Applying for Higher Education – the diversity of career choices, plans and expectations

Findings from the First Futuretrack Survey of the 'Class of 2006' applicants for Higher Education

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This research was undertaken on behalf of the Higher Education Career Services Unit (HECSU) in conjunction with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

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Futuretrack: a longitudinal investigation of career decision-making among 2006 applicants for UK full-time undergraduate and sub-degree courses

Preface

In 2005, the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) launched a major programme of research, designed to explore the process of entry into and through higher education in more detail than had hitherto been attempted. This programme, has at its core a major longitudinal study, named ***Futuretrack***, of all applicants to full-time UK higher education courses who applied through the Universities and Colleges Admissions service (UCAS) in 2006.

Futuretrack is independent, interdisciplinary policy-related research on the relationship between higher education, career decision-making and labour market trend. It is being conducted by a research team at the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick directed by Professor Kate Purcell, with substantial design input from Professor Peter Elias. Its ultimate objective is to provide robust and comprehensive evidence to clarify the socio-economic and educational factors that determine career choices, and outcomes. This evidence will inform the policy, practitioner and research communities and perhaps most importantly, higher education applicants themselves.

The programme of research involves the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Surveys and related investigative work are being conducted at four points; in summer 2006 prior to HE entry, in summer 2007 one year on, in autumn 2009 when most will have completed their undergraduate programme of study and in winter 20011/12, when many will have achieved some labour market integration. A longitudinal pilot of a sample of 2005 applicants is being conducted one year ahead at each stage.

All full-time 2006 UCAS applicants, including EU and overseas applicants, were invited to complete an online survey in summer 2006. This report details the information they provided. The next survey (Wave 2) is currently online, tracking nearly 130,000 respondents to the first survey. The greatest challenge facing the team is respondent retention and considerable resources and creativity are being invested in this, with the support of the main stakeholder organisations that have a strong interest in facilitating collection of the best possible information about higher education choices, experiences and career decision-making. We are particularly grateful to colleagues at the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), Universities UK (UUK), the National Union of Students (NUS), and the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) and to representatives of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the national Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales who have contributed in consultative and advisory capacities.

HECSU has set up a dedicated Futuretrack website, primarily for the Futuretrack participants themselves, to encourage interest in and commitment to the project: see www.Futuretrack.ac.uk and involvement and sponsorship are also being sought from wider stakeholders, including employers who have an interest in recruiting graduates and offering student internships and work placements.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Details of the Futuretrack project were provided in the preceding Preface. This report presents analysis of the first stage: a census of 2006 applicants who applied through UCAS for full-time places in UK higher education (HE). These data lay the foundation for the longitudinal investigation that is scheduled to end, with a fourth survey, in Winter 2011-12; five years after most respondents embarked on their courses. However, the picture is complex, because the accepted student respondents range from those doing two-year foundation degree or undergraduate diploma courses through to those studying for degree programmes lasting five or more years, and includes those applicants who took a gap year before beginning their courses and those who, for whatever reason, did not proceed into higher education. The focus is on career decision-making: the information and guidance accessed by applicants prior to their higher education choices and their perceptions of the relationship between higher education and career opportunities. The greatest challenge presented by the research is retention of respondents, especially those who did not enter higher education or become disaffected in the course of their studies.

In Chapter 1, the background issues and the context within which respondents were applying to study are discussed briefly – in particular, the impact of HE expansion and the changes in both the HE supply and demand that this has encompassed, related to wider socio-economic and technological change.

The sample – who are the Futuretrack cohort?

Chapter 2 outlines the project methodology, the characteristics of respondents, the extent to which they are representative of the population from which they are drawn, and the measures taken to redress this bias in the analysis. Essentially, comparison of the respondent and population profiles reveals very little bias according to the known characteristics of the population – and given that UCAS collects data on gender, age, socio-economic background, ethnicity, prior qualifications and prior educational or employment characteristics, we can be reasonably confident that this analysis provides a reliable indication. However, women were more likely to have responded than men, and hose with higher prior educational qualifications than those with lower ones, and accepted rather than non-accepted applicants. Consequently, we have weighted the survey data to take account of the gender and UCAS tariff score biases, and with the support of UCAS, we conducted a follow up short survey of non-respondent non-applicants.

Analysis of the response points to a number of key factors which related to the success or otherwise of an application to study full-time in a UK Higher Education Institution in 2006.

- Not surprisingly, the better entry qualifications were, the higher the chances of gaining a place
- Likelihood of acceptance was higher for applicants to some **subjects** than others. Not surprisingly, Medicine, dentistry and subjects allied to medicine had much lower rates of acceptance than other courses. Subjects with high rates of acceptance were: Physical Sciences, mathematics and computing, engineering, mass communications and documentation, combined sciences and languages.
- Those applying as ‘young mature’ applicants aged 21-24 year olds appear to have had the highest success rate.
- Applicants from ‘middle class’ backgrounds had a higher chance of success even after controlling for their higher entry qualifications.
- In terms of broad **ethnic** groups Asian applicants fared better than whites, blacks less well. The differences among those from different minority ethnic backgrounds within the broad groups are also significant and the scale of the sample enables such differences to be explored.

- The **gender** difference in outcomes is intriguing and will be a major focus of the study as it proceeds. Males had a higher probability of success than females, even controlling for their very different subject choice profiles.
- **Access to information** about the occupations the applicants wanted to follow was important. Those who responded positively to this question were more likely to have been successful.
- There were significant **regional** differences in likelihood of acceptance. Applicants who had applied to Higher Education Institutions in Greater London, the South West, Scotland or Northern Ireland as their first choices were less likely to have a successful application.
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Mapping higher education

Chapter 3 'unpacks' the complexity of undergraduate higher education, to identify the different types of HE trajectory and develop analytic tools to make sense classification of these different categories of 'HE package', according to characteristics of the courses – skills, knowledge and degree of vocational focus – and the characteristics and career orientations of the student populations they attract. The following key findings emerged:

- The majority of applicants had a reasonably clear idea about the occupational direction that they wished to take after completing their courses and the qualifications required to achieve it.
- This was, however, related to the course of study they were about to embark on and the analyses revealed a clear pattern that enables us to map the extent to which different areas of study are regarded by the students opting for them as vocational.
- Females, older applicants, those from Black minority ethnic groups, those with higher entry qualifications and those opting for areas of study at the most occupationally-directed end of the spectrum exhibited greatest clarity about their career directions.
- Males, those under 19 when they applied for HE, those from White and Asian ethnic backgrounds, those with lower educational qualifications and those opting for languages, historical and philosophical studies (– subjects at the least vocational end of the course spectrum) – had lower likelihood of having a clear career direction.
- Coming from a higher managerial and professional background, and having attended a fee-paying school, were associated with lower probability of having a clear career direction, illustrating how many 'traditional' HE applicants move on into HE without much thought of where it will lead.

We also explored applicants' subjective assessments of their competence in four core areas of skill; written communication, spoken communication, numeracy, computer literacy and, in addition, self-confidence. Stability and change in these will be monitored as the project proceeds, in recognition of the fact that these are related to access to opportunities, performance and relative success and failure in education and the labour market.

