findings show that white, working class men are making decisions about whether or not to pursue university much later than their peers.
- The data shows that this group is more aspirational than their peers, which supports the conclusions of other scholars but contradicts popular discourses suggesting they are not aspirational.
- The research participants expressed their career aspirations along a spectrum of certainty, which may provide insight into recruitment and outreach strategies.
- This group is worried about transitioning into higher education and whether or not they will feel like they belong.

This report concludes with the implications of the research findings and suggested recommendations, divided into seven subheadings as follows: Targeting white, working class males; Challenging ‘low-aspiration’ discourses; Risk and decision-making; Supporting attainment; Supporting transitions; Outreach and age; and Personalised/tailored outreach.

7.1 Targeting white, working class males

Pre-entry: The study highlights the difficulties associated with defining and targeting white working class males. Collection of parental occupation data is likely to provide the most accurate assessment of socio-economic background but ensuring access to accurate data is problematic and none of the schools/colleges involved in the research felt this was an appropriate strategy for identifying target learners.

- Use of FSM data to identify individual learners within target schools is possibly the most straightforward approach but is likely to lead to some learners missing out and therefore flexibility to include other learners, identified by school staff, would be required.
- Use of FSM data is not possible across the board in the post-16 sector and therefore an alternative proxy appears to be eligibility for a college bursary. Again this is imperfect and for this group of learners it may be appropriate to also focus on those learners whose path to HE is not secure, including those on vocational pathways.
- HEIs may also wish to consider how learners on work based provision may be targeted as part of WP initiatives as the data suggests white working class males are well represented within this form of learning.

Post-entry: The challenges of understanding the university experiences of working class students begins with recognising that a universally accepted definition of “working class” does not exist and choosing which measures to use to find out which students fit into the category of “working class” is contested (Soria and Bultmann, 2014). There are a number of ways to try to identify working class student populations for outreach, recruitment, and support, each with their own challenges:

- **First generation students:** For the post-entry research project, survey respondents and focus group participants were identified by their status as first generation students. First generation students are more likely to be from working class families than continuing generation students (as in students who have at least one parent who has completed a university degree) (Gardner and Holley, 2011). However, first generation status does not always mean a student is working class.
- **Postcode:** HEFCE’s POLAR3 data provides insight into which neighbourhoods have lower or higher rates of higher education participation and is still used as a method to identify which students may be working class. For outreach and recruitment, focusing on low participation neighbourhoods should be a part of widening participation strategy at every university. Though, not all students living in a Quintile 1 postcode are working class. Additionally, the data on which the POLAR3 maps are based was published in 2012 and is based on the 2009 cohort of university age students, so it is starting to become outdated.
- **Parental occupations:** As a method for identifying social class, using parental occupation may not be ideal as it assumes many things, including (but perhaps not limited to): that a student has a parent or parents to begin with; that a student is traditional age, rather than a mature student whose own occupation may be more relevant as a measure; that parental occupations are singular, fixed, stable and long-term.
- **Qualification for bursaries:** At the university level, identifying students who qualify for bursaries based on income may be a method akin to identifying Free School Meal recipients when it comes to targeting working class students for outreach and support. Since the income level used to determine if a student is qualified for a bursary could either be their parents’ or their own (if they are a mature student or a student who has come out of care), this method of identifying working class students might capture a broader population than using parental occupation. However, as this is sensitive information, it may be a challenge to reach out to this student group through this method of identification.

- **Self-definition:** Previous research with university students indicated that participants' 'self-identified social class strongly correlates with students' self-reported and institutionally reported family income and parental education, lending validity to students' self-identification in a social class' (Soria and Bultmann, 2014:52). Though the challenge with this method is that some students may not identify as working class, even if they come from low income families, and some more financially privileged students may not identify as middle class.

7.2 Challenging 'low-aspiration' discourses

Pre-entry: The study suggests that the majority of male learners from disadvantaged backgrounds hold positive attitudes to education. The vast majority of participants reported that they are keen to engage in new or different types of learning, they see a link between studying and success and view working hard at school/college as a positive characteristic. They also show more interest in a wider variety of HE pathways, rather than the 'tried and tested' full time route. Although they may not report financial gains as the most important motivator, they are interested in accessing education and training and allows them to progress into careers that suits their interests and skills. Many of the learners we spoke to do however have concerns about their ability to cope with HE, both academically and on a personal and social level and therefore the issue appears one of low confidence.

- Outreach provision that supports schools and colleges to building confident learners may be effective in increasing progression.
- White, working class male learners need to experience the full breadth of HE learning opportunities available, to allow them to explore how provision might offer them a suitable pathway.

Post-entry: The findings from the post entry research suggest that this population of underrepresented students may be more aspirational than their peers. This is not to suggest that all white, working class males are more aspirational than their peers. While it may be difficult to reconcile research findings that challenge the dominant aspiration discourses that suggest that white, working class males have low or no aspirations, consider:

- A number of scholars have challenged the 'low aspiration' rhetoric employed to construct underrepresented students, including white, working class males, through discourses of deficit (Grant, 2016; Stahl, 2016; Burke, 2011; Spohrer, 2011; St Clair and Benjamin, 2011; Burke, 2006).
- If current strategies for increasing recruitment of white, working class males that are primarily focused on 'raising aspirations' were effective and successful, then this research and report would not be necessary. This is not to suggest that widening participation teams should eliminate all strategies focused on providing opportunities for students to raise and articulate their aspirations. However, additional strategies should be developed to account for those students from underrepresented backgrounds, including white, working class males, who are already aspirational but need other forms of outreach and support in order to make the choice to pursue higher education.

7.3 Risk and decision-making

Pre entry: Risk of studying in HE is high for this group of learners and other routes may appear a safer option. Some learners report that making a decision about university is stressful and they seem aware that information provided is not always impartial. Other learners have limited access to information that will allow them to understand the level of risk and make an informed decision. Discussions with parents show they feel this risk keenly and possibly negative messages about university in the media and within their local community heightens the unease. Outreach provision cannot ignore the fact that tuition fees make HE a risk. And given this group of learners as a whole are less interested in financial return it cannot simply make the argument that you will earn more in future.

- White working class male learners need access to impartial information about HE opportunities, including the costs and the benefits to them as an individual and they need support to make this decision. Although outreach providers are well versed in the relative merits of HE, they perhaps need to think about how impartiality might be increased. They may also consider how best to support other influencers (teachers, advisers, parents) to understand the facts.
- Access to positive role models, for example through school/college Alumni networks, employer or student mentoring programmes and Student Ambassador schemes may offer learners examples of HE success that their more advantaged peers have ready access to.
- Young male learners are interested in experiencing HE in order to help them to assess whether it is the right option, they want to 'try before they buy'. Opportunities for these learners to come onto campus on a regular basis, for example as part of their current studies or to take part in additional learning or leisure activities, would help demystify HE and build confidence that it is a viable route.

Post-entry: Findings from the post-entry data suggest that white, working class males consider the choice to pursue higher education a risk that may not be worth taking, which is aligned with the pre-entry findings, as well as with findings from previous studies focused on working class students (Jones, 2016; Archer, Pratt, and Phillips, 2001; Reay, 2001; Archer and Hutchings, 2000). Focus group participants discussed the apprehensions they had while making the choice to apply to university as well as the reasons some of their peers' decided not to enter higher education. Finances was the biggest concern overall, including: the anxiety of taking on student debt; the worry that, even with the maximum amount of student loans, they would not be able to afford basic living expenses while studying; and the fear that they might not find gainful employment upon graduation. In addition to the financial risks, participants felt that it was risky to commit three years of their life to a university and/or to a degree programme that they may not enjoy or where they may not fit in. A number of participants also discussed the appeal of apprenticeships and full time employment as less risky choices in comparison to pursuing a university degree. Some participants also talked about parents who tried to discourage their student from choosing university. Based on these findings, it is recommended that outreach/recruitment/widening participation teams should:

- To reiterate from the pre-entry findings and suggestions, provide balanced information about higher education. Give prospective students an opportunity to speak candidly about their concerns. When it comes to recruitment and outreach, strike a balance between the glossy, perfectly-positive, marketing strategies and the down-to-earth, brutally honest advice a knowledgeable expert might provide to someone making a major life decision. It is three-years of their life and a significant amount of debt that we are asking them to devote to our university.
- Prove to them that the rewards outweigh the risks by providing university-specific or course-specific data about the benefits of pursuing a university degree and about their post-graduation employment prospects. While students have heard that graduates will earn higher salaries across their lifetime, on average, compared to non-graduates, some students are also aware of recent studies that have revealed that working class students were less likely to be employed in as high paying jobs as their middle class peers after graduation (Ashley et. al. 2015; Wakeling and Savage, 2015).
- Create a panel of current students to review and provide feedback on your outreach/recruitment/widening participation strategies before they are implemented. Seek feedback and evaluations from prospective students about their experience at recruitment events and use that data to continue to refine your strategies (often evaluations are collected without the feedback informing changes or improvements).
- Provide concrete information for parents and schools in multiple forms so that they may help rather than hinder recruitment efforts. Consider developing a parents' panel to review and provide feedback on your outreach/recruitment/widening participation strategies and to user-test recruitment materials and webpages geared towards parents.

