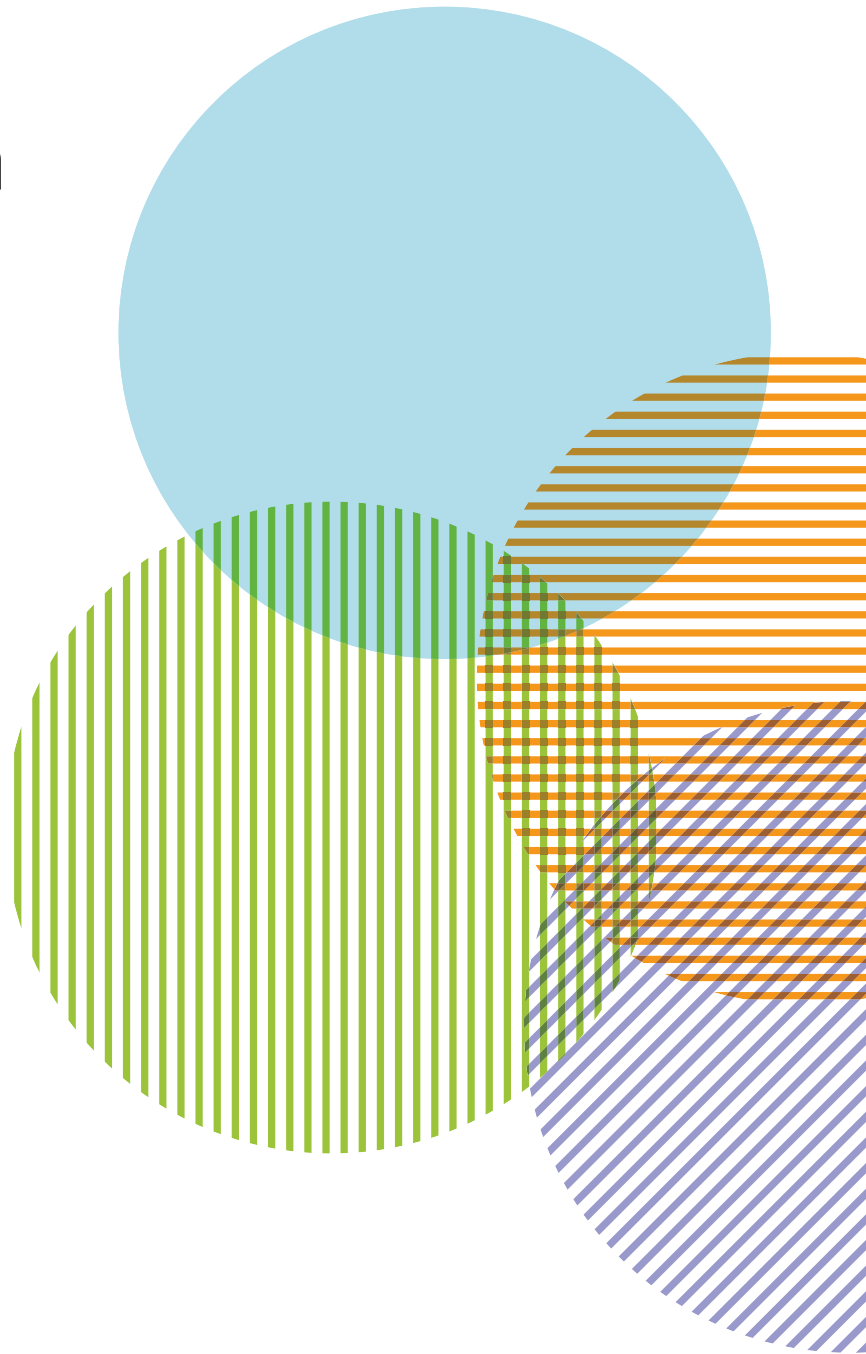


A Selection of Research Resources on Widening Participation to Higher Education



Working in partnership with
Sheffield Hallam University,
the University of Sheffield and
South Yorkshire colleges and schools
to increase the number of young people
progressing to higher education

The articles included below represent a brief selection of key research papers focusing on a young person's progression into higher education. Please note that this selection reflects the interests of researchers in the University of Sheffield's Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Unit (WPREU) and is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of work in this area.