- We find a clear relationship between self-rated written communication skills and numeracy skills and **outcomes** and we also find that there are strong **cultural differences** in terms of ethnic background in the extent to which respondent subjectively rated themselves in terms of their possession of these skills. Over 70 per cent of Black African respondents considered that their self-confidence was excellent or very good, compared to well under half of White respondents and only 39 per cent of Asian Chinese. These assessments are not congruent with educational achievement and clearly reflect cultural diversity, in terms of classifications and values relating to self-evaluation. They are echoed by self-assessment of other core areas. Apart from in Computer literacy, Black Africans are among the most likely to rate themselves highly and, apart from in Numeracy and Computer Literacy, Asian Chinese least willing to do so.

- Independently of cultural variation, there appears to be a systematically-gendered patterns of response on these scaled items that conform to gendered educational performance. Women rate themselves more highly than their male peers in written communication (apart from in the case of Chinese Asian women, who are less willing to rate themselves highly than men on every dimension), there is little gender difference in self-rating on spoken communication, and women rate themselves significantly lower on numeracy and computer literacy. We discovered a very clear '**gender confidence gap**'.

Exploring the different population profiles of different subject areas highlighted the obvious but often under-acknowledged fact that HE is *not* a homogeneous commodity. Some subjects are mainly or exclusively taught in particular types of HEI, attract different types of student – with greater or lower proportions of women, representatives of minority ethnic groups, non-traditional students, and offer different access to educational and social facilities and access to opportunities. Our findings reinforce previous evidence that social and educational advantage prior to HE entry leads to greater likelihood of acceptance at elite institutions – but these data provide the opportunity to monitor the dynamics of the interaction of privilege and equal opportunities policies and practices within higher education.

Reasons for the decision to embark on HE and choice of university or college

Career plans, belief that it would enable them to get a good job, enjoyment of their subject, and desire to realise their potential were the most common reasons for applicants choosing to enter HE.

- The decision to enter higher education and choice of higher education institution is influenced by both socio-economic and cultural factors. Parents' socio-economic background and experience of higher education had a clear impact upon whether a student decided to apply for higher education. Traditional applicants who had parents with experience of higher education were the most likely to state that they had chosen to apply for higher education because it was the normal thing for someone like them to do, with alternatives not considered. These, mainly 'traditional' applicants also appeared to have received careers information and advice from the widest range of sources.
- Certain groups faced particular constraints when making when deciding which HEI they would attend. Mature students were often limited by their need to study locally because of family or work commitments. Asian students, particularly female applicants from Asian Pakistani communities, were also likely state that they had chosen their HEI to be able to study while living at home – as were Asian Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean applicants.
- Availability and content of particular courses, location, and reputation were all important factors when applicants were choosing their HEI.
- The analyses in this chapter reinforce the picture of patterned diversity discussed in Chapter 3, reflecting cumulative advantages, preferences and restrictions, that result in the student profile for different subject groups being systematically different and reflecting different access to routes within HE. They also reveal that type of university and types of course studied are closely related – as will be discussed in the chapter that follows.

How did applicants choose their courses and subjects?

As with initial decisions to enter HE and choice of HEI, course choices were related to applicants' personal characteristics and previous experiences.

- The majority of respondents who were accepted onto higher education courses were planning to study degree level courses.
- Applicants from higher social-economic backgrounds were more likely to be applying to study on undergraduate degree programmes, and less likely to be studying for HNDs or DipHEs than those from routine and manual backgrounds.

- Applicants planning to study for foundation degrees or HND/DipHEs were likely to be older, more likely to be in employment, less likely to be planning to study at an old (pre-1992) university, and less likely to rate their numeracy and literacy skills highly than students studying for three and four year degrees. There is also some regional variation in the types of courses applicants planned to study.
- The four most popular reasons for choosing to study a particular course were: interest in the course and employment or career-related reasons. Younger applicants were more likely to choose subjects they are good at or enjoyed, and they were less likely than older applicants to give instrumental, employment related reasons for choosing their course. Applicants from higher social classes are also more likely to choose subjects they enjoy or are good at, whilst those from lower social classes were more likely to give employment related reasons. This reflects the correlation between the age at which applicants applied to enter higher education and their socio-economic background. Older applicants generally have clearer reasons for choosing their course.
- Differences in distribution over the range of subjects by ethnicity and gender are striking. Both women and those from minority ethic groups are most likely to have applied for courses at the vocational end of the spectrum and in the case of Asian applicants, are particularly concentrated in Medicine and Dentistry, Subjects Allied to Medicine, Maths and Computing and Business and Administration. Both Asian and black applicants were twice as likely to have applied for the last of these than White applicants. Conversely, White applicants were considerably more likely to apply for Creative Art and Design, Physical Sciences and Biological, Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences.
- Subject choice remains profoundly gendered, and women's greater clarity in ideas about the career they aspire to apparent in the analysis of vocational subject choices, as the discussion in chapter 3 revealed.
- Family influence was regarded both positively and negatively by applicants. When family members had experience of higher education, they were able to offer useful advice, but family pressure to study particular subjects was also seen to constrain choices.
- In relation to vocationally-focused choices non-standard, particularly older applicants, were more likely than others to have applied for such courses, as were those with non-standard or lower pre-entry qualifications; although some of the courses requiring high qualifications were at the vocational end of the spectrum.
- The majority of applicants had chosen their course with at least some consideration of its vocational direction. Older applicants were more likely to be embarking on clearly vocational courses, showing their more employment-orientated approach to HE. The youngest applicants were most likely to be choosing non-vocational options.

Access to careers guidance and information

Most of the applicants reported positive experience of the application process overall, and they had access to adequate information and guidance in enabling them to make their choice.

- Over three quarters of applicants had made independent visits to universities or colleges, over two thirds believed that they had had adequate information on courses available, half or more stated that they had had adequate information about the relationship between courses and employment options, access to publications such as 'Good Universities' guides, access to adequate information or guidance outside their school or college and had visited a Careers Fair.
- Less than half considered they had had adequate information about **alternatives** to going on to higher education, had had individual careers guidance, had visited HEIs arranged by their schools and colleges or had had presentations from employers about career options.

Educational and social advantage showed, and there was indication of **gender inequality**. Type of school attended was significantly related to access to information, with those from schools which selected pupils on the basis of ability, single-sex schools and fee-paying schools – those traditionally geared to support HE entry – less likely to report having received inadequate information across the board. Applicants from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who had studied at FE colleges prior to application, who were applying as 'non-traditional HE applicants' were more likely to report shortfalls in information about HE options and careers available to them, and female respondents were more likely than males to report lack of information, with those from selective schools more likely to report deficiencies than their male peers.

Family was an important source of advice, with over 50 per cent of applicants agreeing with the statement that their family had been supportive of their choice of course. University websites and prospectuses had been helpful; and the UCAS website had been easy to use.

Applicants who had applied for subject areas at the **non-vocational** end of the spectrum were more likely to report that they **had not had enough information** about the relationship between the course and employment options. They were less likely to have had advice from family or teachers, or influenced in their choices of course by friends – evidence of the 'non-standard' step they were taking.

However, 31 per cent report that they had needed more help and advice in choosing their course and a further 15 per cent were not sure.

- Factors associated with desire for more help were being older (aged 25 or more when they applied), coming from minority ethnic groups, having opted to apply for Social Studies courses;
- Those most likely to disagree with the statement 'I needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study' were aged 18 years or under at the time of the applications, white ethnic group who had opted for medicine, dentistry, education, history and philosophical studies, who were second generation HE applicants and who had given a positive response to questions about having had careers advice and information.

Those who were worried about their ability to succeed in HE were more likely to be young, non-traditional females, who were first generation HE applicants.

