What factors influence Fair Access students to consider university and what do they look for?

Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a participatory mixed methods study into the perceptions of Fair Access students on the factors which led them to consider accessing Higher Education. The study consisted of focus groups with thirteen first year Fair Access Students (female n=9, male n=4) studying at the university. The data from which was analysed thematically, identifying five themes (what others say, going to university to escape, influence of habitus, location and what the university offered). These five themes formed the basis of a Likert type questionnaire which was completed by 239 students (n=168 Fair Access, n=71 non-Fair Access). It was evident that students from Fair Access backgrounds have the same high aspirations as their non-Fair Access counterparts, as do their families. However they can be discouraged and disadvantaged in the application system due to a variety of reasons; within compulsory education (perceptions of teachers as well as a lack of careers advice and support), intuitional habitus of Higher Education Institutions (provision of pre-access information and support) as well as not identifying themselves as coming from a widening participation background, thus reducing the likelihood of a contextual offer. All of these could impact on the ability of an individual from a WP background being successful in obtaining a place to study in Higher Education.

Key terms: research, non-traditional students, widening participation, first in family

Background

Internationally there are concerns regarding the number of individuals from diverse backgrounds accessing Higher Education (HE) (Thomas et al. 2012). This has led to a number of widening participation (WP) activities with the ultimate aim of:

> *"...ensuring that those with the ability to benefit from higher education have equal opportunity to participate and succeed regardless of background, age, ethnicity, disability or gender"* (HEFCE 2014).

As such, widening participation aims to promote equality of opportunity and social mobility (HEFCE 2014). Within England, Higher Education is funded and regulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Included within this role of regulation, is the monitoring of students accessing HE, including numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as other personal characteristics such as ethnicity, age, and disability. HEFCE are committed to widening both the range and numbers of people who access Higher Education (HEFCE 2006). Within the UK participation rates of students from less advantaged backgrounds have increased significantly. Recent statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) show that of the 2012-2013 full-time, first degree, UK domiciled young students, 89.3% were from state schools. In addition, 32% of entrants were from socio-economic groups 4-7 and just fewer than 11% were from low-participation neighbourhoods (HESA 2013). Despite this upward trend, there is still evidence that individuals from diverse backgrounds do not have equal opportunity to participate and succeed in higher education both within England (HEFCE 2014), the UK (HESA 3013) and internationally (Thomas et al. 2012; Carson 2009). This is despite calls from the Department for Education and Employment (1998) for there to be more support and encouragement for students from families without a background of Higher Education to enable individuals to raise their sights and fulfil their potential.

Widening aspirations to attend university within disadvantaged groups has largely been achieved through outreach activities within schools, as well as invitations to attend bespoke days at higher education institutes, in order to gain insights into the

experience of attending university. Prior to 2011, this was largely achieved through discrete programmes of activities organised by the Aim Higher initiative from the Department for Education and Skills. However this funding ceased in 2011 and now, HEIs are expected to have a greater responsibility with regards to WP. This has been asserted in the National Strategy for Access and Student Success in Higher Education (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2014). This strategy explicitly identifies that HEIs have to consider the total student journey from preparation for application, studying and support as a student, as well as on completion of course to post-graduate study and/or employment. This National Strategy highlights that more work that needs to be done especially in the field of access as there remains significant gaps in participation rates between the most advantaged and disadvantaged within society (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2014).

The National Strategy also highlighted regional differences, noting that the growth within the South West region is below the national average; therefore more targeted work needs to occur to increase participation within this region. In order to achieve this, there needs to be an increased emphasis on recruiting students who were first in families to access HE, care leavers and students from socio-economic groups 4-7 (referred to collectively as Fair Access students (FAS)). However, there is limited information available about the perceptions of this particular group of students regarding Higher Education in general. Some research has been undertaken on students from working class backgrounds attending an 'elite' university identifying that HE was perceived as an 'alien place' (Tett 2004:256). It is nonetheless important that we seek to further understand the thoughts and perceptions of Fair Access students, in order to develop more appropriate outreach activities which encourage and promote their attendance in Higher Education. Therefore, this research aims to address the research question 'What factors led to first year Fair Access students considering Higher Education, and what in particular attracted them to the university specifically'.

Methodology

Study Aim:

To ascertain first year Fair Access Students perceptions of the factors which led them to consider accessing HE, and secondly to find out what attracted them to attend a particular university.

