

Creating a fair and equal society: what can be done to help under-represented groups enter higher education?

The UK is an unequal society where those who attend private schools tend to occupy the top jobs:



54% of Top Journalist (1)



68% of Top Barristers (2)



51% of Top Medics (4)

This inequality can be traced back to participation rates in higher education where:

96%

• Of privately educated children go to university

38%

• Of state educated children go to university

16%

• Of children receiving free school meals go to university (5)

Widening participation involves improving access to university amongst disadvantaged groups. This is achieved through various attainment and aspiration raising activities that seek to help young people consider university. This research looks at the educational aspirations of white working class young people in Leicester.

Widening Participation often aims to intervene to raise aspirations and attainment of young people to address issues of access to higher education.

However this focus on aspirations can lead to individuals being blamed for having low aspirations and leads to a danger of elevating higher education above other choices. (6)

Widening participation therefore needs to help inform young people **OF** higher education as one of a number of different possible routes as they think about the future. (6)

OF

Widening Participation Strategies

Research Findings

The role that place or neighbourhoods have on young people is important to consider. Many under-represented groups come from clearly identifiable geographical neighbourhoods that are classed as areas of deprivation. (8) This can 'trap' young people due to poor transport and limited employment opportunities. (9)

OUT

Widening participation often encourages young people to broaden their horizons and should foster an 'outwardlookingness' to enable young people to considering life beyond where they live. (8)

Considering how the world **'OUT there'** is understood by young people is important in attempts to widen access.

References

1. Image courtesy of Nirotz/ FreeDigitalPhotos.net
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OF EXPECTATION ATTAINMENT KNOWLEDGE

Using creative methods, this research worked with young people from years 8 and 10 and found that many did have aspirations to go to university. However there was evidence that young people questioned how realistic going to university was.

Worried ^{however} hopeful
Scared Excited
I want to be realistic.
How I feel about my future

(Kim, Year 8)

I feel that my future will be okay but I don't want to get my hopes too high so I won't be disappointed. I excited but scared.

(Blake, Year 8)

IN COMMUNITY FAMILY PLACE

For the young people in the research family and collective identity mattered and they often had a great sense of loyalty towards them. Some young people spoke of feeling torn between leaving family and friends to move away to university or to remain close to them.

About my future I feel;
- Scared - Happy - Worried
- Lucky - Excited - Naive
- Unrealistic - Unlucky - Hopeless.
I need to think of others as well as myself! But I need to think of myself.

TG: What do you mean about others?

Claire: Meaning that I wouldn't think about the other parts of my family, I would just be thinking about myself and if they needed help. I just think that my life is more important. (Claire, Year 8)

OUT BROADEN HORIZONS OUTWARDLOOKING EXPERIENCE

Some young people had an assumption that students 'out there' would be push and look down on 'people like them'. This however was often an assumption which was challenged by those who did have experiences of university.

"I have seen them [students] when I was on my travels. Some of them were quite uptight because they act like they think they are the best. I was driving past the university and all you see is people walking out like this – thinking they are the best..."

(Candice, Year 8)

Social mobility

The Widening Participation Arrow
Widening Participation has a number of different focuses which can be summarised through 'Of' 'In' and 'Out'

In considering issues of access to university, it is important to think about the social relations that young people are a part of. (7)

Low participation rates may be shaped by factors such as social class, education, upbringing and past choice that result in young people not choosing higher education. (7)

Therefore considering the importance of kinship networks and the communities young people live **IN** is vital to helping young people consider university.