Projected HE Funding and anticipation of debt

There were differences in the patterns of anticipated funding, along socio-economic lines and related to type of education, age, ethnic group membership and, most predictably, country of study.

- Student loans were the most popular means of funding HE study
- Most applicants cited multiple methods of funding, most commonly between 3 and 5 methods were chosen
- Nearly 70 per cent of applicants anticipated doing some paid work to help fund their studies – with interesting variation among sub-groups of applicants.

Debt is a key issue for many respondents. The anticipation of significant debt could (and indeed, did) affect likelihood of entering higher education, the types and locations of the institutions they choose to enter, and the courses that they choose to study.

- Over 60 per cent of applicants anticipate significant debts by the end of their studies
- Applicants from Scotland are much less likely to anticipate significant debts
- There is some variation in anticipation of debt by socio-economic background, though socio-economic background doesn't appear to be as significant in England as it is in other countries of the UK

- Anticipation of debt varied by subject, and there was a significant number who found it difficult to asses whether or not they would accrue significant debt.

Attitudes, values and views about HE policy and its value

On the whole, respondents were extremely positive about the value of HE as an experience and as an investment, with over 80 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with positive statements about its value. Higher education was seen to provide students with opportunities to become independent as well as to clarify career ambitions. The burden of debt was a concern for a large proportion of respondents, but the general principle that students (if they can afford to) should contribute to the costs of their higher education - and the majority accepted that student loans, though thought by many to place an unwarranted burden on students after completing their courses, were a good idea. Socio-economic background, gender and age appeared to influence responses in some areas, as did expectation of significant debt.

- Across many of the attitudinal questions, the most traditional higher education applicants - young males who had attended a fee paying independent school and who had parents in higher SES occupations - were found to be the most positive, most likely to see themselves as being successful and the least likely to question the value of higher education or be concerned about graduate debt. Both sexes of applicants whose parents had experience of higher education, those who did not expect significant debt, and applicants expecting to attend a Russell Group or other old university were similarly more likely to hold positive attitudes and to have fewer worries.
- Respondents who had a clear view about their future career and the qualifications required to enter that occupation or career path also stood out as a group that tended to hold strong, positive views about the value of higher education.
- In all of the questions, there were significant minorities whose responses disagreed with the norm, and these applicants will be interesting to follow up as they progress through higher education.

Global HE? –Differences and similarities among UK, EU and other overseas applicants

In many respects, the profiles of the EU and other overseas applicants were similar to the profile of the UK applicants, particularly in their attitudes towards higher education. They most resembled ‘traditional’ UK applicants, in terms of the types of universities and courses they applied for and other responses likely to relate to a relatively advantaged socio-economic background.

- EU and other overseas applicants are more likely than UK applicants as a whole to have family members who have experience of higher education, and are more likely to receive help from family members to pay for their studies.
- They have much less expectation of significant debt on completion of their studies than UK applicants, and are more likely than UK applicants to see higher education as extremely beneficial.
- Although they rate their written and numeracy skills no more highly than UK domiciled applicants, they are confident, and less likely than UK applicants to worry that they will find the level of work as a higher education student too difficult.
- Other overseas applicants in particular, show a greater propensity to pursue courses with a clear vocational orientation, particularly in the fields of engineering and business and administration. The other overseas applicants also show a greater awareness than other groups of the relationship between higher education and employment, and to have a clear idea of their career paths upon graduation.
- EU applicants appear less vocationally orientated than the other overseas applicants. Whilst they show some propensity towards studying vocational subjects like engineering and business and administration studies, they are also strongly represented amongst applicants planning to study subjects like social studies,

languages and creative art and design, making their profile more similar to the UK domiciled applicants.

- Both categories were more likely to have applied to study in London or the South East – with EU students also disproportionately favouring Scotland in terms of their overall numbers.
- Although there are some areas where they would have liked to receive more advice, the overseas applicants are generally as happy as UK domiciled applicants about the advice they have received and their experience of the application process.
- Those who were dissuaded from continuing to higher education because of debt or costs were more likely to be non-UK domiciled applicants. Given the different scales of fees for different categories of student , this is not surprising. Thirty per cent of those who were domiciled outside the EU cited the cost/debts as a reason for not going on to HE. This is compared with 19 per cent from within the EU (UK excluded) and 17 per cent for UK domiciled applicants.
- Gap year students were predominantly from 'traditional' HE-consumer backgrounds and to have applied as secondary school or sixth form students and to be younger than average.

Regional variation

- Comparison of responses by applicants according to UK region of domicile prior to HE entry region shows some variation in responses, reflecting the different HE funding regimes between UK countries and their different socio-economic and wider demographic structures. Applicants from Scotland differ in many respects from the rest of the UK, as – in different ways - do those from Northern Ireland and Wales. This is not unexpected, certainly with regard to variables which measure outcomes and choices, given that their choices were in part structured by different funding arrangements.
- The findings also reflect differences in access to the range of HE opportunities and to some extent, cultural variations in norms, values and expectations that will require further exploration and careful monitoring as the longitudinal study proceeds.
- There are stronger differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK in terms of attitudes, particularly around such issues as funding, loans and debt.
- General attitudinal questions such as the value of HE and questions about self-perception did not reveal significant differences except where different policy or funding opportunities has had an effect on a particular area.
- The analysis highlighted the importance of future investigation to investigate the subtle but distinct regional differences in choices of courses and perceptions of options, in conjunction with other structural variables such as age, background and ethnic group.

What did those who did not proceed to HE plan next, and were their characteristics and attitudes different to those who started courses in 2006?

The evidence about non-accepted applicants is diverse and presents a challenge for analysis, deriving from those non-accepted applicants who completed the full survey and those who completed the short supplementary survey targeted at non-respondent non-accepted applicants. Both groups included applicants who intended to proceed to full-time HE after a gap year – previously planned or taken in response to either disappointing or unexpectedly good A level results.

- Overall, 88 per cent of UK domiciled applicants who responded to the main survey had an accepted place at an HEI.

- The majority of applicants who did not enter higher education in 2006, either because their application was unsuccessful, or because they decide to do something else, planned to apply again in 2007.
- High socio-economic status and parents who had experience of higher education increased an applicants chances of entering higher education (i.e. being accepted at any HEI). They did not seem to have the same kind of impact on an applicants' changes of being accepted at the HEI of their choice.
- Applicants whose application to enter higher education, and whose choices of HEI and course and were self-motivated, were more likely to have accepted places than those whose main reason for applying to enter higher education was encouragement by others.
- Applicants who had the clearest idea of their future careers were the most likely to not accept a place at an HEI. They were also the second most likely, after those who rated themselves 7, in other words had no idea of their future career, to not be accepted at their chosen institution. This is likely to reflect the relatively high rejection rates for those aiming to study some of the more vocational subjects like medicine, dentistry and nursing.
- Applicants who were positive about the role and value of higher education were more successful in the application process than those who are not. They were more likely to be accepted at an HEI and more likely to be accepted at the HEI of their choice.
- Information plays an important role in determining the success of an application. Applicants who consider themselves well informed about higher education courses are much more likely to be successful in their application than those who do not.
- Applicants who chose their course so that they could continue to live at home lower rates of acceptance at their chosen institution and higher rates of non-acceptance.
- Most of the applicants in the main survey who said that they did not expect to be enrolled on an HE course in 2006 were planning to take a gap year, indicating a high degree of planning and confidence given that they mainly did not know the outcome of their application or A level results in most cases. However, those who had planned to take gap years were less likely than those who planned to enter HE in Autumn 2006 to have an accepted place, so the plan for a gap year may be a way of 'hedging bets' in case desired outcomes are not achieved.
- Short survey respondents who reported that failure to obtain required grades were more likely to come from relatively disadvantaged social backgrounds.
- There is interesting qualitative data, still to be explored in detail, that provides examples of applicants whose ideas about what they wanted to study had changed and applicants who had been discouraged by the prospect of debt. Mature applicants were most likely to have reported that failure to obtain a place had discouraged them from trying again.