7.4 Supporting attainment

Pre-entry: Data suggests that the attainment levels of white working class males are below that of their peers. Reduced level of attainment is likely to have an impact on the progression opportunities open to the learners at age 14 and at KS4 and KS5. Attainment is also likely to have an impact on how learners perceive their own abilities. Reduced levels of attainment are also likely to impact on the perceptions of others, influencing whether they are encouraged to consider university as an option.

- Although NCOP provision targets schools with a ‘gap’ between attainment and progression levels, at an individual level male working class students are less likely to be reaching their potential as it stands and therefore attainment outcomes are valid.
- Outreach providers therefore need to carefully consider how they can employ resources to support the raising attainment agenda in schools/colleges and how this might be targeted at male learners more specifically. OFFA highlights a range of approaches adopted by universities to support attainment, including subject based interventions (such as masterclasses and revision sessions) as well as more generic confidence building (such as mentoring). Evidence on what impacts most successfully on attainment is weak, although OFFA suggests co-ordinated, sustained activity is most effective (for example through a Progression Framework).

Post-entry: While attainment was not covered within the data collected for this research project, the existing literature has exposed the gap in higher education attainment between working class and middle class students (HEFCE, 2014; Archer, Hutchings, and Ross, 2003). Additionally, first generation students are less likely to persist through to degree completion compared with their continuing-generation counterparts (Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin, 2014; Davis, 2010). The gap in achievement and completion rates contributes towards underrepresented students’ perception of higher education as a risk not worth taking. Developing strategies to support students in order to address unequal participation, progression, persistence, and degree outcomes is essential not only for widening participation teams, but also for outreach and recruitment practitioners – the longer the gaps persist, then the more difficult it will become to recruit underrepresented students, like white, working class males. To that end, to support attainment, suggested strategies include:

- Identify existing support programmes and support staff on campus and provide information about available support to students during recruitment activities. Provide specific guidance about those available support services. For example, how many students engage with career services each year? How many students meet with academic tutors? How many hours of counselling services are provided to support students?
- Encourage university-wide audit and assessment of existing support services. Recognise good practices already in operation at the university while also improving support programmes that are not meeting measurable targets.
- Work collaboratively, university-wide, to develop strategies for addressing unequal participation, attainment, progression, persistence, and degree completion. Ensure that the student experience, from recruitment through to the alumni experience, is equal for all students.

7.5 Supporting transitions

Pre-entry: Evidence is that white working class males are making choices about their future learning that are not consistent with secure progression. Males appears particularly vulnerable to making a positive transition at post 16, with a higher likelihood of being outside of education or being in vocational provision. Although attainment levels are likely to impact on patterns of progression the research also suggests males are attracted more to the work based or vocational route.

- Learners need to be fully informed about the implications of the educational choices they make, including choices at aged 14. Outreach providers can support schools to meet their statutory responsibilities for providing careers education, information, advice and guidance by providing information about HE entry requirements.
- At the same time local HE providers need to ensure that alternative routes to HE are in place and that choosing not to pursue an A level route need not close the door on higher levels of learning. Embedding information and providing opportunities to explore the full range of HE provision as part of outreach programmes may be of particular value, including for example Higher and Degree apprenticeships and HE in FE provision.

Post-entry: Findings from the post-entry research project show that white, working class male students are concerned about transitioning into university. This finding is echoed in higher education literature (Gale and Parker, 2014; Lehmann, 2014; Quinn, 2010). A number of the research participants revealed that they did not feel like they had clear guidance on what to expect once they began their first year. Focus group participants identified the concerns they had about making the transition to university as one of the risks they considered when deciding whether or not to pursue higher education. Supporting students as they transition into higher education has an impact on student engagement, participation, and success. Feeling supported as they prepare for that transition before they begin their studies may impact recruitment of white, working class male students and, as such, it is suggested that outreach, recruitment and widening participation teams should:

- Develop strategies for addressing concerns underrepresented students, like white, working class men, have about transitioning into university. The focus group participants in the post-entry research project talked about the process of transitioning into university being easier than they had imagined before they applied. Find a way to relay that message to prospective students, who might see the transition as one of the risks higher education unappealing as an option.
- Engage current students to help develop outreach and marketing materials to address the topic of transitioning into higher education, whether that includes print content, social media posts, videos, or interactive elements to show prospective students a glimpse of what their actual transition experience might be like.
- Identify and engage with working-class identified academics at the university to develop outreach and marketing materials. Consider developing a mentoring scheme between academics from working-class backgrounds and prospective working-class students.
- Ensure that information, resources, and materials shared with prospective students and with accepted students does not alienate underrepresented students. Review existing materials to check for assumptions about university life that might seem like common knowledge for some, but may be unknown, unclear, and confusing for first generation and/or working class students.

7.6 Outreach and age

Pre-entry: Research suggests that white males from disadvantaged backgrounds are less sure about HE at pre-16 level but once they reach post-16 they show similar levels of interest in HE to their more advantaged peers. At the same time the research suggests they are making post-16 choices in a different way to both their female and their more advantaged peers and this is having an impact on eventual progression to HE.

- Learners need access to early outreach to ensure that HE is considered as a potential opportunity, and that the window of opportunity is open as learners progress through and beyond statutory education. Choices made at 14 have the potential to impact on HE progression and therefore work prior to KS3 is crucial.
- Once in a post-16 setting support that builds confidence levels, maximises attainment and converts interest into an informed application is important.

Post-entry: The post-entry survey data suggests that white, working class males become certain about their decision to apply to university much later than their peers, for this research population, their decision is much later than recent UCAS data suggests (UCAS, 2016). The report from UCAS (2016) revealed: “Being certain about higher education by age 10 or earlier means a child is 2.6 times as likely to end up at a more competitive university than someone who decided in their late teens”. The earlier a student sees himself as university ‘material’ -- deserving of, worthy of, and smart enough to belong within the higher education community – the more likely he is to be confident in his choice to apply. Belonging plays an important part in the university experiences of working class students (Curran, 2016; Evans, 2010; Leese, 2010; Mangan et. al. 2010; Ingram, 2009). As such, the findings from this research suggests that outreach/recruitment/widening participation strategies should:

- Engage in outreach efforts in earlier years, before the age of 10. The earlier that underrepresented students, including white, working class boys, hear about higher education as an option for them, the more likely they will be to make the decision to apply.
- Consider developing a peer mentoring scheme between current students and the schools at which you outreach so that younger students can see themselves represented among your current student population.
- Strengthen outreach efforts in later years (14-18) to ensure that underrepresented students, like white, working class boys, develop a strong confidence in their decision to pursue a university degree.

7.7 Personalised/Tailored outreach

Pre entry: There is evidence that many learners have doubts about their ability to succeed in HE and many were concerned about the negative impact it might have on their well-being. Some had very specific concerns related to their own set of personal circumstances. When asked about the kind of support they might need to make a decision about HE many felt that discussing their plans with others would help. With many of the older learners we spoke to keen to make decisions independent of their parents, it seems clear that access to personalised support, where an individual’s on-going questions and concerns could be explored, would be of value to this group of learners. Access to existing sources of support did seem to vary depending on what the school/college had been able to provide and whether the individual had been targeted for any specific interventions and therefore working with targeted schools and colleges to build programmes that incorporate individual level support seems important.

- Learners need access to support that builds on their existing levels of knowledge about HE, allows them to explore their individual questions and concerns, and supports their ability to make informed decisions.
- HEIs need to identify ways of embedding this personalised support into WP programmes, for example through long term mentoring provision, on-going access to advice and guidance and providing opportunities to experience HE (for example through personalised visits and tasters) at a time that is relevant to an individual’s own decision making.

Post-entry: Findings from the post-entry data suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to outreach and recruitment may be inadequate. White, working class male students are not a homogeneous group and recruitment strategies should be enhanced to reflect this. While some respondents indicated that, as first year students, they had already developed a clear, concise career path and a plan to achieve their career goals through their degree, on the other end of the spectrum, some participants expressed complete uncertainty about their career goals and indicated a desire to use their three years at university as a space to find out more about what they enjoy doing, how they can develop their skills and knowledge, and where that might lead them after graduation. As traditional age first year students (17-19 years old), it is understandable that they might still be developing their plans for the future. In order to personalise/tailor the outreach/recruitment experience, it is suggested that teams should:

- Develop three strategies for the different career certainty levels of the prospective students: those who are certain, those who are deciding, and those who are uncertain. Those who are certain are more likely to want to know the exact path towards their career goals and the ways your university and/or your specific degree programme will help them achieve those goals, including placement opportunities, career fairs, industry connections and rates of post-graduation employment. Deciding students are more likely to want to know that they can try different options within their degree programme, such as different elective classes, different hands-on opportunities, or opportunities for industry placements, so they can explore the different options in their chosen field of study. For uncertain students, they are more likely to want to know that the university has programmes and staff who will give them support and guidance as they navigate university and make decisions about their future.
- Understand the schools at which you outreach: are their student populations more likely to be certain, deciding, or uncertain? How can you tailor your outreach to meet the needs of the specific population served by that school in that neighbourhood?
- Build strong collaborations with the career services team and seek their feedback on outreach strategies that are careers and employability focused.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the findings from these two research projects and the highlighted recommendations will provide opportunities to: inform measurable improvements to student services, specifically related to: recruitment, outreach, access, widening participation and support services; increase recruitment of white, working class males and raise HE participation rates amongst white working class males in the SUN region; and enhance the student experience, including recruitment, participation, progression, persistence, and attainment of white, working class men at your university.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Pre-Entry Research Methodology

Research aims

The research aimed to:

- Explore perceptions of HE, held by young white working class males and their parents;
- Establish both the barriers and enablers to HE participation;
- Make recommendations about the strategies and interventions that might reasonably be expected to raise HE participation rates amongst white working class males in the SUN region.