Objectives:

1) To develop an understanding of the range of factors influencing first year Fair Access students to consider attending higher education.

2) To explore Fair Access students' perceptions regarding the factors that attracted them to attend a particular university.

3) To explore the degree to which these identified factors are important to a wider student body

4) To compare Fair Access and non-Fair Access students perceptions of factors which led them to consider Higher Education and the university as a choice for them

The study used a participatory (Grant and Ramcharan 2010) mixed methods approach. It was participatory in that Fair Access students as the key players were participants in the research process. This was really important to the study team as it provided some students from a disadvantaged background the opportunity to develop and enhance skills which would assist them in their future careers. In addition, having students contribute to the research methodology enabled the team to ensure that the research approach was user friendly for participants and reflected the priorities of the students. Three Fair Access students worked on different aspects of the project, including developing the research proposal and application for ethical approval, co-leading focus groups and analysing data.

The study itself consisted of a qualitative and quantitative element. Qualitative data were gathered using focus groups (Kitzinger 1994) in order to ascertain the Fair Access participants' perceptions of the factors which led them to consider Higher Education and why the university was an attractive choice for them. The themes which arose from the focus group data were then used to develop the quantitative

part of the study which was a likert type questionnaire (Polit and Beck 2010) in order to ascertain the degree to which each identified factor was important to a wider population of Fair Access students. In addition, in this part of the study first year non-Fair Access students at the University were also recruited in order to ascertain whether there were any similarities/differences between the responses of Fair Access and non-Fair Access students. This would enable the identification of whether outreach materials would need to be specifically targeted towards FA students or whether more generic outreach would be of use to both sets of students. As such, questionnaires were distributed to first year students in Health and Social Care, Business School and Media School electronically by programme administrators. The questionnaire (see appendix 1) began with general biographical information, within this Fair Access status was established by asking the respondent which of the following best describes their family circumstances:

a) Lived in care in the past

b) First in family to attend university

c) Parent(s) is/are in skilled/unskilled manual work

d) None of the above

The fact that more than one circumstance (a-c) may have applied to some respondents would not have adversely impacted the results, as the objective of the survey was to explore the attitudes and opinions of students that (a) were care leavers, (b) are from low participating neighbourhoods and/or (c) are from socio-economic groups 4 – 7 in comparison to students who were not from a Fair Access background.

<ins>Ethical Considerations</ins>

Approval was granted by the University Research Ethics committee. A key issue in this research was that some of the research team taught on the participant's educational programme. In order to ameliorate this, participants were able to choose to join a focus group not facilitated by the staff member associated with their programme. In addition, confidentiality and anonymity of data was reassured to the participants and the voluntary nature of their participation was stressed.

Focus Groups

Purposeful sampling was used as the research team wished to recruit first year students from Fair Access backgrounds in order to understand their perceptions of the factors which led them to consider Higher Education, as well as the reasons why the University was an attractive choice for them. Two focus groups involving 13 participants were conducted. The participants came from the School of Health and Social Care (n=11) and Business School (n=2). There were a variety of ages represented; 21 years and under (n=5), 22-29 years (n=3), 30-39 years (n=2) and 40-49 years (n=3). The majority of the participants were female (n=9) and there were 4 males. They represented two key Fair Access backgrounds; first in family to go to university (n=10) and parents in skilled manual occupations (n=9). None of the participants in the focus groups came from a care background and this may be due to a proportionally smaller number of individuals from a care background within the University or may reflect a desire not to be identified as coming from a care background. The focus groups posed the question for the participants to explore: 'What factors led them to consider going to university?' and 'What in particular attracted them to this university?'

Focus groups were audio recorded and the data transcribed verbatim by two student researchers. The transcribed data were analysed by VH and PA using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) individually at first and then re-reviewed by the group once initial categories had been identified to identify any interpretations that may have been missed. Five themes were identified (what others say, going to university to escape, influence of habitus, location and what the university offered).

Questionnaire

A total of 239 students responded to the survey (n=168 Fair Access and n=71 non-Fair Access). The FA students were predominantly female (72%). However, there was a predominance of female students across both the Fair Access and non-Fair Access groups (72% versus 67%). The only difference was that in the small subgroup of FA students who described themselves has having been "in care in the past" (n=3) 100% were female. The majority of the FA students who responded to the survey were studying in the School of Health and Social Care (57%) then Business School (30%) and Media School (13%). The FA students that responded

were predominantly aged 24 and under (67% of respondents), being fairly evenly split between those under 20 and those 21-24. There were no FA students responded over the age of 50, although 7% were 40-49. These percentages did not differ greatly from the non-FA students. However, although a similar number of Fair Access and non-FA students were aged 18-24, a larger proportion of non-Fair Access compared to FA students were aged 18-20.