The conclusion attempts to make sense of the overall picture of HE applicant diversity that has been revealed by the earlier analyses, highlights some key variables that, together , begin to reveal a patterned system of opportunities and obstacles to equality of outcomes that the HE choices made by applicants appear to be presenting. The range of diversity revealed is illustrated and some of the implications are summarised. Finally, the potential of the Futuretrack longitudinal survey and related qualitative investigations to reveal the mechanisms that determine career choices and outcomes, in the complex interaction of applicant characteristics and potential, social advantage and disadvantage, and participation in particular programmes of HE is outlined.

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CHAPTER 1

Researching the relationship between higher education and careers

The Futuretrack study

This report contains key findings from the first stage of this major five year investigation, named Futuretrack, which is following the progress of higher education (HE) 2006 applicants for full-time courses in UK colleges and universities. Information was collected from respondents in summer and autumn 2006 at the point where the majority of respondents were making the transition from secondary to higher education, beginning a full-time higher education undergraduate or sub-degree course in September or October 2006.

Futuretrack is the most ambitious investigation of the relationship between higher education and career development ever undertaken in the UK. The project provides an unprecedented opportunity to track, in detail and for a variety of groups of applicants, the different routes through HE and the impact of educational and career decisions on access to opportunities and on outcomes. The findings will throw light on the variables associated with different educational and subsequent career routes, and the advantages and obstacles encountered in different contexts and by different groups. They will provide the opportunity for comparison between similarly-qualified candidates who did, or did not, take gap years between school and university or college and who chose, rejected or were refused the opportunity to study full-time in higher education. They also allow for more comprehensive comparison between 'traditional'[1] higher education applicants and those making the transition from secondary to tertiary education as mature students.

At the first stage of this enquiry, a large volume of data has been generated and analyses of this will continue as the research programme proceeds. In summer 2006, after an extensive series of exploratory research and consultation that included a pilot survey of 2005 applicants[2] and questionnaire-testing workshops with groups of students in a wide range of schools and colleges around Britain, all 2006 UCAS applicants were invited to participate in the study. The invitation email contained a link to an online questionnaire and, when agreeing to participate, respondents also gave permission for basic data from their UCAS application to be merged with their questionnaire responses.

The key objective at this first stage has been to collect information from the full-time HE applicant population in order to map and better understand its complexity. Very often 'higher education', 'an undergraduate degree' and 'the graduate labour market' are discussed as if they constitute unambiguously homogeneous phenomena – but all those concerned with HE policy and practice recognise that they are highly complex and constantly evolving processes which encompass a diverse ranges of activities, meanings and values. The knowledge and skills developed within higher education programmes range through theoretical to practical; the varieties of pedagogies from highly structured and didactic to experimental; the learning environments from lecture halls and laboratories to workplaces and virtual networks; learning contexts from large group to independent scholarship and research. The variety of higher educational experiences develop different skills and provide access to different opportunities, with different outcomes in terms of rewards and status.

Consequently, applicants approach HE with varying aspirations, bringing a wide range of prior skills, knowledge, abilities and ambitions from secondary and further education. They arrive at the threshold of higher education by different routes and embark on very different career trajectories within higher education. The big questions for higher education policymakers, careers advisers and higher education practitioners relate to how far applicants have adequate information to enable them to evaluate the best option for them, and how far they

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1 'Traditional HE applicants' is an imprecise but useful (and commonly-used) shorthand term to refer to secondary school students from communities where the transition from school to university or college is the norm rather than the exception.

2 This Futuretrack2005 survey – a sample survey of 2005 UCAS applicants - was designed as a longitudinal pilot for the 2006 census study and a study, in itself, of the last cohort to enter higher education prior to the introduction of variable fees. The Futuretrack2005 Wave 1 report can be accessed on www.hecsu.ac.uk

are making appropriate choices that will enable them to develop their potential. The Futuretrack study will reveal how applicants make choices, reveal the patterning and diversity of higher education experiences and monitor the variables that contribute to educational and career outcomes.

Higher education expansion and career opportunities

From the latter part of the twentieth century and onwards progressively rapid industrial restructuring, technological change and globalisation have changed the parameters of employment. Governments' assessment of the skills required for economic growth and development have driven higher education investment and expansion policies in the UK as they have internationally. Higher education has become a global industry – part of the 'knowledge economy' that it serves – and this is reflected in increasing education-led migration and mobility – both of EU and overseas students to study in UK and of UK students to study overseas. Within the UK, HE expansion has provided wider employment opportunities for an increasingly high proportion on the population – and well over half of accepted applicants who are participating in the Futuretrack study are first generation HE participants.

However, the interesting question is how far the full range of opportunities offered within HE are equally accessible to all, or are accessed in ways that reinforce existing inequalities. Since the early 1970s, successive equal opportunities initiatives, underpinned by anti-discrimination legislation, have made a significant impact on educational and employment opportunities. The majority of 2006 HE applicants have grown up in a society where they have been encouraged to regard themselves as able to aspire to any area of education or employment, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability or any other social or demographic characteristics. However, despite concern to widen access to young people and adults from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds, those traditionally excluded from educational opportunity have proved more difficult to recruit to the expansion of which has disproportionately benefited those from professional, managerial and intermediate occupational backgrounds, with school leavers from professional and managerial backgrounds four times as likely to proceed to HE as those with parents in unskilled occupations. The biggest growth in HE participation as a result of expansion since the 1980s has been of middle class women, reflecting change in the gender division of labour, industrial restructuring and growth of the service sector, and the increasing importance of credentials in new professional and technical areas – many in public sector educational, social policy and healthcare occupations. Yet even among recently-qualified graduates, women's employment outcomes continue to reflect gendered inequalities (Purcell and Elias 2008).

Education has long been recognised as the traditional route to social mobility (Tawney, 1931), but long-range mobility was rare in the first half of the twentieth century and rates of relative social mobility in developed countries generally has been shown to have been remarkably stable throughout the twentieth century (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). Recent comparative analysis of social mobility indicates that social mobility rates are lower in Britain and USA than in comparable countries, and that intergenerational mobility has been falling in Britain in the most recent cohorts (Blanden *et al.*2005). Throughout recent decades, short-range upward mobility has not been matched by comparable downward mobility. This suggests that economic restructuring – in particular, the growth of services generally, and expansion of 'the service class' in particular, has been responsible for the bulk of intergenerational occupational movement, and that those with positional advantage have succeeded in insulating their children against downward mobility. One of the key ways in which they have achieved this is by investment in education (Brown 2003, Brown and Hesketh 2005, Marshall 1997). One of the key questions we will be addressing as this project proceeds is how far HE applicants carry social advantage and disadvantage through the HE process, the factors that influence career decision-making and the mechanisms through which access to opportunities is facilitated or restricted.