Overall approach

A mixed methods approach to the research was adopted. Qualitative data was gathered using learner focus group and semi structured interviews with parents. In order to reach a larger sample of learners focus groups were supplemented by an online learner questionnaire. In addition to primary research, desk research was also undertaken. A brief review of recent literature was completed (in collaboration with University of Portsmouth Research team) and an analysis of KS4/KS5 destination data for local state funded schools and colleges was used to provide context for the study. Three school/colleges based in Southampton were identified by Southampton Solent University to act as partners in the research, providing access to learners and their parents. Incentives for participation were agreed and it was thought that in many instances this had increased levels of engagement amongst learners.

Learner focus groups

In order to reach the appropriate target group a range of criteria were identified with the three partner institutions as follows:

School focus groups – White, male, years 9-11, resident in POLAR 1 quintile, Pupil Premium funded.

6th Form focus groups – White, male, aged 16-19, level 3, resident in POLAR1 quintile, in receipt of college bursary or previous Free School Meal recipient.

College focus groups– White, male, aged up to 19, resident in POLAR1 quintile, in receipt of college bursary or carers or looked after child and on Level 2 or Level 3 provision with potential to progress to HE (as defined by tutors).

Parental background (in terms of HE heritage and occupational classification) was not used to assist in the selection of learners as it was unavailable within the partner institutions and would have been too complex to collect in the timescale available. Difficulties in recruiting at the college meant the criteria were not rigorously applied, however all were male, young, vocational learners and given the catchment area of the college were likely to live in low participation neighbourhoods.

In total six focus groups were completed, two at each of the partner institutions, reaching a total of 51 white male learners. 22 of the 51 participants reported family experience of HE, 23 had no prior family experience of HE and a further six did not know. During the focus group participants were asked to rate the likelihood of progressing to HE in the future on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest likelihood).

Table 1: Focus group sessions and participants.

Focus Group	No of Learners	Year Groups	Programmes of study	Likelihood of progressing to HE (average score)	Family HE experience		
					Yes	No	Don't Know
School FG1	10	Year 9	GCSE	6.8	5	4	1
School FG2	9	Year 10/11	GCSE	6.4	2	5	2
6 th Form FG3	8	Year 12/13	7 A Level & 1 Vocational Level 3	8.6	5	3	0
6 th Form FG4	8	Year 12/13	5 A Level & 3 Vocational Level 3	8.4	4	3	1
FE College FG5	7	16-19 learners	Level 2 Motor Vehicle	3.2	2	3	2
FE College FG6	9	16-19 learners	Mixed vocational learners	2.8	4	5	0

In order to assist with the collection of standardised data from across the six focus groups a script was developed (available at Appendix C). Outputs from focus groups included transcripts, facilitator notes (including learner quotes) and written products (such as post it notes and flipchart paper). Data was analysed to determine findings consistent across all sessions, although differences between sessions and institutions were also identified.

Qualitative research with parents

In order to understand the perceptions of parents qualitative semi-structured telephone interviews were also planned. The agreed recruitment strategy varied between the school and the post 16 institutions. In both the 6th Form and the college, all focus group participants were provided with a letter for their parent (s) to invite them to take part in the study. In the partner school there was a preference for the school to communicate directly with parents and the school was provided with a research statement and suggested letter. Three parents all with learners in the 6th Form college responded and were interviewed. There were no other responses. Although the data cannot be considered representative, a small number of quotes from parental interviews have been used in the report.

Online learner survey

An online survey was developed to identify the attitudes and perspectives of young white working class males, and how there might be differences between young men with different socio-demographic backgrounds. The survey collected quantifiable data only in order to increase the internal completion rate, with focus groups being used to provide a more in-depth exploration of the issues. The survey was initially disseminated to the three school/college partners and then in order to increase response rate disseminated by Southampton Solent University using established contacts in a range of local schools and colleges. In order to increase the numbers of responses from learners in low participation neighbourhoods specific schools were also targeted.

In total 157 usable responses were generated, from at least six different school and college settings. Completion of postcode information was variable, with approximately half of respondents providing information which allowed them to be accurately categorised using POLAR3 data. The analytical strategy employed is described further below.

Online survey analytical strategy

It is generally considered that the HEFCE POLAR3 (Participation of Local Areas data) is an appropriate measure of educational disadvantages since it captures the trend in young participation to HE and therefore gives a sense of whether residents have a tradition of HE progression at the level of geographical wards. The POLAR3 categories local wards based on 5 quintiles where quintile 1 represents the lowest young participation (most disadvantaged), and quintile 5 areas with the highest rates (most advantaged), according to the combined participation rates of those aged 18 between 2005 and 2009, who entered HE between 2005-06 and 2010-11 academic years. HEFCE has also produced participation gap data for the local areas, which takes account of educational attainment factors (key stage 4 attainment) and ethnicity to show any gaps between actual young HE participation and what might be expected given the education outcomes and ethnic mix. In quintile 1 participation is much lower than expected (i.e. the areas considered to be where there is an 'unexplained' gap in participation based on educational attainment and ethnicity) whereas quintile 5 has higher than expected participation.

The HEFCE gaps analyses and POLAR3 data was used to provide a categorisation of respondents to the survey where possible. Because of the issues around how the survey was disseminated along with the problems of respondents omitting to provide a postcode, or giving only partial postcodes, the strategy was implemented as follows:

Postcodes where given were matched to Census Area Statistical (CAS) wards, which then provided the young participation rate and categorisation into POLAR3 and HEFCE participation gap quintiles.⁴ In addition, based on their postcodes, these respondents were coded into either Southampton or 'Rest of area'. The rest of area group mainly comprised respondents in Hampshire. There were a small number who gave postcodes in other areas.⁵ Where a partial postcode was given, the respondent was categorised as within a broad geography defined as either 'Southampton' or 'Rest of area'.

Where a postcode was not given but the school was known, the respondents was categorised as within the area signified by the rest of their school population.

Remaining respondents were categorised as 'Not known'.

The responses received were broken down as follows:

Table 2: Survey responses by participation gap quintiles

	Southampton		Rest of area		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Participation gap Q1	33	36%	7	11%	40	25%
Participation gap Q2	15	16%	7	11%	22	14%
Participation gap Q3	8	9%	4	6%	12	8%
Participation gap Q4		0%	8	12%	8	5%
Not known	35	38%	40	61%	75	48%
Total	91	100%	66	100%	157	100%

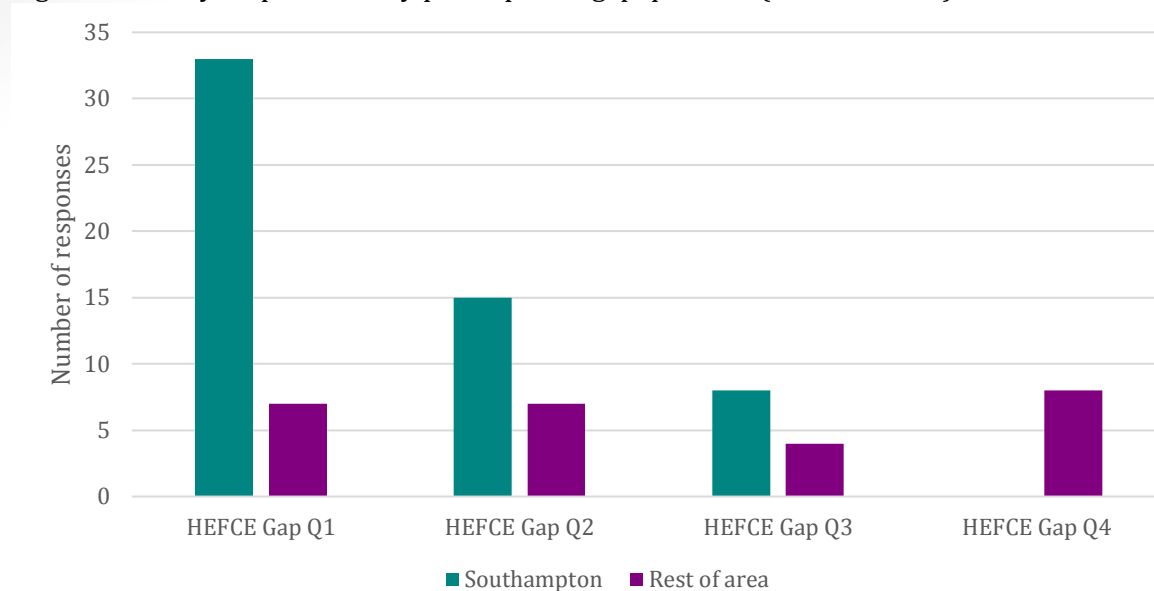
As Table 2 shows there were a relatively large proportion with unknown POLAR3 data (just under half) reflecting the difficulties in obtaining and matching postcode information from the target group of respondents. Amongst those that did provide a valid postcode the largest group (48%) were within areas with the largest participation gaps (HEFCE gaps quintile 1). As might be expected there were differences in relation between respondents in Southampton and other areas (Figure 1). Almost two-thirds (62%) of respondents from Southampton with known young HE participation were from quintile 1 areas (with the highest gap in participation) compared to around a fifth (21%) of those with known postcode from areas outside of Southampton.

