

PERSPECTIVES & PROSPECTS

The educational ambitions and intentions of young white British males from five disadvantaged areas in North West England

Introduction & Objectives:

This study sought to explore the educational ambitions and motivations of young white British males from five geographical areas of educational and economic disadvantage in North West (NW) England. Drawing on the insights of learners at two distinct transition points in their educational journeys; working towards their GCSEs and deciding on post-16 options.

The study explored the impact of influences in great depth and from its findings presents a series of recommendations. It is hoped that these recommendations will help to guide the work of outreach practitioners and others in NW England - and further afield - who are working to enhance the progression prospects of this particular group of under-represented young people.

Methodology:

Desk Research

A preliminary survey of published reports and articles relevant to the subject area. The findings from this literature review also helped to guide the themes that were to be explored in the primary research.



Primary Research

Interviews were conducted with outreach practitioners and teaching professionals from five of the participating areas:

- Cheshire
- Merseyside
- Greater Manchester
- Lancashire
- Cumbria



Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with 70 young men, (36 year 10s and 34 year 12s), with the number of participants being evenly distributed across the five different areas. All focus group participants were white males from the NCOP* cohort.



*The consortium has been renamed to UniConnect.

Key Observations



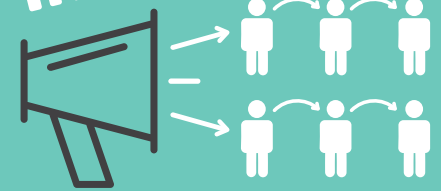
Intentions

Post-18 plans

Many young men from the target cohort (Especially year 10s) are unlikely to be considering Higher Education (HE) as an option.

However, most harbour career interests and ambitions.

Influencers



Parents

For many of the young men in this cohort parental experience of HE - and the consequent ability of parents to provide insights and draw on first-hand knowledge of university - will be limited.

However, in some instances those with no parental history of HE, may still have parents who are supportive of their educational ambitions in general, and of their progression to HE in particular.

Other family members and local networks

The neighbourhoods many of these young men come from - and interact with - are likely to contain comparatively few residents with first-hand experience of university.

In some instances, other family members (besides parents) and those in their social networks can act as HE role models and provide examples of those who have been to university.

Peers

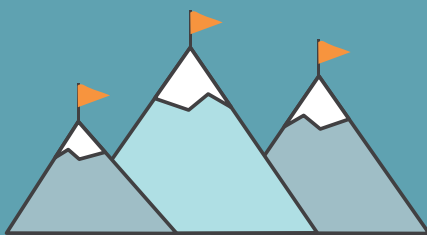
Peers and friendship groups can influence levels of school engagement amongst these young men, in both a negative and positive way.

They can also impact on their post-16 study choices and HE ambitions.

Teachers

Teaching professionals can influence levels of classroom and subject engagement amongst these young men and their future plans for higher education.

Challenges



Educational engagement

Young men from the target cohort may experience:

- Difficulties in managing GCSE workloads and in developing effective coping strategies.
- Challenges in managing the transition to level 3 study, especially where a change of institution is involved.
- For at least some from this group, the vocational and work-based post-16 choices made could make HE progression less probable.
- Some young men from the target cohort hold positive views of education (and school), and what it can offer.

“If you feel like you can't do something and then feel embarrassed to ask a teacher, you sit there and get really moody and feel like you are going to fail. I [then] go quiet... And then I don't say nowt and it affects what I do at home and when I go to work - everything. You build it all up and get really annoyed.”

Financial costs of HE

For many young men from the target cohort **the perceived cost of HE can act as a significant impediment to HE progression** and, potentially, in considering HE as a viable option.

However, for some the financial costs associated with HE are considered worthwhile.

“You gain more at university, [but] the cost is overwhelming [And there is] the chance of being in debt as a result... I just don't think it's worth it, especially if you don't end up with the job that you wanted.”

Comparative costs of HE

For some young men from the target cohort **the local labour market - and the prospect of earning money - are a powerful draw**.

However, amongst others HE is viewed as offering the chance to enhance their employment prospects and earning potential.

The apprenticeship option is viewed favourably by many from this cohort, since it is considered to combine the attractions of employment with training, whilst the cost of full-time HE (including the debts likely to be incurred) can be avoided.

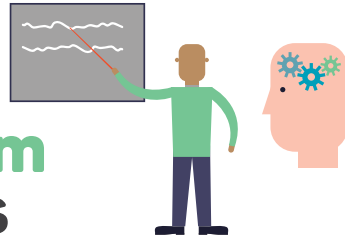
Opportunity costs of HE

For some young men in this cohort the **opportunity costs associated with the university option - and what will be sacrificed - are considered too high**.

However, for others the benefits are judged to outweigh such costs.

> Recommendations

Classroom practices



1 Recognise, support and encourage effective classroom and teaching practices that:

- Use a variety of approaches in delivering the curriculum

- Communicate an enthusiasm for the subject and include activities that encourage learning to be enjoyable
- Involve explaining and exploring the real world relevance of what is being studied
- Enable teachers to learn about their students' interests and ambitions
- Involve teachers providing biographical details of the educational pathways they took and insights into their university experiences

School-wide activities



2 Identify and work with students' **career ambitions**, as well as their **subject interests**, in providing a reason and rationale to study and progress.

3-4 Explore ways of **encouraging and supporting school-hosted events involving local FE colleges and universities**. These intervention can help in raising awareness of next step options (including HE).