In the chapters that follow, we provide a picture of the routes into UK full-time higher education and the characteristics and aspirations of applicants, including those who have not, so far, succeeded in obtaining places - or who had deferred or rethought their decision to do so, and address some of these questions.

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CHAPTER 2

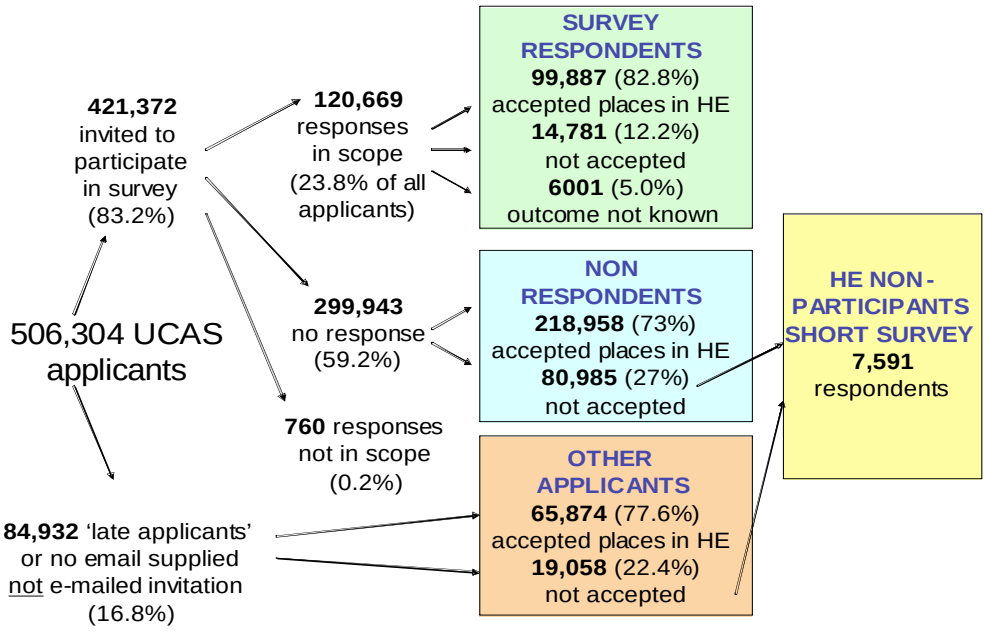
The achieved sample: who are the Futuretrack respondents, how representative are they of the 2006 HE applicant population – and who got places?

As a result of conducting the 2005 pilot study, some key research design decisions were taken. It was decided to aim for a population census, rather than starting out with a sample, to generate sufficient responses via web-based data collection methods. Given the ability of the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) to contact the majority of HE applicants by email, an email containing a personal link to the online survey was sent from UCAS on behalf of the research team. Respondents were invited to participate in the survey on the understanding that participation would entail the transfer of UCAS application data to be merged with their responses to the survey questions, thus precluding the need to collect previously-supplied educational and demographic details from respondents.

It was recognised from the outset that reliance on web-based collection methods might lead to significant response bias, but the potential to compare response with the full population profile in terms of most key variables – age, educational and social background, ethnicity, regional location – meant that it was possible to identify biases, to weight data to take account of them, if necessary, and to consider a range of strategies to 'rebalance' the survey population.

At the first stage of data collection, as anticipated, those who had not proceeded into higher education showed a lower propensity to respond. A supplementary 'short survey' was developed, in which non-responding HE non-participants were invited to participate in January 2007. Figure 2.1 shows the relationship between the population surveyed, the survey instruments and the responses achieved.

Figure 2.1: 2006 UCAS Applicants: Population and response at Stage 1



When the survey was closed, there were 120,669 usable responses. Those applicants who had not proceeded into higher education were under-represented in the response. In order to amplify response for this group, non-respondents who, according to UCAS data, had not accepted a place in higher education, were invited to complete a short online questionnaire in Winter 2006-7. This generated a further 7,591 responses, taking the Futuretrack Wave 1 sample to 128,260, of whom 22,372 had not proceeded directly to full-time HE study.

Tables in Annexe 1 compare respondents to the main survey and to the short survey of non-accepted applicants are compared with this population. There are two respects in which the achieved sample varied significantly from the population from which it was drawn: a higher proportion of women than men responded (as is characteristic of survey response patterns generally), and a higher proportion of those with high university entry qualifications responded than those at the less highly-qualified end of the spectrum. The data have been weighted to take account of these biases in the analysis. Details of the response analysis and weighting procedures are shown in Annex 1.

A basic profile of the sample

In this section of the report, we outline the basic profile of the respondent sample, outcome of their applications, according to domicile, gender, age, ethnicity, what they were doing (in terms of educational or labour market status) at the time of their application to HE, and the type of course they applied for, in terms of qualification level and subject of study.

Balance of home and overseas students: 87 per cent UK-domiciled; 6 per cent EU citizens; 7 per cent other overseas;

Gender: 37 per cent males; 63 per cent females

Age group: 50 per cent 18 or under; 25 per cent 19 or 20; 11 per cent 21-25; 9 per cent over 25 (5 per cent unknown);

Broad ethnic group: 70 per cent white; 8 per cent Asian; 4 per cent black; 2 per cent mixed race; 16 per cent unrecorded[3]

Activity prior to application: 55 per cent applied from their final year in secondary school or 6th Form College; 20 per cent as students at a Further Education (FE) college; 15 per cent were employees, 3 per cent were unemployed and 7 per cent were in other situations; mainly engaged in other educational courses in the UK or overseas, engaged in gap year travel or unpaid work or non-employed in households.

Success and failure in obtaining HE places

All applicants for full-time undergraduate and sub-degree-level courses[4] were invited to participate in the study. 4.7 per cent of respondents had applied for Foundation degree programmes, 2.5 per cent for an HND or DipHE course, 1.2 per cent to study full-time for an additional year to transfer from HND to undergraduate status, 60.5 per cent to study on a three-year undergraduate programme, 24.5 per cent on four year or sandwich degree courses and 6.2 per cent on an undergraduate programme lasting more than four years.