⁴ The analyses used the postcode to CAS Ward lookup released for November 2015.

<https://borders.ukdataservice.ac.uk/pcluts.html>

⁵ Two respondents had postcodes out of Hampshire (inc. Bracknell Forest, and Berkshire)

Figure 1: Survey respondents by participation gap quintiles (where known)

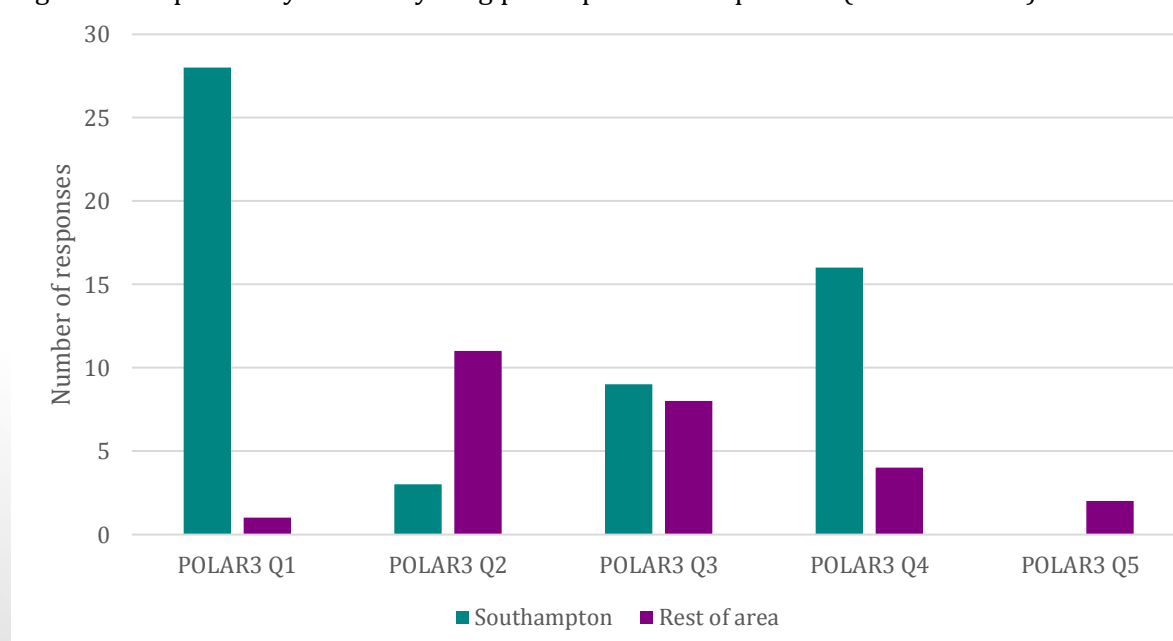


In terms of the estimated rates of young HE progression, Table 3 shows the breakdown of responses according to POLAR3 quintiles and shows the actual rates of estimated participation in the wards according to the combined participation rates of those aged 18 between 2005 and 2009, who entered HE between 2005-06 and 2010-11 academic years.

Table 3: Survey respondents by POLAR3 young participation rate quintiles

	Southampton		Rest of area		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
POLAR3 Q1	28	31%	1	2%	29	18%
POLAR3 Q2	3	3%	11	17%	14	9%
POLAR3 Q3	9	10%	8	12%	17	11%
POLAR3 Q4	16	18%	4	6%	20	13%
POLAR3 Q5		0%	2	3%	2	1%
Not known	35	38%	40	61%	75	48%
Total	91	100%	66	100%	157	100%

Figure 2: Responses by POLAR3 young participation rate quintiles (where known)



Of those with a known young participation score for their home area and with a large unexplained participation gap (gap quintile 1), most of the respondents (72.5%) were in areas with the lowest young participation rates (POLAR3 quintile 1). However, some POLAR3 quintile 2 and quintile 3 areas also had high gaps in young HE participation which could not be explained by attainment and ethnicity factors. Some areas of low relative young HE participation in quintile 2 which are also classed as low participation neighbourhoods (LPN) also low participation gap score – signifying that participation is lower than might be expected given the local factors.

Table 4: Responses by POLAR3 quintiles and participation gaps

	POLAR 3 quintiles (young participation rate)					Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	
Gaps Q1	29	8	3			40
Gaps Q2		3	11	8		22
Gaps Q3		2	1	5	1	9
Gaps Q4		1	2	7	1	11
Total	29	14	17	20	2	82

Analysis of KS4 and KS5 data

In order to better understand the local context, analysis of KS4 destination data and KS5 attainment and destination data was analysed. The primary focus of the analysis was Southampton schools and colleges, although county and regional data was also examined to allow for local comparison. Analysis of KS4 destinations drew upon the most recent Department for Education destinations dataset available at institutional level which reports on the tracking of the 2013/14 KS4 cohort in the 2014/15 academic year. Analysis of KS5 attainment data drew upon the latest Department for Education Level 3 examination results for young people at state-funded schools and colleges. The data covers students at the end of advanced level study who were entered for at least one substantial level 3 qualification in the 2014/15 academic year, and includes results achieved in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years. KS5 destination data was also examined, again using the Department for Education destinations data. Datasets from 2012/13 and 2013/14 KS5 cohorts were analysed, although changes in how the data is collected and reported, and changes to the definition of disadvantage, makes the data less comparable between the two years.

In addition, the research team sought to work with the FE and 6th Form college to access their own UCAS applicant data. The intention was to undertake a comparative analysis of the data to help identify where the differences in application/acceptance rates were smaller or larger (particularly in relation to qualification type and subject studied), thus helping to identify priorities for future interventions. Unfortunately, no data was forthcoming during the timeframe of the study.

Appendix B: Pre-Entry Online Survey

Pre-entry – online survey text only

Thank you for taking part in this survey. It has been designed by Southern Universities Network to find out what young males think about education. It will help schools, colleges and universities to provide better information about the options open to you.

1. How old are you?

Under 14

14 to 16

17 to 19

20 and over

2. Where in Hampshire do you live? We only need a postcode. Leave blank if you are not sure.

3. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?

Arab

Asian or Asian British – Indian

Asian or Asian British – Pakistani

Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi

Asian or Asian British – Any other

Black or Black British – Caribbean

Black or Black British – African

Black or Black British – Any other

Chinese

Mixed – White and Black Caribbean

Mixed – White and Black African

Mixed – White and Asian

Mixed – Any other mixed background

White – British

White – Irish

White – any other White background

Any other ethnic origin group

4. Which of the following best describes your situation right now?

At school (up to year 11)

At school 6th Form

At 6th Form College

On full time course at a further education college

On a part time course at a further education college

On an Apprenticeship or other training programme

In paid work

Looking for work

Other (please specify)

5. What would you most like to do next?

Go to a school 6th Form

Go to a 6th Form College

Take a full time course at a further education college

Take a part time course at a further education college

Get onto an Apprenticeship or other training programme

Take a gap year

Study at a university or college to do a degree or other higher qualification

Start a business

Get a job

6. How important is learning to you? Please rate your agreement with the following statements. Strongly agree/ Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/ Disagree strongly/ disagree/ Not applicable

- I enjoy my current studies
- I am keen to learn new or different things
- I work hard in my current studies
- It's good to be seen as hardworking at school/college
- Studying hard will help me achieve my career goals

7. Are you interested in studying a course at university?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

8. How likely is it that you will study a course at university in future?

- Highly likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Highly unlikely
- Not sure

9. What kind of university course would interest you the most? Tick up to 3.

- Full time course
- Part time course
- Distance learning (for example online learning or through materials sent in the post)
- Getting sponsorship from an employer (An employer would pay towards your costs)
- Degree Apprenticeship (Getting a degree through an Apprenticeship route)
- Sandwich course (includes a year in work as part of your course)
- Going after a gap year
- Going later on in life

10. Please rate your agreement with the following statements Strongly agree/ Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/ Disagree strongly/ disagree/ Not applicable

- Going to university is necessary for the career I have in mind
- I am more likely to get a job if I study at university
- The courses and subjects available at university are suitable for me
- I would get accepted into university if I applied
- University is open to everyone
- I am the sort of person that would go to university
- I would enjoy being a university student
- I would be able to cope with the work at university
- University is affordable
- My close friends are likely to go to university
- My family thinks university is a good option for me
- There are plenty of places to get advice about university

11. What is important to you when choosing your next step? Tick up to 3.

- I want to start earning as soon as possible
- I want a job that is well paid
- I want a job that is suited to my interests and skills
- I want a job that is worth while
- I want to continue to study a subject that is interesting to me
- I want to develop skills that are needed by employers
- I want some fun
- I want some independence
- I want to provide financial support for my family
- I want to do something that makes my family proud
- Other (please specify)

12. Would any of the following be helpful to you right now?

Visiting different kinds of university

Taking part in subject 'tasters'

Finding out about careers on offer after university

Knowing what local employers think about university

Finding out what it's like to be a university student

Details of courses on offer

Information about costs and funding

Chance to talk to someone about my career plans

Thank you for taking part in the survey. If you wish to be entered into our free prize draw for £50 of Amazon vouchers, please leave your details below. We will only use your contact details if you are one of our prize winners.