The breakdown of type of Fair Access student consisted of 3 of the 168 respondents cited "lived in care in the past", 68% first in family to attend university, and 30% had parents in skilled/ unskilled manual work. However, these figures may not paint a true picture as the students could only select one option. Thus, any respondent might have had affiliation to more than one category.

Within the questionnaire the overall sample size, and comparatively small numbers in each group meant that only descriptive statistics were used. Percentage scores were used to describe the data. Mean scores were not used as data were non-parametric. In this paper, percentage scores have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Findings

Each of the main findings from the study is presented including both the qualitative and quantitative aspects. Analysing the data from the focus groups with Fair Access Students regarding the factors which influenced them to going to university, and what attracted them to the university, five themes arose:

- What others say
- Going to university to escape
- Influence of habitus
- Location
- What the University offered

What others say
The first theme related to the perceptions and thoughts of others. It was evident from the participants that external influences were important in shaping their decision to

attend university. This external influence came from families as well as other professionals involved with them, such as teachers. This influence of others could be both positive (encouraging them to consider university) or negative (discouraging them from considering university). For some participants hearing negative perceptions was actually a driving force to succeed and come to university in a desire to prove those perceptions held by others as incorrect.

> *"My dad has always encouraged me to…..you know, 'you can be whatever you wanna be, it's all about you and the choices you make in life'…so yes, he sort of just pushed me and I finished college and… then I started my Adult-Nursing Degree" (P6FGB)*

> *"My mum and dad never encouraged me. When I got in to university and I said to dad I got into university, he said 'don't you need qualifications to get into universities?' I said 'dad I've just been working the last 7 years to get the qualifications, where have you been?" (P6FGA)*

> *"I'm blessed; I went to a good 6th form. They were serious about uni. My 6th form teacher went to uni herself and told me about the joys of going to uni" (P7FGA)*

> *"I was predicted to receive no GCSEs, was predicted to receive nothing because of my autism and I couldn't read or understand as a normal abled student…I thought 'no, I've got to get on with it. Go here and prove my teachers wrong." (P7FGA)*

Exploring the degree to which perceptions of others influenced participants' decision making regarding whether to attend university, the questionnaire identified that this was prevalent in both Fair Access and non-Fair Access students. For Fair Access students, parental encouragement (70%), other family member encouragement (69%) and friends or peers and teachers (66%) were each felt to have been encouraging. The findings from the counter questions to these, what discouraged students from attending university, were consistent with the encouragement question, with few citing parents, other family members, friends, or teachers as discouraging. There was a higher rate of encouragement from parents (86%) and families (80%), friends or peers (76%) and a slightly higher rate of encouragement from teachers (70%) of non-FAS than their Fair Access counterparts.

Going to university to escape

The second theme that arose from the focus group data was having the opportunity to attend university as a mechanism of escaping. This escaping was both physical as well as psychological. Physical, in that some participants grew up in a small town and they saw university as an opportunity to escape their town and broaden their horizon. Psychologically, it was linked to having a different life than their parents. Wanting something more, a sense of greater financial security on one side but also a better quality of life, being able to do something they really wanted to do in contrast to seeing parents having to work in a job they may not particularly like:

> *"the town I am living, that I am from, was a small town, wasn't a lot going on....there wasn't anywhere to move on to...there wasn't anywhere to progress to" (P4FGB)*

> *"...there is that aspect of it (financial), but....getting a job afterwards, it's more job satisfaction than financial, because neither of my parents are really happy in their jobs and they get quite stressed and upset about it, sometimes....so, knowing that, I wanted to go to uni, so I could get job that I really wanted to do, as opposed to just getting a job that would just pay the bills." (P2FGB)*

When exploring these issues in the questionnaire it was apparent that the participants' motivations related to pursuing a specific career path (92% for FA, 86% for non-Fair Access students), improving future employment prospects (96% for FA compared to 93% for non-Fair Access), achieving job/career satisfaction (92% for FA and 87% for non-Fair Access), and improving future financial prospects (85% for FA compared to 87% for non-Fair Access) were the strongest motivational factors. The opportunity to have a better life than their parents/ grandparents was stronger for Fair Access students (57%) than their non-Fair Access counterparts (40%).