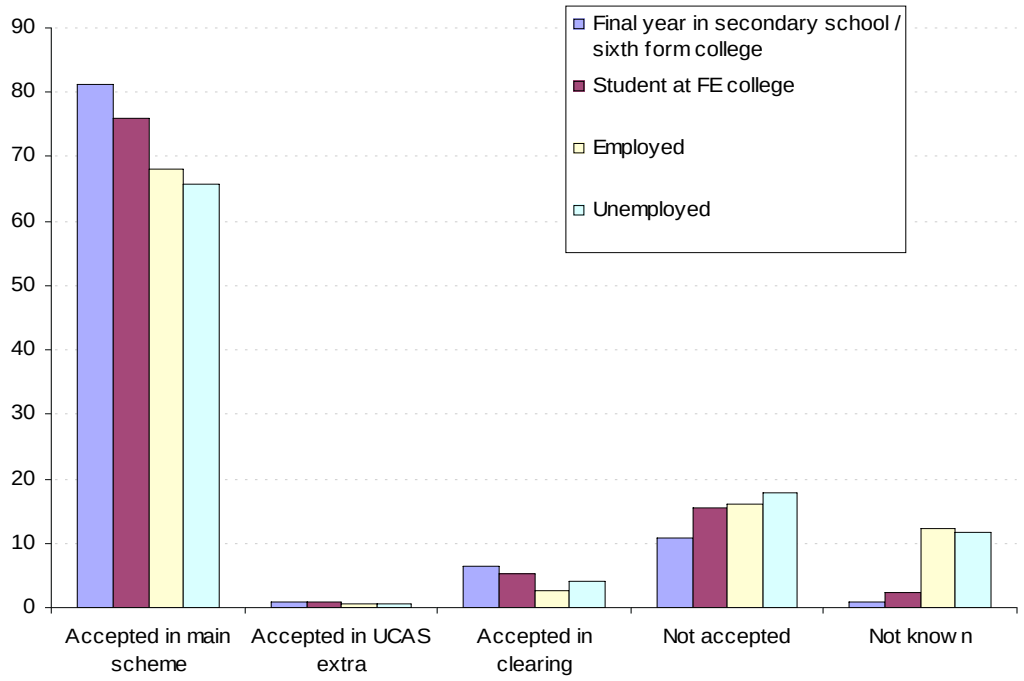
Of Futuretrack participants who completed the full survey, 90.8 per cent had expected to embark on a full-time higher education course in Autumn 2006, but in the event, only 86 per cent of those where the outcome is known had accepted places[5]. Over three quarters were accepted under the main scheme, rather than through the 'clearing' process - and the data show that 'traditional' applicants were more likely to succeed in this respect than others. Those applying as secondary school students, those under 21, white rather than ethnic minority and UK rather than EU or other overseas students had a greater propensity to have received offers and accepted places under the main UCAS scheme, were less likely to enter through 'clearing', and less likely to end up without a place. Figures 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 illustrate these differences in origins and outcomes.

3 EU and overseas applicants are not required by UCAS to provide ethnicity or socio-economic data on application.

4 All UCAS applicants who had provided email addresses in their UCAS application were emailed with an invitation to participate and link to the online questionnaire. In addition, a general invitation and information were posted to all applicants and reminders in both hard copy and by email were issued.

5 This compares with 77.2% of the whole population of UCAS applicants and illustrates the under-representation of non-accepted applicants that prompted the decision to conduct a third mailing to those who did not proceed into HE inviting them to complete the 'short survey' questionnaire.

Figure 2.2: Differences in patterns of integration to HE by previous situation

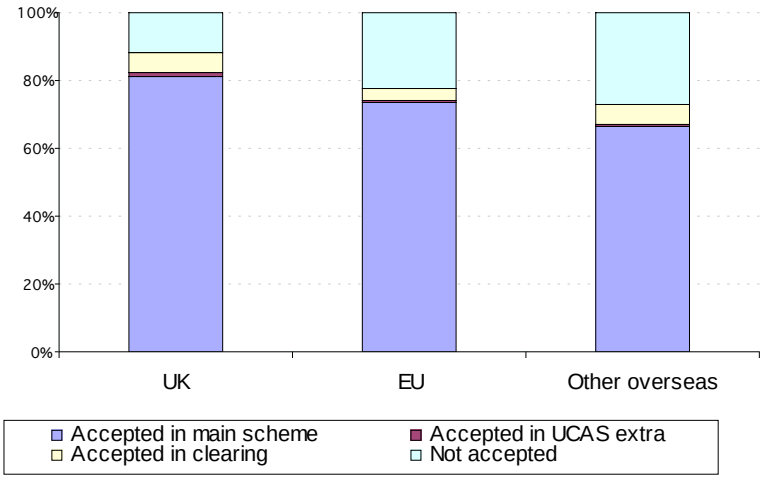


Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted.

As far as UK applicants were concerned, those with a higher propensity to have accepted places were male, coming from a professional or managerial background, were 18 or under at the time of application, and/or were applying from a sixth form college that was part of a secondary school. In terms of ethnicity, white and Asian applicants were more likely than black candidates to have accepted places.

Figure 2.3 reveals that outcomes of applications varied by region and country of domicile, with overseas applicants less likely to have accepted places than UK applicants. Data collected in the short non-participant survey indicates that significant proportions of EU and other overseas students proceeded to university places in other countries, which might have been either because they chose not to accept an offered UK place or failed to obtain one.

Figure 2.3: Differences in HE acceptance patterns, comparing UK, EU and other overseas students



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted.

Table 2.1 shows that within the UK countries and regions there was some diversity, with higher non-acceptance rates in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Greater London and for 'other UK domiciled' applicants. The high rate of non-acceptance for applicants domiciled in Northern Ireland is particularly striking.

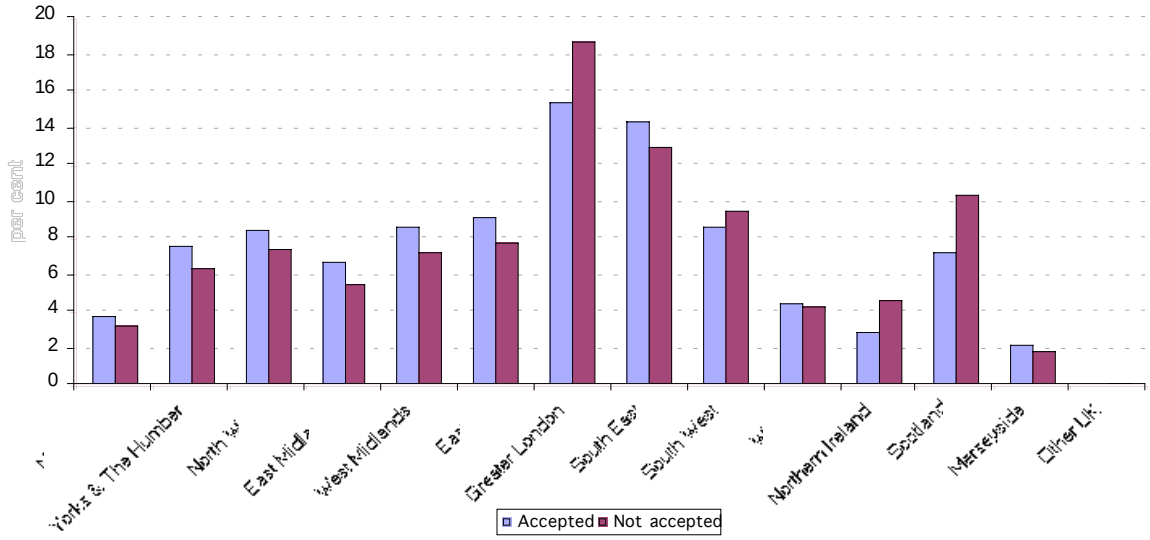
Table 2.1: Outcome of application by domicile

	Accepted via normal scheme to HEI of choice	Accepted via normal scheme to other HEI	Accepted through UCAS extra or clearing	Not accepted
North East	72.8	11.0	5.8	10.4
Yorks & The Humber	72.1	11.1	6.7	10.1
North West	72.7	10.5	6.2	10.5
East Midlands	73.0	11.3	5.6	10.1
West Midlands	70.7	12.0	7.0	10.3
Eastern	69.7	14.3	5.8	10.3
Greater London	59.6	15.0	11.2	14.2
South East	69.6	14.1	5.4	10.9
South West	69.6	13.5	4.0	12.9
Wales	71.3	11.5	6.0	11.2
Northern Ireland	63.7	12.1	6.0	18.2
Scotland	69.4	9.7	4.5	16.4
Merseyside	72.4	10.6	6.9	10.1
Other UK	64.3	6.3	8.4	21.0
All UK respondents	68.8	12.6	6.6	12.0

Source: Futuretrack 2006: UK-domiciled respondents to full survey (weighted responses).