Name

School or college (if applicable)

Email address or telephone number

Appendix C: Pre-Entry Focus Group Plan

Pre-Entry Research: Focus Group Plan

We aim to:

- Explore perceptions of HE, in comparison to other education and training opportunities
- Identify barriers and enablers to HE
- Identify action to help white working class males make more informed choices about HE

Time	Aim	Task
0	Clarify purpose of the group / create positive atmosphere conducive to sharing views	Welcome each participant, ask name and create name badge. Thank for participation, introductions & explain aims of group Assure of confidentiality and explain that we expect participants to have a range of views and experiences; we welcome different views and invite everyone to respect different views
10 mins	Explore perceptions of HE, in comparison to other education and training opportunities	- Give out post-its and invite everyone to jot down the first thing that occurs to them in response to 'university' (Depending on feeling, ask for quick feedback or move into next task) - Split into 2 groups, give a piece of flipchart and ask them to jot down any thoughts or views on university (both positive and negative). Ask a volunteer from each group to feedback. Clarify / explore themes in group. - Ask full group: What are the alternatives to university? Jot on flipchart and in the same groups ask them to jot down thoughts/views on these e.g. apprenticeships, work, self-employment. Note HE is delivered through colleges as well as universities, this may need to be addressed during discussion (for example locally Southampton City College provide HE level courses)
25 mins	Identify benefits / disadvantages of HE	Give out post-its and in pairs ask them to jot on yellow post-it's the benefits of university for them and on green post-it notes the disadvantages for them as an individual. Feedback by each pair adding ideas to flipchart; theme pros and cons and number them. Discuss and clarify. Ask participants to individually rank top 3 pros and cons for them; on post-its.
35 mins	Identify perceptions of 'the fit' with university	Invite everyone to imagine a line along the room, one end is 'strongly agree', one is 'strongly disagree'. Ask them to place themselves along the line in response to a statement and draw out different views e.g. I think I'd fit in at university; Boys are more likely than girls to want to go to university; The views of my family matter a lot when deciding whether to go to university; The views of my friends matter a lot when deciding whether to go to university; My friends would encourage me to go to university; My family would encourage me to go to university. Select statements depending on discussions so far.

45 mins	Identify what would help them to make an informed choice re HE	Acknowledge that university may not be for everyone but sometimes individuals may not have enough information to make an informed decision. <i>Ask 'What can be done to help boys / young men decide whether university is for them?' In 2 groups or pairs - depending on dynamics – ask them to jot down responses on post-its. Prompts: What have you already done that has helped you to find out about university? What other information would be helpful right now?</i>
50 mins	Gather information about background	Hand out slip of paper with 2 questions: 1) Have any members of your close family been to university? Yes/no/don't know 2) How likely are you to go to university? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very unlikely Very likely
55 mins	To appreciate input	Thanks everyone; give out information about who / where they can get information about HE / decision-making/clarify arrangements for receiving vouchers.

Appendix D: Pre-Entry Parent Interview Guide

Pre-entry research: Parent semi-structured interview script

INFORMED CONSENT -

- Check research statement received (if not provide outline)
- Clarify purpose of interview and invite questions
- Explain note taking process
- Explain use of information and confidentiality
- Confirm incentive and process for receiving voucher

1. What do you think about university as an option? Why do you think this?
2. What would be the benefits to your son of going to university?
3. What would be the disadvantages of your son going to university?
4. What alternatives are there to university for your son? How do these compare to university?
4. If your son wished to go to university is there anything that might prevent him?
5. What might encourage your son to go to university?
6. What information or advice, if any, has your son had about university?
7. Is there any information or advice you think he might benefit from?
8. Have you ever been offered any information or advice about university as an option for your son? If yes, where from? How useful?
9. As a parent, if you had questions about university where would you turn?
10. About you HE experience? Y/N
HE experience in family (e.g. partner, siblings, close relatives)? Y/N
Parents employed? Y/N Nature of employment?
11. Is there anything else you might want to add?

CLOSE -

Thank them for time

Confirm next steps (incentive, use of information)

Appendix E: Post-Entry Research Methodology

Overview

The research collected for this project informs part of a larger multi-year study at the University of Portsmouth titled: Understanding the University of Portsmouth Student: Recruitment, Aspirations, Induction, and the Student Experience. The multi-year study is a mixed methods study involving surveys and focus groups to explore the student experience at the University of Portsmouth. The University published the Education Strategy for 2016-2020, which includes what it means to be a “Portsmouth graduate”, highlighting the strengths, qualities, and attributes that a Portsmouth student can expect to develop during the course of their studies (University of Portsmouth, 2016).

The main aim of this study is to explore and enhance the ways by which the University of Portsmouth supports students to become “Portsmouth graduates”, focusing on recruitment/outreach/access/widening participation; induction activities; aspirations/employability; progression/persistence; and attainment.

Combining data collection for this research with the larger study provided an opportunity to gather more responses and more data than would have been possible if a separate survey had been created specifically for the white, working class men in higher education research project. Before working with the Marketing and Communications team to build specific questions into their annual survey that would provide data for this research, the estimated number of survey responses the white, working class men in higher education project was expected to achieve was 200 out of the 5775 first year undergraduates, which would have amounted to about a 3.5 percent response rate. As a result of combining survey questions into the larger survey, 678 students completed the survey, amounting to approximately a 12 percent response rate.

Aims/Objectives

The primary aims/objectives of this research is that the research outcomes will:

- increase recruitment of underrepresented students, specifically white, working class men;
- inform improvements to student services, specifically related to: recruitment/outreach/access/widening participation and support services;
- enhance the undergraduate student experience at the University of Portsmouth.

Project Timeline/Milestones

Aug-Sep	Drafted a literature review focused on UK literature around the higher education participation of white, working class, young men, including a focus on the local Portsmouth specific data around HE participation.
Aug-Oct	In partnership with Marketing and Communications, developed a survey for first year undergraduate students.
Oct	Developed a focus group guide for focus groups with working class, white, traditional age men who are current undergraduates at the University.
Oct	Prepared and submitted applications to the ethics committee and the student voice group for review. Both approved.
Oct	Prepared a recruitment and advertising strategy, including print and online advertising.
Nov	Collected survey responses online using Qualtrics for four weeks from 3 rd Nov – 1 st Dec.
Nov	Recruited focus group participants.
Nov - Dec	Organised and conducted three focus groups with 20 participants lasting approximately one hour each.
Dec	Analyse survey data using Qualtrics and focus group data using thematic analysis.
Dec	Present initial findings at the SUN WP conference in Bournemouth on 15 th December
Jan	Complete report of findings.

Research Design Review

Review of the design and methodology of this project was undertaken by members of the Marketing and Communications team and members of the Induction Working Group, which includes academic and support staff and elected student representatives. Additionally, the survey was reviewed and tested by current undergraduate students. Feedback from reviewers was vital in shaping the survey to be concise (15 minutes to complete) and as accessible and user-friendly as possible.

Research Participants

Participation in this study was limited to current undergraduate students at the University of Portsmouth, especially focused on first year students (new starters). For the survey, all current first year undergraduates who were new starters in Autumn 2016 (n: 5775) were emailed the survey link. The University of Portsmouth Student Voice Group approved the distribution of the survey link to all first year undergraduates (new starters). Participation was encouraged through a prize draw incentive. Five winners were selected at random every day while the survey was open (140 prizes total). The earlier a participant completed the survey, the higher their chances of winning a prize. As winners were selected randomly, participants could win more than once. Each winner received a £10 voucher. For the initial survey, the response rate we had hoped to achieve was a minimum of 10 percent. The survey was completed by 678 participants, so the actual response rate was 12 percent. The survey contained many conditional and routed questions which were dependent on a respondent's answer to a previous question. This enabled a student to complete the survey in around 15 minutes on average.

Survey Demographic Data	
Category	Number/Percentage
Gender	
Male	297 (44%)
Female	368 (54%)
Other/Prefer not to say	13 (2%)
Nationality	
UK	600 (88.5%)
EU	47 (7%)
Non-EU	31 (4.5%)
Race/Ethnicity	
White	White: 507 (75%)
BME	148 (22%)
Prefer not to say	23 (3%)
Age	
Traditional Age (17-19)	484 (71%)
Mature (20+)	194 (29%)
First Generation	374 (55%)

For the purposes of this research, the survey data from the participants who identified as male, white, from the UK, first generation, traditional age students (n: 97) were the focus. Their responses were analysed both as a group and in comparison to the larger survey population. The 97 respondents represented 20% of all traditional age respondents and 62% of respondents who identify as male, white, from the UK, and traditional age.