The articles provide useful background reading for those involved in the HeppSY+ programme. We have given links to open access resources where possible. Please contact WPREU at wpreu@sheffield.ac.uk, if you would like to discuss any of the issues discussed below.

Aspiration

The role of an individual's aspiration to progress into higher education is a source of debate in research about widening participation. Aspiration has long had a role in policy discussions (usually from a deficit perspective, which suggests that some students fail to progress due to insufficient aspiration or ambition). For this reason, 'raising aspirations' has sometimes been flagged as a key objective of higher education outreach work. However, as the work of Gutman and Akerman suggests, some of the initial assumptions about the relationship between disadvantaged young people and low higher education aspirations have been challenged by contemporary research.

Gutman, L. and Akerman, R. (2008) *Determinants of aspirations*. London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning

<http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/2052/>

Recent research has, for example, expanded thinking about the role of 'aspiration' in higher education progression. Many researchers make a distinction between aspiration ('what an individual hopes will happen in the future') and expectation ('what an individual believes will happen in the future').

Khattab, N. (2014) How and when do educational aspirations, expectations and achievement align? *Sociological Research Online*, 9 (4)

www.socresonline.org.uk/19/4/7.html

Gorard, S., See, B. & Davies, P. (2012) The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation. *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, (April), 1–103

www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/203881.pdf

Khattab, N. (2015) Students' aspirations, expectations and school achievement: what really matters? *British Educational Research Journal*, 41 (5), 731–748

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/berj.3171/full>

At the same time, an individual's expectations tend to be based on sets of cultural assumptions, which may be subject to particular limitations – you have to know what to expect in order to benefit from your expectations. From this perspective, any attempt to raise aspiration needs to be coupled with further advice and guidance to provide a context for those aspirations and expectations.

Bok, J. (2010) The capacity to aspire to higher education: 'It's like making them do a play without a script'. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51 (2), 163–178

www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17508481003731042

Other researchers suggest that low aspiration is not the key issue and that most, if not all, young people and their parents start off with high expectations. However, these ambitions can be eroded in the face of practical challenges experienced during the process of progressing into higher education.

Whitty, G., Hayton, A. and Tang, S. (2015) 'Who you know, what you know and knowing the ropes: a review of evidence about access to higher education institutions in England'. *Review of Education*, 3 (1), 27–67

http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1475904/1/Whitty_et_al-2015-Review_of_Education.pdf

Archer, L., DeWitt, J. & Wong, B. (2014) Spheres of influence: what shapes young people's aspirations at age 12/13 and what are the implications for education policy? *Journal of Education Policy*, 29(1), pp.58–85

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02680939.2013.790079>

Sue Clegg and Jacqueline Stevenson's work on the important role played by students' conception of their 'future selves' (what seems possible - or impossible - for them in the future) explores how these concepts impact on their motivation and outcomes. They note that both parents and teachers have a significant influence on the development of a student's 'possible self'.

Stevenson, J. and Clegg, S. (2011) Possible selves: students orientating themselves towards the future through extracurricular activity. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37 (2) 231–246

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/01411920903540672/abstract>

Parents as Influencers

Research suggest that 'significant others' play an important role in influencing young people's decision making about higher education. Indeed, some researchers argue that parents exert influence over their offspring's choices of institution, or even whether to go at all, with over half of students in one study noting that their parents influenced them a fair or huge amount in their decision about whether to progress into higher education.

Phillips, C., Newton, E. & Stanbridge, J. (2014) *Parental influence on children's academic and employment choices*. GTI Media

http://groupgti.com/sites/gtimedia.co.uk/files/imce/Parental_influences_report.pdf

Kintrea, K., St Clair, R. and Houston, M. (2011) *The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/young-people-education-attitudes-full.pdf>

Similarly Diane Reay et al. (2005) found that for those students from families where there was a history of progression into higher education, university progression was taken-for-granted and never explicitly articulated within the family unit, creating a sense of what 'people like us' do.

Reay, D., David, M. and Ball, S. J. (2005) *Degrees of choice: class, race, gender and higher education*. Staffordshire, Trentham Books Limited

This American article suggests a number of ways that schools can remove some of the barriers which might prevent parents from engaging with their offspring's education to the fullest extent possible.