Figure 2.4 presents this same information in a different manner, revealing the distribution of accepted and non-accepted applicants by region. This highlights the dominance of Greater London and the South East as the 'supplying areas' for potential university students.

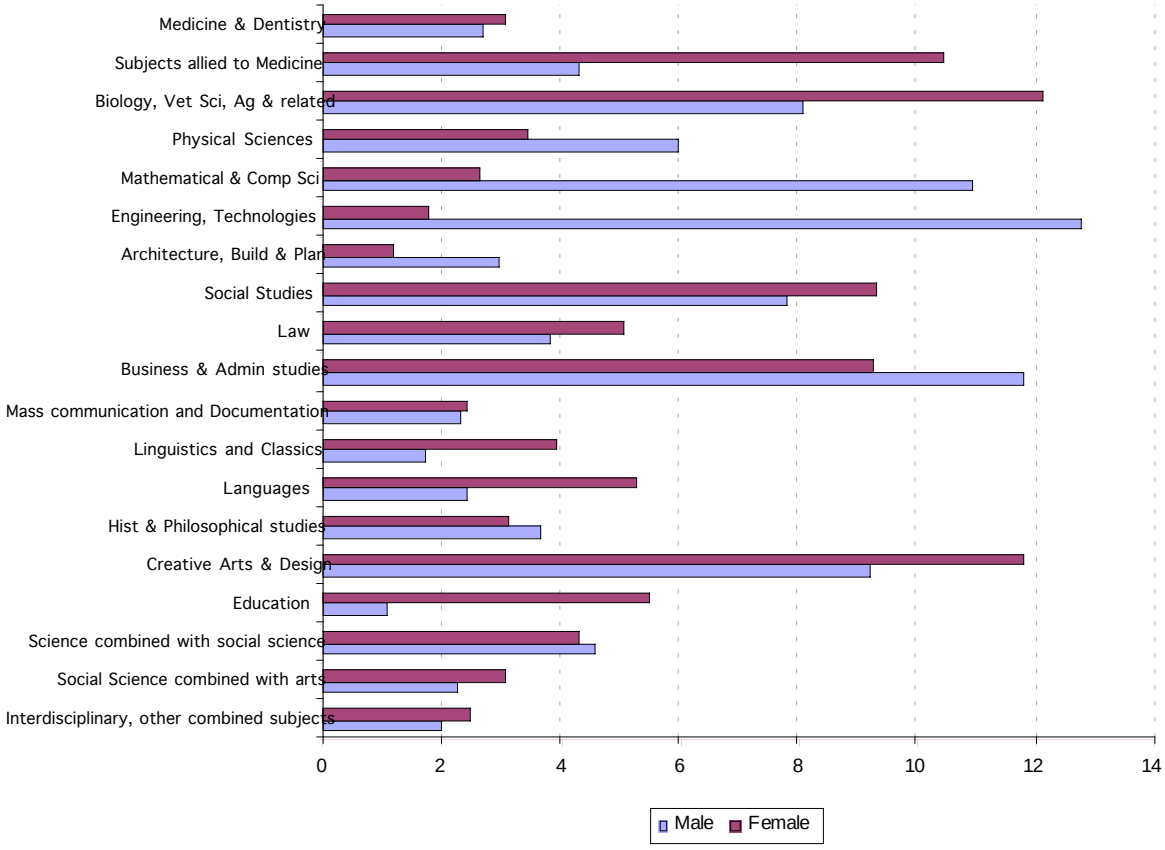
Figure 2.4: Distribution of UK accepted/not accepted Futuretrack respondents, by domicile when applying for HE places



Source: Futuretrack 2006: UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted.

Figure 2.5 shows, for accepted applicants, the distribution by category of subject applied for and by gender, illustrating how different the profiles of male and female students remain.

Figure 2.5: Subject applied for, comparing male and female distributions (accepted applicants)

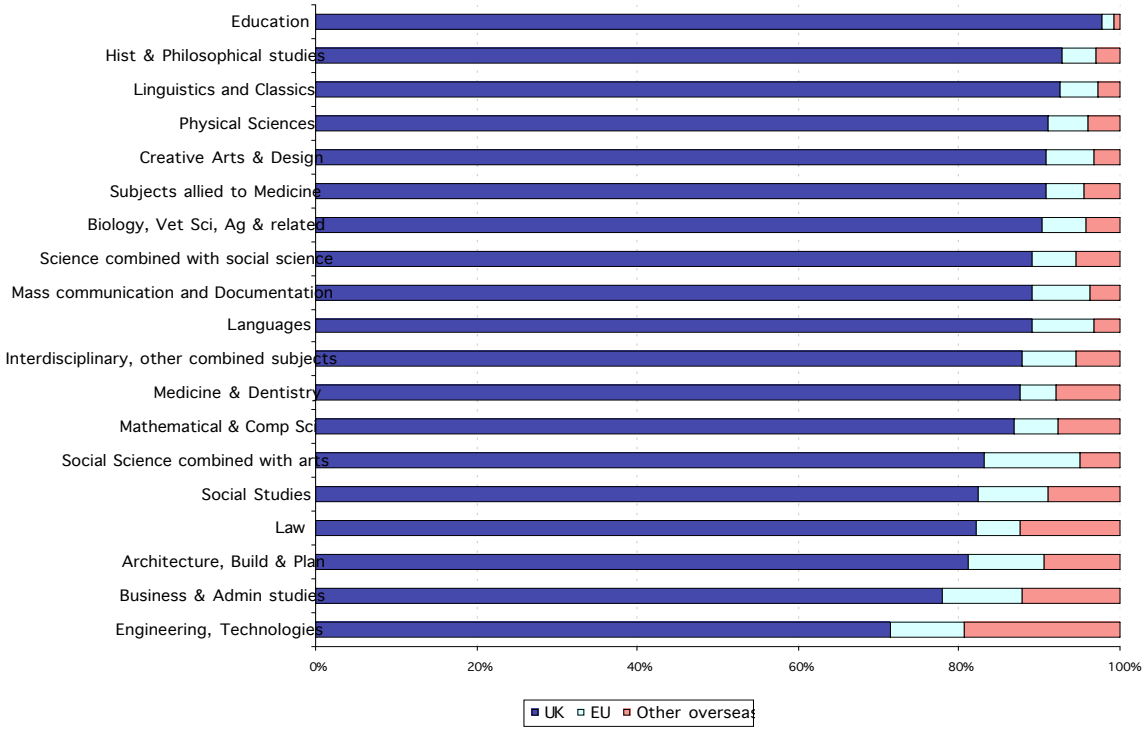


Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

The preponderance of women within subjects allied to medicine, biology, veterinary science and agriculture and related courses, outnumbering men accepted to such courses by more than 2 to 1, is particularly noteworthy. In contrast, men outnumber female applicants in engineering, technologies, mathematics and computer science by more than 4 to 1.

The other way in which courses differ is in terms of the profile of those whom they recruit. Investigation of accepted applicants by broad subject reveals very different distributions in terms of the extent to which they attract students from outside the UK. Figure 2.6 shows that non-EU students tend to be located in engineering and technology subjects, business and administration, architecture and law. Not surprisingly, education is the subject least attractive to overseas applicants, because of the more limited transferability of skills and differing national qualification requirements in this vocational subject area.