Seek to support the work of school and college-based careers advisors. Careers guidance (including that offered early in secondary/high school) can have a significant impact in encouraging school engagement, as well as in motivating students to think about the role that further and high education can play.

5 **In recognising the challenges that the transition to post-16 study can present** (especially where a change of institution is involved), explore ways in which more information, advice and guidance on post-16 options can be provided; including offering insights into the demands and character of post-16 study and training.

6 Identify and deploy (school, college, university) **alumni from comparable backgrounds** to provide (relatable) accounts of their learner journeys and insights into the reasons for the decisions they made, including those associated with opting for higher education.

7 **Support and encourage the use of guest speakers in graduate-level occupations** who can talk about their educational experiences and journeys, and the value of higher-level study and training.

8 Given that it is a widely considered option - especially amongst the cohort of learners this study is concerned with - **consider ways in which students can be informed of work-based pathways, and higher and degree level apprenticeships**, including through hearing from a range of employers and training providers.

Outreach interventions



9-11

Recognise:

- > And support the role that **undergraduates** can play in offering relatable accounts of university
- > The value of **subject tasters** in supporting attainment, as well as providing information and guidance about HE level study. Seek to ensure the subjects offered align with learner interests
- > The value of **HE campus-based events** and seek to ensure these provide realistic insights and experiences of higher education.

12-13

Deploy **second and third year undergraduates on outreach interventions**. These individuals can draw on more extensive experience of HE (than those new to university-level study), including the challenges they have encountered and how these have been overcome.

Work with alumni (particularly those from comparable WP backgrounds) who can provide first-hand experience of the benefits of gaining a university-level education, and who can talk about the educational and career routes they took.

14-16

Explore ways to provide those from this cohort (and others) with information and advice on the:

- > Comparative costs and benefits of HE
- > Financial support available at university for those from lower income households and WP backgrounds.
- > Consider ways in which this information can also be provided to the parents and carers of these young people.

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Consider the **provision of HE-level lectures and seminars** that align with the subject areas sixth formers and level 3 college students are pursuing, and that can provide an insight into where their subjects can lead and the key skills needed at HE level.

18

Recognise the importance of **outreach activities that have a more enduring impact**, including those comprising a **series of (progressive) interventions**.

Similarly, consider ways in which more young men from the target cohort can participate in immersive HE experiences, such as summer schools.



A good practice guide; when working with white males from disadvantaged areas

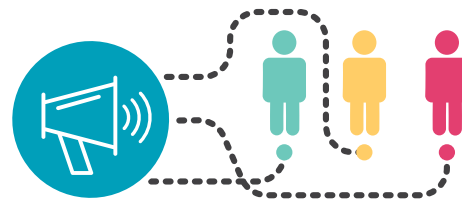
The following recommendations have been suggested by participants and key practitioners, in order to help effectively engage with students from this demographic



Tactics in the classroom: what works?

Practitioners who:

- Show enthusiasm and care about their subject
- Use practical sessions and group work
- Interact with the class
- Are approachable and willing to answer questions, and to explain
- Have a sense of humour and recognise the fun side of learning
- Show the wider relevance of what is being taught
- Take time to learn about their students
- Are interested in their students' career ambitions
- Provide biographical insights, including their HE experiences
- Listen to students and provide feedback on how to improve (and progress)



Outreach activities: what engages?

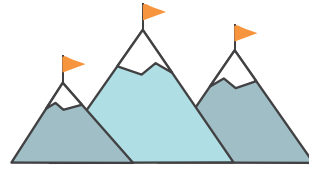
- Residentials
- Highly aspirational initiatives, including guest speakers
- Interactive projects with tangible outcomes
- Interventions focusing on career ambitions
- Visits by university students
- Subject tasters – whilst valuable, the evidence suggests the need to ensure that what is offered aligns with male learner interests
- University visits
- More interventions for younger learners - starting to engage young people from year 7 onwards
- Impartial guidance on the comparative costs and benefits of HE
- Information on financial support available
- Sector visits
- Relatable role models – hearing from:
 - A range of undergraduates who can offer different perspectives, including those part-way through their studies
 - Recent graduates
 - Those with comparable backgrounds now in graduate employment
- Mock HE lectures in level 3 subjects studied
- Immersible HE experiences
- A (progressive) series of interventions



White male profile

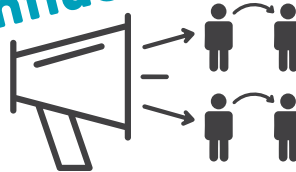


My Challenges



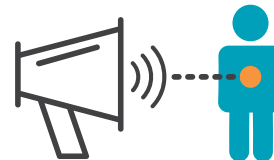
- › Educational engagement - difficulties managing workload and coping with the transition to level 3 study
- › The Financial cost of HE is a significant barrier to HE progression or consideration
- › Comparative costs of HE and the Prospect of earning money more immediately is a powerful draw
- › The risks of progressing with HE are considered too high in comparison to the potential benefits, which are not guaranteed

My Influencers



- › Parents
- › Other family members
- › Local networks
- › Most of my influencers have limited insights or experience of HE

How to engage Me



- › Show you care
- › Be approachable with a good sense of humour
- › Listen to me
- › Tell me how I can improve and progress
- › Get me involved in practical, hands on sessions
- › Answer my questions
- › Tell me why you're teaching me a particular subject and how I can apply it to my life
- › Take some interest in my ambitions
- › Tell me about yourself and your HE experiences



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