Focus group participants were recruited through email (from the survey participants who indicate a willingness to participate); through a flyer advertisement; and through targeted social media posts. Focus group participation was encouraged through a £20 voucher for participation. For the focus groups, we had hoped to recruit 24 participants. However, we were only able to recruit 20 participants. While attempts were made to recruit second and third year students to participate in the focus groups, 19 out of 20 focus group participants were first year students while the remaining participant was a second year student. Focus group participants identified as male, white, from the UK, first generation, traditional age students.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought and granted through the University of Portsmouth Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee (Reference: 16:17:06). This study complies with the ethical codes, policies, and procedures outlined within the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (Universities UK, 2012); the RCUK Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct (Research Councils UK, 2015); and the ethical principles published by The British Sociological Association (British Sociological Association, 2002). Information Sheets for this study were distributed electronically via a link for survey participants and in hard copy for focus group participants. Consent Forms were created for this study and consent was sought electronically for survey participants and via signed hard copy for focus group participants. Additionally, an Oral Consent Script was created and read at the start of each focus group. Data collected was coded and anonymised.

Publication/Dissemination

Findings from this study will be published in internal reports at the University of Portsmouth to inform best practices for recruiting and supporting students. Additionally, findings will be presented at academic conferences, published in external reports, and published in academic journals.

Appendix F: Post-Entry Online Survey

Understanding the University of Portsmouth Student

Thank you for taking the time to share your views. We need to hear from new students. Your feedback will help us identify what we are doing well and where we need to improve our services to create a better student experience. For more information about this research, please view the Information Sheet ([link](#)).

Completing the Survey: All answers will be treated confidentially and anonymously, so please be as open and honest as possible. If at any point you decide that you no longer wish to participate, you can simply exit the survey by closing the window or tab on your browser.

Entering the Prize Draw: There is a separate prize draw page at the end of the survey. Each day the survey is open, there'll be £50 worth of prizes up for grabs. We'll be randomly selecting 5 winners daily who will be able to choose from one of the following: £10 Amazon voucher; £10 campus catering credit; £10 Student Union shop voucher; or £10 supermarket voucher. It's your choice. So, the earlier you complete the survey, the more chances you have of winning.

Consent Form:

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the study. I confirm that I know whom to contact if I have any questions about the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving any reason before submitting the survey. I understand that withdrawal of anonymous survey responses will not be possible once the survey has been submitted. I understand that the results of this study may be used in publications and / or presentations. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings. I give my permission for my anonymous data, which does not identify me, to be disseminated in this way. I agree to the data I contribute being retained and archived for any future related research that has been approved by a Research Ethics Committee. I agree to take part in this study.

- Yes, I consent to participate in the study.
- No, I do not consent to participate in the study.

If no is selected, respondent receives the message:

We understand that you do not wish to participate in this study. Many thanks for your interest and good luck with your studies.

About Your Studies

Which course are you studying? Please select one option from the drop-down list

- Accountancy and Financial Management (Top-up) BA (Hons)
- Accounting and Business BA (Hons)
- Accounting with Finance BA (Hons)
- American Studies BA (Hons)
- American Studies and History BA (Hons)
- Animation BA (Hons)
- Animation with Business Communication BA (Hons)
- Applied Languages BA (Hons)
- Applied Languages MLang
- Applied Physics BSc (Hons)
- Applied Physics MPhys (Hons)
- Architecture BA (Hons)
- Biochemistry BSc (Hons)
- Biochemistry MBiol
- Biology BSc (Hons)
- Biology MBiol
- Biomedical Science BSc (Hons)
- Broadcast Journalism BSc (Hons)
- Building Surveying BSc (Hons)
- Business HND
- Business and Human Resource Management BA (Hons)
- Business and Management FdA
- Business and Management BA (Hons)
- Business and Supply Chain Management BSc (Hons)
- Business and Systems Management BSc (Hons)
- Business Economics BSc (Econ) (Hons)
- Business Information Systems BSc (Hons)
- Business Information Systems (Top-up) BSc (Hons)
- Business Leadership and Management (Apprenticeship) BA (Hons)
- Business Management and Entrepreneurship BA (Hons)
- Business with Business Communication (Top-up) BA (Hons)
- Childhood and Youth Studies BA (Hons)
- Childhood and Youth Studies with Psychology BA (Hons)
- Civil Engineering MEng
- Civil Engineering BEng (Hons)
- Combined Modern Languages BA (Hons)
- Communication and English Studies BA (Hons)
- Computer Aided Product Design BSc (Hons)
- Computer Animation BSc (Hons)
- Computer Animation with Business Communication BSc (Hons)
- Computer Engineering BEng (Hons)
- Computer Engineering MEng
- Computer Games Enterprise BSc (Hons)
- Computer Games Technology BSc (Hons)
- Computer Games Technology with Business Communication BSc (Hons)
- Computer Networks BSc (Hons)
- Computer Science MEng
- Computer Science BSc (Hons)
- Computing BSc (Hons)
- Computing and Information Systems (Top-up) BSc (Hons)
- Construction Engineering Management BEng (Hons)
- Counter Fraud and Criminal Justice Studies BSc (Hons)
- Creative and Media Writing BA (Hons)
- Crime and Criminology BSc (Hons)
- Criminology and Criminal Justice BSc (Hons)
- Criminology and Forensic Studies BSc (Hons)

- Criminology with Psychology BSc (Hons)
- Dental Hygiene and Dental Therapy BSc (Hons)
- Dental Nursing CertHE
- Digital Marketing BA (Hons)
- Digital Media BSc (Hons)
- Drama and Performance BA (Hons)
- Early Childhood Studies BA (Hons)
- Early Childhood Studies with Psychology BA (Hons)
- Early Years Care and Education FdA
- Economics BSc (Econ) (Hons)
- Economics and Management BA (Hons)
- Economics, Finance and Banking BSc (Econ) (Hons)
- Education and Training Studies (Top-up) BA (Hons)
- Electronic Engineering BEng (Hons)
- Electronic Engineering MEng
- Electronic Systems Engineering (Top-up) BEng (Hons)
- Engineering and Technology BEng (Hons)
- Engineering Geology and Geotechnics BEng (Hons)
- English and American Studies BA (Hons)
- English and Creative Writing BA (Hons)
- English and History BA (Hons)
- English and Media Studies BA (Hons)
- English Language BA (Hons)
- English Language and Literature BA (Hons)
- English Literature BA (Hons)
- English with Psychology BA (Hons)
- Environmental Science MEnvSci
- Environmental Science BSc (Hons)
- European Studies and International Relations BA (Hons)
- Exercise and Fitness Management BSc (Hons)
- Fashion and Textile Design BA (Hons)
- Film Industries BA (Hons)
- Film Industries and Creative Writing BA (Hons)
- Film Production BA (Hons)
- Film Production with Business Communication BA (Hons)
- Finance with Business Communication (Top-up) BA (Hons)
- Financial Management for Business BA (Hons)
- Forensic Computing BSc (Hons)
- Forensic Psychology BSc (Hons)
- French Studies BA (Hons)
- Geography BA (Hons)
- Geography BSc (Hons)
- Geological Hazards BSc (Hons)
- Geological Hazards MGeol
- Geology BSc (Hons)
- Geology MGeol
- German Studies BA (Hons)
- Graphic Design BA (Hons)
- History BA (Hons)
- History and Politics BA (Hons)
- Hospitality Management BA (Hons)
- Hospitality Management with Tourism BA (Hons)
- Human Communication Science (Top-up) BSc (Hons)
- Human Geography BA (Hons)
- Human Physiology BSc (Hons)
- Human Resource Management with Psychology BA (Hons)
- Illustration BA (Hons)
- Innovation Engineering BEng

- Innovation Engineering MEng
- Interior Architecture and Design BA (Hons)
- International Business BA (Hons)
- International Business Communication BA (Hons)
- International Development Studies BA (Hons)
- International Development Studies and Languages BA (Hons)
- International Relations BA (Hons)
- International Relations and History BA (Hons)
- International Relations and Languages BA (Hons)
- International Relations and Politics BA (Hons)
- International Trade and Business Communication BA (Hons)
- International Trade, Logistics and Business Communication (Top-up) BA (Hons)
- Journalism BA (Hons)
- Journalism with English Language BA (Hons)
- Journalism with English Literature BA (Hons)
- Journalism with Media Studies BA (Hons)
- Languages and European Studies BA (Hons)
- Law LLB (Hons)
- Law with Business LLB (Hons)
- Law with Criminology LLB (Hons)
- Law with International Relations LLB (Hons)
- Leadership, Business and Management (Top-up) BA (Hons)
- Learning Support FdA
- Logistics and Business Communication (Top-up) BA (Hons)
- Logistics and Supply Chain Management (Top-up) BSc (Hons)
- Marine Biology MBiol
- Marine Biology BSc (Hons)
- Marine Environmental Science BSc (Hons)
- Marine Environmental Science MEnvSci
- Marketing BA (Hons)
- Marketing with Psychology BA (Hons)
- Mathematics BSc (Hons)
- Mathematics MMath
- Mathematics for Finance and Management BSc (Hons)
- Mathematics with Statistics BSc (Hons)
- Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering BEng (Hons)
- Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering (Top-up) BEng (Hons)
- Mechanical Engineering MEng
- Mechanical Engineering BEng (Hons)
- Media Studies BA (Hons)
- Media Studies and Entertainment Technology BA (Hons)
- Music and Sound Technology BSc (Hons)
- Music Computing BSc (Hons)
- Musical Theatre BA (Hons)
- Nursing (Adult) BN (Hons)
- Operating Department Practice BSc (Hons)
- Optometry MOptom
- Palaeontology BSc (Hons)
- Palaeontology MGeol
- Paramedic Science BSc (Hons)
- Partnership Degree Programme BA/BSc
- Petroleum Engineering BEng (Hons)
- Petroleum Engineering MEng
- Pharmacology BSc (Hons)
- Pharmacy MPharm (Hons)
- Photography BA (Hons)
- Physical Geography BSc (Hons)
- Physics, Astrophysics and Cosmology BSc (Hons)