LaRocque, M., Kleiman, I. & Darling, S.M. (2011) Parental involvement: the missing link in school achievement. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 55 (3), 115–122

<http://parented.wdfiles.com/local--files/family-engagement/Parent%20Inv%20-%20Missing%20link.pdf>

Higher Education Decision-Making

The research below focuses mainly on the decision-making process that takes place once a student has decided to progress into higher education. It explores how students decide on which course and institution to progress onto and the types of information sources they use.

The Sutton Trust, for example, suggests that students applying for the most selective institutions were aware of the high 'status' of these institutions and subsequently placed less importance on practical issues (e.g. distance, cost of living, employability rates) than other students.

Sutton Trust (2012) *Tracking the decision-making of high achieving higher education applicants*. London: Sutton Trust and Department for Business Innovation and Skills

www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/12-1240-tracking-decision-making-of-high-achieving-higher-education-applicants.pdf

The location of higher education institutions is reportedly more influential for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who have an increased propensity to remain in the family home whilst attending higher education.

Patinotis, J. and Holdsworth, C. (2005) 'Seize that chance!' Leaving home and transitions to higher education. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8 (1), 81-95

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13676260500063710>

Holdsworth, C. (2009) Between two worlds: local students in higher education and 'scouse'/student identities. *Population, Space and Place*, 15 (3), 225-237

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/psp.511/abstract>

Holton, M., and Riley, M. (2013) Student geographies: Exploring the diverse geographies of students and higher education. *Geography Compass*, 7 (1), 61-74

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gec3.12013/abstract>

Remaining at home, or close to home, has been noted to act as a way for some students to maintain confidence regarding 'space and place', reduce risks, and minimise the threats to their identity that might come from moving to a geographically-distant university.

M. David (ed.) *Improving learning by widening participation in higher education*. Oxon, Routledge

Ball, S. J., Davies, J., David, M. and Reay, D. (2002) 'Classification' and 'judgement': social class and the 'cognitive structures' of choice of higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23 (1), 51-72

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01425690120102854>

Other research suggests that many students experience information overload when considering which institution to apply for, potentially leading to 'sub-optimal' decision-making. Diamond et al. (2012) go on to suggest that emotional responses to higher education institutions (during open days, for example) override any form of 'rational' decision-making.

Diamond, A. et al (2012) *Behavioural approaches to understanding student choice*. HEA and NUS

www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/student_choice.pdf

Students might use formally available information, or softer sources of information and balance non-rational and rational decision-making processes. Young people tend to put more emphasis on 'hot' sources of knowledge (people they know) – supplemented by 'warm' knowledge – people they meet on open days – rather than 'cold' documentary sources such as websites or prospectuses. University-provided knowledge is often distrusted by students.

Slack, K., Mangan, J., Hughes, A., Davies, P. (2014) 'Hot', 'cold' and 'warm' information and higher education decision-making. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35 (2), 204-223

www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01425692.2012.741803

'Fitting In' and Belonging Factors

A body of literature around widening participation focuses on what happens to students from 'disadvantaged' or under-represented backgrounds once they enter the university environment. For some students in certain institutions there can be a disjunction between their previous cultural environment and that of their university. Therefore, students from family backgrounds where there is no history of higher education progression may not be equipped with the cultural and social skills they need to adapt and succeed in the higher education environment.

Reay, D. Crozier, G. Clayton, J. (2010) "Fitting in' or 'standing out': working-class students in UK higher education', *British Educational Research Journal*, 36 (1), 107-124

www.educ.cam.ac.uk/people/staff/reay/FittinginBERJ2010.pdf

Bathmaker, A., Ingram, N., Waller, R. (2013) 'Higher education, social class and the mobilisation of capitals: recognising and playing the game'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34 (5) pp. 723-743

<http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/26463/8/Final%20version%20inc%20abstract.pdf>

Moreover, as Maggie Leese suggests, the experience of 'widening participation students' progressing into university can be different to that of non-widening-participation students, and might include increased need to combine study and work, less time spent on campus and uncertainty about the need to be an independent learner.

Leese, M. (2010) 'Bridging the gap: supporting student transitions into higher education', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 34 (2) , 239-251

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03098771003695494>

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For more information about WPREU, please contact Julian Crockford: julian.crockford@sheffield.ac.uk

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