Influence of habitus

It was apparent there were two distinct influences of habitus in the focus groups. Bourdieu (Maton 2012; 50) defines habitus as "a property of actors (whether individuals, groups or institutions) that comprises a structured and structuring structure". Habitus is structured by past and present circumstances such as family upbringing and educational experiences which in turn influence the way in which

individuals can view the world and opportunities within it. The first habitus identified related to "going to university after school is the norm", and therefore the participants just assumed it was the next step for them to take. In contrast, the second related to a moving away from habitus or the life they had known from their parents.

> *"I went to 6th form for two years and the school were quite, not pushy, but they focused more towards the people going straight to university...so for me, it was kind of the next step from 6th form." (P3FGA)*

> *"...my teachers at school never really made it sound like an option to not go to university, they kind of quite pushed it onto me..." (P2FGB)*

> *"Well, my dad is a builder. He left school with no qualifications. He retired at 45 and sold a million pound house...he used to say 'well I never went to school and look what we've got'...it was always expected by dad that I'd stay at home and look after the baby..." (P6FGA)*

> *"...my dad worked his way up from being at the bottom of a foundry, right at the labourer bottom and worked his way up to the top and my mum worked for Tesco for 25 years, so none of my family, I've got no-one in my family who does study at college, let alone university, so I was the first one..." (P5FGB)*

As few had cited a lack of encouragement from others as an issue and 32% described having a strong desire to attend university despite discouragement from others. There seemed to be more students seeking a university place despite discouragement they had received, than the number who had been discouraged from attending university. This is perhaps reflective of the sample group as all were studying at a university. 16% felt that teachers had told them they were not clever enough to go to university, and 23% did not themselves think that they were clever enough. This unfortunate self-perception that they were not the 'right candidate' for HE may be reflective of the habitus identified in the focus groups. There were few differences in the motivators for Fair Access and non-FAS attending university, although to improve job satisfaction was slightly higher in non-FAS, whilst financial advantage and the expectation of a better life than parents or grandparents was slightly higher in FAS.

Location

Location of the University was identified as a very important factor for many of the participants. The majority of the participants were health and social care professional students who are often older and have family commitments. For students with family commitments, having the University close to home was important as it meant they were able to study whilst staying close to family. For those without family commitments being located in a town and close to the beach was a real inducement.

> *"...my reason is location, location, location, being a single parent with two children...it was the only one I could apply for, cos there was no way I could have lifted up my family and take them anywhere else." (P5FGB)*

> *"I have bought a property in Poole, so this (university) is the first that is local to me, convenient and cheap." (P2FGA)*

> *"I like the idea of a campus uni, rather than a city uni, so I thought that the campus was quite nice..." (P5FGB)*

> *"...all my family are in the Southwest and I just want to be further North way, so that I still had my independence, but it was quite easy to get back...Also, because the beach is near..." (P1FGB)*

What the University offered

For some of the participants it was clear that the opportunity for a placement was a key driver in choosing the University. This was less important to the students undertaking a Nursing or Social Work programme as these are dual registration professional courses, in which placements are an integral part. External reputation (of both the course and the University) was an important factor which influenced some of the participants in choosing a university. Lastly, for one of the participants with an additional learning need, the facilities to support disabled students were integral to their decision making:

> *"...if you look at the 'red bricks', most of them don't do the placements, actually, it is more universities like this... that give you that opportunity." (P3FGB)*

> *"...I really liked their special needs department it was really good..." (P7FGA)*

It was clearly apparent that staff friendliness and approachability were key factors for participants who attended open days or interview days. What particularly attracted the students was a perception that staff really cared about what they were teaching and this enthusiasm influenced their decision to come here:

> *"...it felt friendly here...that lecturers just seemed really passionate..., one was on the course when I started, so I was like 'I definitely made the right decision' because they really care about what they're teaching...." (P1FGB)*

> *"I came to a mini Open Day and I found the lecturers really interesting and I felt that it actually helped me in my interview, as well...we had conversations about Social Work and it drove my passion even further..." (P5FGB)*

It emerged during the focus groups that many of the participants who were not local to the area did not attend an open day given financial constraints. As a result, many of these participants made decisions regarding the course by reviewing online information:

> *"I didn't come to an Open Day, on the basis that I was living in Durham...." (P2FGB)*