- Physics, Astrophysics and Cosmology MPhys (Hons)
- Policing and Investigation BSc (Hons)
- Politics BA (Hons)
- Product Design and Innovation BSc (Hons)
- Property Development BSc (Hons)
- Psychology BSc (Hons)
- Quantity Surveying BSc (Hons)
- Radiography (Diagnostic) BSc (Hons)
- Radiography (Therapeutic) BSc (Hons)
- Risk and Security Management BSc (Hons)
- Social Work BSc (Hons)
- Sociology BSc (Hons)
- Sociology and Criminology BSc (Hons)
- Sociology and Media Studies BA (Hons)
- Sociology with Psychology BSc (Hons)
- Software Engineering BSc (Hons)
- Spanish and Latin American Studies BA (Hons)
- Spanish Studies BA (Hons)
- Speech, Language and Communication Science FdSc
- Sport and Exercise Psychology BSc (Hons)
- Sport and Exercise Science BSc (Hons)
- Sports Development BSc (Hons)
- Sports Science and Management (Top-up) BSc (Hons)
- Television and Broadcasting BSc (Hons)
- Television and Broadcasting with Business Communication BSc (Hons)
- Web Technologies BSc (Hons)
- Other

If you selected other course from the previous question, please specify:

What is your mode of study? Please select one option

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Distance Learning

What age were you when you felt sure that you would apply to university? Please select one option

- Age 10 or younger
- 11 to 13
- 14 to 15
- 16 to 19
- 20 or older

What were your main reasons for choosing to pursue an undergraduate degree? Please select all that apply

- Because it is necessary in order to achieve my career goals
- Because a degree will make me more employable or will expand my career prospects
- Because a degree will lead to a higher salary
- Because it's the next step in my formal education
- Because my peers/friends were going to university
- Because my parent(s) expected me to go to university
- Because I am passionate about the subject I have chosen to study
- Other (please specify) _____

What are your career goals? Whether you are still developing or thinking about your career goals or you have a specific career plan in mind, please write about where you are in the process of considering your future career.

In what ways will pursuing your degree at the University of Portsmouth help you achieve your current desired career goals? Please be as specific as possible

About Your University Choice

Who did you talk to (if anyone) about your choice of university? Please select all that apply

- Careers advisor
- School/College subject teacher
- Head of sixth form
- School/College form teacher/tutor
- University course tutor
- University staff member
- Parent/Guardian
- Other Family member
- Friends
- Students at university
- Partner
- Employer/Work colleagues
- Music/Arts/Sports/Other extra-curricular activity coach/trainer
- Religious leader
- I did not speak to anyone specifically about my choice
- Other (please specify) _____

Thinking back to when you were making your university choices, which of the following information sources (if any) did you find useful in your research and decision-making? Please select all that apply

- University prospectuses
- University websites
- Course brochure/leaflets
- University Open Days (before you received an offer)
- Applicant Open Days (after you received an offer)
- League tables
- UCAS website
- Social media sites or apps e.g. Facebook
- Student websites (e.g. The Student Room)
- University comparison sites (e.g. Unistats, Which? University)
- University/ Student experience surveys (e.g. NSS)
- Printed/online student guides
- Careers Centre/Library (School/ College)
- Higher Education Fair/ University exhibition
- Word of mouth
- International agents
- None
- Other (please specify) _____

Which social media site/s or apps did you use (if any) in your university decision-making?

Please select all that apply

- Facebook
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Pinterest
- Tumblr
- Vine
- Twitter
- WeChat
- Weibo
- Baidu
- Reddit
- Google+
- Linked In
- YikYak
- Live.ly
- YouNow
- Periscope
- I did not use any social media sites or apps
- Other social media site/app (please specify) _____

Which website/s did you use (if any) in your university decision-making? Please select all that apply

- The Student Room
- Hotcourses
- Push
- What Uni
- Which? University
- Wikipedia
- HEAP
- StudentCrowd
- Prospects.ac.uk
- Complete University Guide
- Unistats/KIS (Key Information Sets)
- I did not use any websites
- Other website (please specify) _____

Which league table/s did you use (if any) in your university decision-making? Please select all that apply

- The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide
- The Complete University Guide
- The Guardian University Guide
- Times Higher Education World University Rankings
- I did not use any league tables
- Other league table (please specify) _____

Which University/student experience survey/s did you use (if any) in your university decision-making? Please select all that apply

- National Student Survey (NSS) results
- The Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey
- The Which?/HEPI Student Academic Experience Survey
- I did not use any university/ student experience survey
- Other university/student experience survey (please specify) _____

Which of the following academic factors (if any) were important to you when you were deciding where to apply? Please select all that apply

- Academic reputation of universities
- Graduate employment prospects
- University position in league tables
- Course position in league tables
- Scores from the National Student Survey (NSS)
- Course and course content
- Quality of the study facilities
- University bursaries/ scholarships
- Cost of the course
- Incentives (e.g. laptops, cash etc.)
- Unconditional offer scheme
- Teaching quality for my chosen subject
- Teaching and assessment methods
- Staff to student ratios
- Research quality for my chosen subject
- Entry requirements were realistic
- University links with industry/ employers
- Opportunity of a placement
- Opportunity to learn a language
- Opportunity to study abroad
- Funding opportunities
- University reputation
- University brand reputation (academic credentials)
- None
- Other (please specify) _____

Which of the following non-academic factors (if any) were important to you when you were deciding where to apply? Please select all that apply

- The appearance of the campus/ university buildings
- Cost of living in the area
- Distance from parental/ permanent home
- Parent or family members decided
- I could continue to live at home and study
- Proximity to the coast/seaside
- Universities in or close to city centres
- The social life of the area/university
- A friendly and supportive atmosphere
- Reviews from other students
- Safety of campus/local area
- Quality of information or experience received after a University Open Day (before you received an offer)
- Quality of information or experience received after the Applicant Open Day (after you received an offer)
- Availability or standard of accommodation
- Universities' attitudes towards environmental issues
- Availability of local employment whilst studying
- Support and Wellbeing services
- Sports and recreation facilities
- University reputation
- University brand reputation (non-academic credentials)
- University brochures, websites, publications, etc.
- None
- Other (please specify) _____

What was more appealing about your course at the University of Portsmouth compared to courses elsewhere? Please select all that apply

- The academic reputation of the course
- The research reputation of the course
- Links with industry/employers
- The entry grades were achievable
- The course was unique/niche
- The course structure
- The content/emphasis of the course
- The method of assessment
- The academic staff
- The staff to student ratio
- The method of teaching/learning
- The duration of the course
- The cost of the course
- The timetabling of the course
- The accreditation of the course
- The course-specific facilities/equipment
- The support for the course
- The history of the course (i.e. how long it has been established)
- The ratings of the course (i.e. league tables, NSS)
- The employment prospects associated with the course at this university
- The opportunity of a placement
- The opportunity to study or work abroad
- The opportunity to undertake fieldtrips
- Only course offered to me through Clearing
- University reputation (non-academic credentials)
- University brand
- Course information materials (brochures, websites, publications, etc.)
- Nothing
- Other (please specify) _____

At the time you applied, where did the University of Portsmouth rank in your own mind? Please select one option

- It was my first choice
- It was my second choice
- It was in the middle
- It was towards the bottom of my choices
- It was my only choice
- University of Portsmouth was not in my list of choices, but was offered to me in Clearing
- Other (please specify) _____

At what point did you decide to accept your offer from the University of Portsmouth? Please select one option

- After attending a University Open Day
- After attending an Applicant Open Day
- After attending an audition/interview
- After attending a (self-guided) campus walking tour
- When I had visited another university
- When I had received my offer/s
- In Clearing
- Other (please specify) _____

What were the main reasons you chose to attend the University of Portsmouth and not another university? Please give brief details below

What would you say are the strengths of the University of Portsmouth? Please give brief details

What do you think makes the University of Portsmouth unique? Please give brief details

About the University Brand We are embarking on an exciting project to re-brand our University. We will be consulting widely with people across the university during 2016/17. We're interested in how you perceive the current branding.

Are you aware of the University of Portsmouth logo?