> *"I didn't attend an open day, I just couldn't afford to travel from Cardiff, it was just too far to come, so I just came down for my interview" (P4FGB)*

> *"I didn't come to an open day, the same, the travel expenses from the island (Isle of Wight)" (P6FGB)*

When exploring the questionnaire data regarding what attracted the participants to consider studying at the university a range of factors was identified. Most importantly was the course offered for both Fair Access (100%) and non-Fair Access (97%), opportunity for placement (85% for both FA and non-FA students), academic reputation (82% for both FA and non-FA students), employment statistics (77% for FA compared to 80% for non-FA) in comparison to the university ranking, although this was more important to non-FA students (66%) than their FA counterparts (59%).

It may be inferred that the students were more interested in the opportunities and facilities which enhance employability than in ranking of the university. This was also alluded to in the focus groups.

It was apparent in the questionnaire data that more FA students did not attend open days in comparison to non-Fair Access students (n=52 versus n=21). The issue of cost in attending open days was identified in the focus groups but this was not substantiated in the questionnaire (only 2.3% identifying costs as an issue). Reasons for not attending open days identified in the questionnaire were clashes with work commitments, inconvenience and distance of travel. Whatever the reason, it appears that many FA students make decisions on whether to apply to a university based upon the information on a university's website. Of those which attended open days, 67% found university open days useful, whilst 26% were indifferent. However, the friendliness of staff was noted to be a key indicator in deciding to study at the university with 74% of the FAS highlighting this as important or essential.

Discussion

It is evident from the national and international literature (Thomas et al. 2012; Carson 2009) that more work needs to be undertaken to increase participation in higher education from individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. Within this, there is a need to increase participation from individuals who do not have parents with a background in Higher Education, individuals from care and from socio-economic groups 4-7. This study explored factors influencing individuals' decision making regarding consideration of higher education.

Aspirations towards HE are often perceived to be lower amongst disadvantaged groups however this research challenges this perception identifying that Fair Access students have the same high aspirations as non-Fair Access students regarding graduate employment, employment and financial security. In addition, Fair Access students are also motivated by intrinsic factors such as increased job satisfaction and wanting to have a different life to those they have witnessed from their parents who may be working in jobs they dislike but have little ability to change. However, we

recognise we have only captured Fair Access students who applied and were successful in gaining a place within Higher Education, further work needs to be undertaken to explore the perception of younger people in school from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not aspire to HE to examine why.

The notion of cultural capital and habitus are often explored within the context of Widening Participation in that the habitus for disadvantaged individuals is often that HE is not for them. Whilst this was not evident in this study it was evident that the world around the participants influenced their decision making with regards to considering Higher Education (parental encouragement (70%), other family member encouragement (69%) and friends or peers and teachers (66%)). Habitus shapes an individual's sense of agency and possibility (Edgerton and Roberts 2014), therefore it is consistently being constructed (James et al. 2015) as individuals' identities and social capital either challenge or reinforce ones perception of oneself. Mills (2008) identifies two co-aligned processes; reproductive habitus which reinforces social constraints and transformative habitus which acknowledges agency, seeking out opportunities for action. It was evident from the study that teachers were of significant importance in influencing Fair Access students in their decision to attend university both positively and negatively. Positively, there appears to be a shift towards a norm of attending Higher Education after post compulsory education and this in part maybe related to increased focus on disadvantaged students within compulsory education through careful monitoring of Pupil Premium Funding since 2011. Pupil Premium is additional government funding available to schools within England to be used to reduce the gap in attainment between the most advantaged and disadvantaged pupils (Pupils receiving free school meals, service children and young people in care). This focus on narrowing the gap is reinforced by the regulators of compulsory education (Ofsted 2013) in their reviews of schools. Thus this increased focus on attainment of these particular pupils may have contributed to raising aspirations towards consideration of higher education. Yet not all participants within the study received positive reinforcement regarding accessing higher education. Indeed, some of the participants claimed to have experienced some negativity in school regarding their future possibilities. Interestingly, rather than discouraging these individuals, they were in fact motivated to succeed despite the negative feedback. It should however be recognised that such negativity could be a de-

stabilising and demotivating force. As this study only included participants studying at HE the degree to which teachers' focus on discouraging pupils from HE cannot be ascertained, however there was a difference between encouragement to attend university between Fair Access (66%) and non-Fair Access students (70%). Thomas et al. (2012) reviewed international research studies exploring the role of teacher in creating or diminishing aspirations for HE and identified that the social status of students influenced the teacher's aspiration of their abilities. This was also identified by Tett (2004) in her study on working class students which identified that working class students often received negative experiences at school which perpetuated the perception that HE was not for them. However teachers are ideally placed to nurture transformative habitus (Mills 2008) and as such play a pivotal role in raising aspiration. Therefore it is vital that teachers are aware of the impact they have with regards to either reproductive or transformative habitus and may need to challenge their perceptions regarding capabilities of disadvantaged students.

If we are to be affective in addressing the gap between the numbers of students accessing HE from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as high aspirations of the individuals and encouragement from external sources there needs to be support in the process of application. Application to HE is a challenging process for all applicants, however this is compounded for individuals from disadvantaged families, as they lack vicarious experience of parents to draw upon with regards to application (Foster and Higson 2008). This disadvantage is perpetuated, as evidence from the Sutton Trust identified that learners from non-selective state schools received less advice regarding HE admissions processes, and reports that teachers are 'not equipped with the knowledge and expertise to advise' (The Sutton Trust, 2008b p.6). In response to this the National Strategy for WP (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2014) identifies that, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds must receive the best advice, guidance and support at every stage of their HE journey. However this study has highlighted process issues related to the mechanisms by which FA students are identified. Many of the participants that initially came forward for the focus groups were not those identified in the central university database as coming from a WP background. This occurred because the students did not disclose certain personal characteristics when applying to university. This may have been because they feared disclosure or felt that their

application would be treated negatively. Another reason may have been that students do not disclose because they do not appreciate the relevance of identifying themselves as a widening participation student. Since undertaking this work and other work in outreach activities, we have been exploring this potential candidates as well as individuals who support careers advice in schools and colleges. This anecdotal experience has highlighted a lack of awareness in both young people and the adults guiding them regarding the importance of disclosure of Widening Participation characteristics. This is worthy of a more detailed review regarding reasons for non-disclosure of personal characteristics leading to identification of WP flag. It would be worth exploring if individuals recognise that impact such disclosure could have in that some universities offer an adjusted criteria scheme for admitting WP students (Hammond et al. 2011/12; Allison 2013).

Another issue that arose from the findings of this study was that attendance at open days is lower for Fair Access students than non-Fair Access students. This is due to numerous factors including a lack of funds to visit universities and/or being unable to take time off from paid employment to attend open days. This could potentially further disadvantage applicants in that they are not exposed to the institutional values and beliefs which are often presented at open days as well as not having access to staff to gain support regarding process issues such as interviewing skills and the application process which as identified earlier they may also not have exposure to at school. This can reduces the ability of individuals from Fair Access backgrounds to be successful at interview. Kenyon (2010) agrees that transportation issues have a significant impact on the success of disadvantaged students. Whilst research by Farr (2001) identified a correlation between distance and university choice, highlighting that young people tend to apply to universities within their geographical region as children at local state schools are not always able to consider travelling to another part of the country.   As a result of not attending open days, young people are likely to make decisions on courses based upon the information of university websites. The implications of this kind of decision making are that the students may not fully appreciate the university experience and may not develop a strong relationship with the university; both factors have been identified as key in increasing the success of widening participation students at university (Bowl 2001; Department of Business, Innovation and Skills 2014). In response to this, Higher Education institutes need to

adapt their institutional habitus to reflect the increasing diversity of the student population and invest in online materials (Table 1) if they wish to increase applications from individuals from disadvantaged groups. Thus promoting both aspirations with regards to HE as well as supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds with regards to applying to Higher Education.

Conclusion

Whilst it is evident that there is an increasing number of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds accessing HE, it is also evident that more work needs to be done in order to ensure that individuals with the ability to benefit from HE have equal opportunity to participate. The study identified that individuals (from disadvantaged groups) and their parents on the whole have high aspirations with regards to Higher Education. This was encouraged by some teachers within compulsory educational settings, who had a transformative impact on habitus and this may be linked to changing policies in compulsory education within England. However some teachers had a negative influence which perpetuated reproductive habitus promoting the social norm that HE was not for them. Therefore more work needs to be undertaken with teaching staff in compulsory education to ascertain their perceptions regarding aspirations of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds accessing HE. Students from WP backgrounds were then further disadvantaged as many of them do not identifying themselves as coming from a WP background which reduces the likelihood of them receiving contextual offers. This disadvantage was further perpetuated by university habitus which offered a traditional face to face open day which many of the FA students could not attend which resulted in these students being potentially further disadvantaged in the application process. Therefore HE's need to realign their pre-application support to reflect a greater diversity of student.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