- Yes
 No

Are you aware of the University of Portsmouth crest?

- Yes
 No

Which of these traits would best reflect the University of Portsmouth? Please select up to three options only

- Innovative
 Contemporary
 Caring
 Authentic
 Grounded
 Student-focused
 Education-focused
 Employment-focused
 Conservative
 Liberal
 Heritage
 Other (please specify) _____

Engaging with the University and/or University Representatives

Which of the following applies to you? Please select one option

- I visited the University before I began my studies here
 I did not visit the University before I began my studies here

What was the nature of your visit/s to the University of Portsmouth? Please select all that apply

- University Open Day (pre-application)
 Applicant Open Day (post-application)
 UCAS Exhibition
 Independent visit (e.g.school/ college visit, campus walking tour)
 Audition/interview
 I had studied at the University previously
 Other (please specify) (e.g. visited siblings/friends/other family) _____

Which of the following aspects of your visit to the University of Portsmouth had a POSITIVE impact on your decision to study at the University (if any)? Please select all that apply

- The booking procedure for a University Open Day
 The booking procedure for an Applicant Open Day
 Contact with teaching staff
 Contact with non-teaching staff
 Contact with current students
 The content of the talks/presentations
 The overall atmosphere of the place
 The audition/interview
 None
 Other (please specify) _____

Which of the following aspects of your visit to the University of Portsmouth had a NEGATIVE impact on your decision to study at the University (if any)? Please select all that apply

- The booking procedure for a University Open Day
- The booking procedure for an Applicant Open Day
- Contact with teaching staff
- Contact with non-teaching staff
- Contact with current students
- The content of the talks/presentations
- The overall atmosphere of the place
- The audition/interview
- None
- Other (please specify) _____

Did you come into contact with any representatives from the University of Portsmouth at the following events? Please select all that apply

- UCAS Exhibition
- Careers Fair at your 6th Form or College
- Talk or Presentation by a University representative at your 6th Form or College
- I did not come into contact with any University of Portsmouth representatives at these events
- I did not attend these events

Did meeting any University representative/s at any stage influence your decision to attend the University of Portsmouth? Please select one option

- Yes
- No

Please tell us how meeting a University representative influenced your decision to attend the University of Portsmouth? Please give brief details below

Did you take part in any of the following University of Portsmouth Outreach activities? Please select all that apply

- UP for It Juniors
- Assembly
- Workshop
- University taster day
- Summer school residential
- UP for It Club holiday workshop
- Year 12 conference
- No, I did not take part in any of these activities

The University provides a lot of information about its services to prospective students and new students. Which statement best describes how you feel about the amount of information provided by the University about its services?

- I did not receive enough information
- I was happy with the amount of information provided
- I was overwhelmed by the amount of information provided about the University's services
- Other (please give brief details) _____

How strongly do you agree with the following statement: 'I found online information about the University's services quickly and easily'

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Not Applicable/I did not access information online

About Your Induction Week/Freshers' Week Experience

Did you access the PrepUP website before starting your course at the University of Portsmouth?
Please select one option

- Yes and I found the website useful
- Yes, but I did not find the website useful
- No, I tried but was unable to gain access to the PrepUP website
- No, I've never heard of PrepUP

What did you find most useful about the PrepUP website? Please give brief details

What suggestions do you have for making the PrepUP website more useful for incoming students? Please give brief details

Did you attend any Induction Week/Freshers' Week activities?

- Yes
- No

Why were you unable to attend any Induction Week/Freshers' Week activities?

- Activities conflicted with my work schedule
- I had family or caring responsibilities
- I did not think the activities would be useful
- Other (please specify) _____

As a result of attending Induction Week/Freshers' Week sessions/events/activities... Please select all that apply

- I felt prepared to start my course
- I learned what is expected of me in my course
- I felt confused about my course
- I learned my way around
- I became confident in using the online tools and resources available to me (e.g. Gmail, Drive, Moodle, MyPort)
- I learned how to find resources at the library (online and in person)
- I learned who to contact if I have questions or problems
- I feel like I am a part of the university community
- I learned how to balance my studies with my work schedule, social life, family obligations and/or other responsibilities
- I felt overwhelmed by the amount of information shared
- Other (please specify) _____

Given the amount of information that needs to be presented during Induction Week, what feedback do you have on the length of time of Induction: Please select one option

- I think one week was enough time to cover everything adequately
- I think induction should be spread out over a longer period of time

If you think it should be spread out over a longer period of time, how long do you think would work best for students? Please select one option

- Spread out over two weeks
- Spread out over the first term
- Spread out over the first year
- Other (please specify) _____

Thinking about the importance of Induction activities to enable you to orient yourself at the university and within your course, which sessions/events/activities did you find most effective or memorable? Please give brief details

Which of the following resources and student support services did you learn about during Induction week? Please select all that apply

- MyPort (online student services portal)
- Moodle
- Student Wellbeing
- Student Finance
- Student Housing
- ASK (Academic Skills)
- Learning Development Tutors
- ASDAC (Additional Support and Disability Advice Centre) Office
- International Office
- Equality and Diversity
- Chaplaincy
- Legal Advice
- Sport and Recreation
- Safer Students
- Maths Café
- Employability (Purple Door)
- Academic Registry
- Student IT Help Centre
- Students' Union
- None
- Other (please specify) _____

The purpose of Induction Week is to provide you with the information and resources to take full advantage of your education at the University of Portsmouth. Given that, what suggestions (if any) do you have for improvements to Induction Week/Freshers' Week at the University? Please give brief details

Have you arranged to meet with or have you already met with your personal tutor? Please select one option

- Yes
- No
- I don't know who that is

Have you completed a Personal Development Plan (PDP)? Please select one option

- Yes
- No
- I don't know what that is

As a result of your experience during Induction Week/Freshers' Week, are you happy that you chose to attend the University of Portsmouth? Please select one option

- Very Happy
- Happy
- Neither Happy nor Unhappy
- Unhappy
- Very Unhappy

And, finally, what else would you like to share about your experience at the University of Portsmouth so far?

About You

Are you:

- Female
- Male
- Transgender/Gender non-conforming
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify if you wish) _____

What is your age? Please select one option

- 17
- 18-19
- 20-21
- 22-30
- 31+
- Prefer not to say

Are you classed as: Please select one option

- A student from the United Kingdom
- A student from the European Union
- An international student (not from the EU)

Please enter the first part of your postcode (the outcode) of your permanent home postcode (NOT your term-time postcode unless you live at home during term-time). Your home postcode will be the same home postcode you entered on your application form e.g. PO1 or SO17 etc.

Did your parent(s)/guardian(s) go to university? Please select one option

- Two of my parents/guardians went to university
- One of my parents/guardians went to university
- None of my parents/guardians went to university
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify if you wish) _____

Do you intend to engage in paid work whilst pursuing your degree? Please select one option

- Yes, I will work 20 hours or less a week
- Yes, I will work 20 hours or more per week
- No, I do not intend to work during term time
- I am unsure about whether or not I will work whilst pursuing my degree

What is your ethnic origin? Please select one option

- Arab
- Asian - Bangladeshi
- Asian - Chinese
- Asian - Indian
- Asian - Other
- Asian - Pakistani
- Black - African
- Black - Caribbean
- Black - Other
- White
- White and Asian
- White/Black African
- White/Black Caribbean
- Other (please specify if you wish) _____
- I prefer not to say

Which social media sites do you personally use (if any) the most frequently (at least once a week)? Please select all that apply

- Facebook
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Pinterest
- Tumblr
- Vine
- Twitter
- WeChat
- Weibo
- Baidu
- Reddit
- Google+
- Linked In
- YikYak
- Live.ly
- YouNow
- Periscope
- I do not use any social media sites or apps
- Other social media site/app (please specify) _____

Thank you for your time! Please press the Submit Survey button on this page to complete the survey. Enter the prize draw by clicking the link on the next page.

Appendix G: Post-Entry Focus Group Guide

Post-Entry Focus Group Topic Guide

Provide Information Sheets and Consent Forms

Introductions, Ground Rules, Oral Consent

1. What do you think are the benefits of getting a university degree? What will you gain by getting your degree? What are your aspirations? How will your degree help you achieve your goals?
2. Did you have friends or peers in your home town who did not go to university? Why do you think some students choose not to go to university? We've talked about the benefits of getting a university degree, what concerns do you think some students have when they consider whether or not to go to university? Did you or do you have concerns?
3. How did you decide to go to university? What was that process like? What did you consider?
4. What can the University of Portsmouth do to reach out to and recruit students who are on the fence about whether to go to university? Think back to when you were deciding whether to go to university and where to go to university, what would you have wanted to hear? What messages or information would help a student like you decide to go to the University of Portsmouth?
5. How do you balance your studies with work and/or your social life or other obligations? Do you feel like there's pressure to be a certain kind of student, socially or academically, when you get to university? Who is a typical student? Outside the classroom? Inside the classroom?
6. Do you feel like a part of the university community? Socially? Academically? In what ways? Do you feel supported at the university? In what ways? What do you think the university could do so that students feel like a part of the academic community?
7. What else can you tell me about your student experience so far? Anything surprising? Frustrating? Anything that has made you feel proud?

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