General information

1) Gender   Male ( )   Female ( )

2) Age   Under 20 ( )   21 - 24 ( )   25 - 29 ( )

     30 - 39 ( )   40 - 49 ( )   50+ ( )

3) Which best describes your family circumstances:

     e) Lived in care in the past   ( )

     f) First in family to attend university   ( )

     g) Parent(s) is/are in skilled/unskilled manual work   ( )

     h) None of the above   ( )

4) School   HSC ( )   BS ( )   Media ( )   FST ( )

5) The number of UCAS points achieved (as per your university application):

     under 300 ( )   Between 300 and 320 ( )   more than 320 ( )

6) Bournemouth University was my:

     first choice ( )   second choice ( )   clearing choice ( )

Questionnaire

1	2	3		4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree		Agree	Strongly agree

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor	Agree	Strongly agree
7) To what degree do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements on external encouragement to go to university?					
One/both of my parents encouraged me to go to university.					
Another/other family member(s) encouraged me to go to university.					
Friends/peers encouraged me to go to university.					
Teacher(s) encouraged me to go to university.					
Other(s) encouraged me to go to university.					
The media (i.e. TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) encouraged me to go to university.					
8) To what degree do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements on external discouragement to go to university?					
One/both of my parents tried to discourage me from going to university.					
Another/other family member(s) tried to discouraged me from going to university.					
Friends/peers tried to discourage me from going to university.					
Teacher(s) tried to discourage me from going to university.					
Other(s) tried to discourage me from going to university.					
The media (i.e. TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) tried to discourage me from going to university.					
9) To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements on your personal motivation to go to university?					

I had a strong personal desire to go to university to continue my education.					
I had a strong personal desire to go to university to pursue a specific career path.					
I had a strong personal desire to go to university to improve my future employment prospects.					
I had a strong personal desire to go to university to achieve job / career satisfaction.					
I had a strong personal desire to go to university to improve my future financial prospects.					
I had a strong personal desire to go to university to "have a chance at a better life" in comparison with my parents / grandparents.					
I had a strong personal desire to go to university to have a good time (i.e. enjoy the "uni experience").					
I had a strong personal desire to go to university in spite of the lack of encouragement from others.					
I had a strong personal desire to go to university because I knew I had the "right stuff".					
I was not really motived to go to university, but I didn't have anything better to do at the time.					
I was not really motived, but I was strongly encouraged to go to university by others.					
I was told by school teachers I was not clever/academic enough to go to university					
I did not believe I was clever enough to go to university					
10) To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements?					
I only began to consider attending university within the last two years.					
I began to consider attending university before I sat my GCSEs					
I received useful careers advice before I chose my GCSE subjects.					
I received useful careers advice before I chose my					

	A-level/B-tech subjects.					
	I received useful careers advice before I chose my university course.					
	I found the universities' open days I attended useful and informative.					
	Most of my friends have gone onto university.					

1	2	3	4	5
Not even considered	Not important	Indifferent – considered, but neither important or unimportant	Important	Essential

11) Please rank the importance of the following factors in choosing to study at Bournemouth University:						
	Beach / south coast					
	Course / degree					
	Clubs / nightlife					
	Academic reputation					
	University ranking					
	Campus (Talbot)					
	Campus (Lansdowne)					
	City (Bournemouth)					
	Integration between the University and the city					
	Student accommodation					
	Available pastoral care					
	Access to additional learning services (ALS)					
	Close to home					
	Not close to home					
	The size of the University					
	The size your specific course within the School					
	The "vibe/buzz" at open day, interview, or any other day visited					
	The opportunity for placement experience					
	The employment statistics for BU graduates					
	Friendly and approachable staff at open day,					

interview, or any other day visited					

13) Please complete these three sentences:

    a) "The main reason(s) I wanted to come to university was/were

       _____

       _____."

    b) "The main obstacle(s) I needed to overcome before coming to university was/were:

       _____

       _____."

    c) "Other specific factors that influenced me to go to Bournemouth University was/were:

       _____

       _____."

14) In the space provided, please feel free to make any other personal comments regarding your decision to come to university, in general, and Bournemouth University, in particular:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____