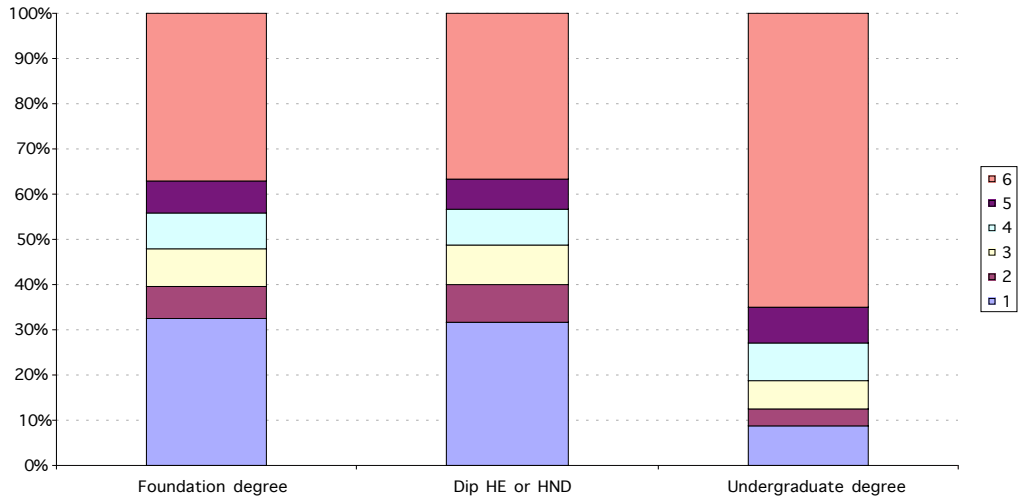
Figure 2.6: Subject by location prior to application, showing shares of UK, EU and other overseas applicants



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

Applicants could choose to submit up to six applications to higher education institutions and courses. Figure 2.7 illustrates how the number of applications varied for different groups, with the main variation being between those who made only one application and those who made six. Applicants for a foundation degree were more likely to have made only one application than those applying for a 'regular' undergraduate degree, reflecting their greater likelihood of applying to study within their region of domicile and (as further analysis will reveal) having a more targeted approach to study, for clearly-specified instrumental reasons. Those applying to do full-time Foundation degrees were most likely to be applying for Creative Arts and Design, with substantial numbers in Engineering, Business and Administrative Studies , Subjects Allied to Medicine and Mathematics and Computing Studies – all areas attracting above average proportions of mature applicants.

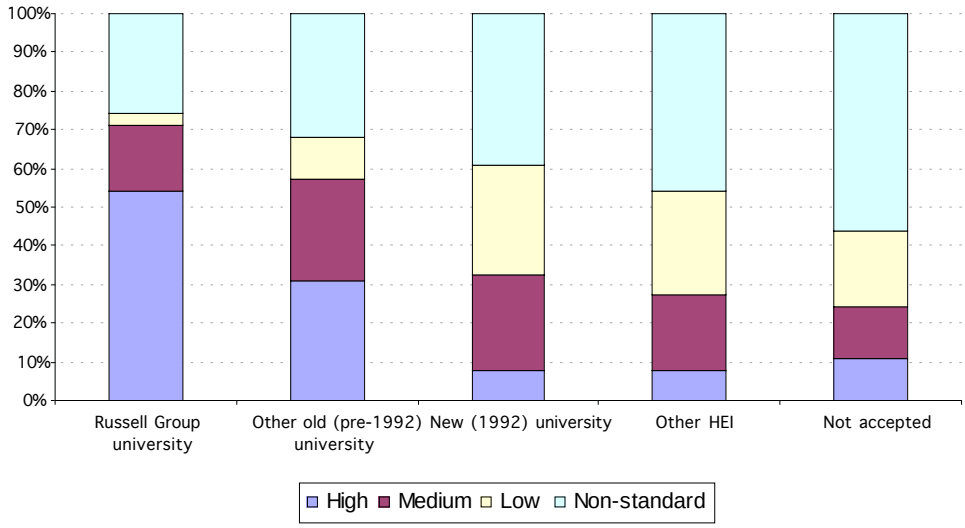
Figure 2.7: Number of applications made, by type of course applied for (UK accepted applicants only)



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, where number of applications known, full survey, weighted.

Not all HEIs offer the same range of courses or require the same average entry qualifications. Figure 2.8 shows this very clearly, comparing the prior qualifications of students accepted at different types of HEI[6] and those not accepted.

Figure 2.8: Educational entry qualifications* and outcome of HE application, distinguishing type of HEI of accepted places



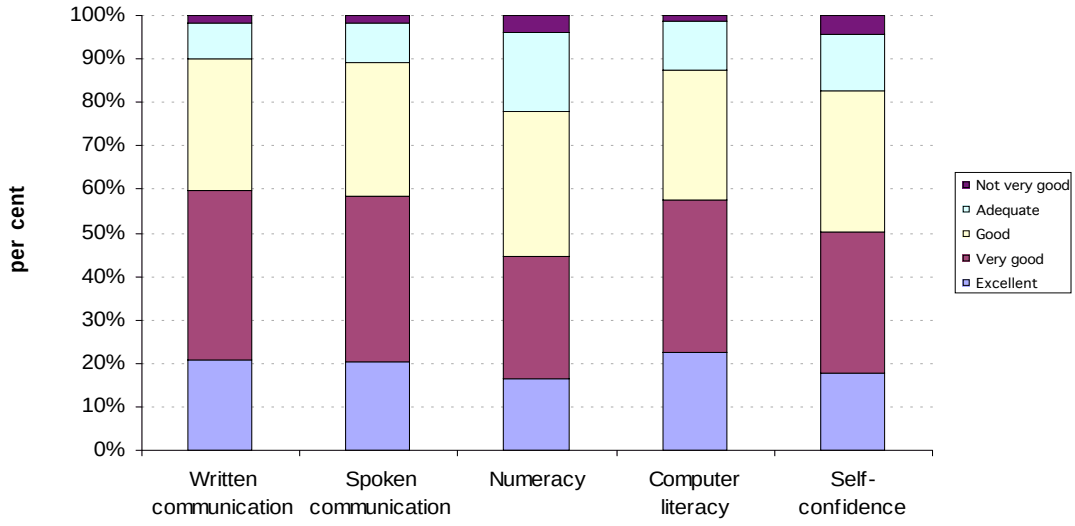
* High = UCAS tariff score of over 360; medium = UCAS tariff score of 240-359; low = UCAS tariff score of 1-239 and non-standard = no UCAS tariff (including overseas qualifications)

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted.

[6] Russell Group universities are an organisation of 20 'research-intensive' universities that was set up in 1994 (See http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/), 'other old universities' are the remaining previously centrally-funded universities, 'new universities' are the previously local authority-funded polytechnics which became universities in or soon after 1992, and 'other HEIs' are higher education colleges, some of which are subject-specialist and highly-selective, such as Art and Drama Schools, and others locally-based higher education colleges, some of which are making the transition to university colleges and local universities.

In addition to formal qualifications, we were keen to explore ways of monitoring less easy-to-measure attributes that are well-known to contribute to success and failure in formulating and achieving career aspirations education – self-confidence and the subjective perceptions of abilities that underlie decision-making and risk-taking. We asked respondents to rate themselves as excellent, very good, good, adequate or not very good on four 'core skill' areas, and in terms of their self-confidence. Figure 2.9 shows the results.

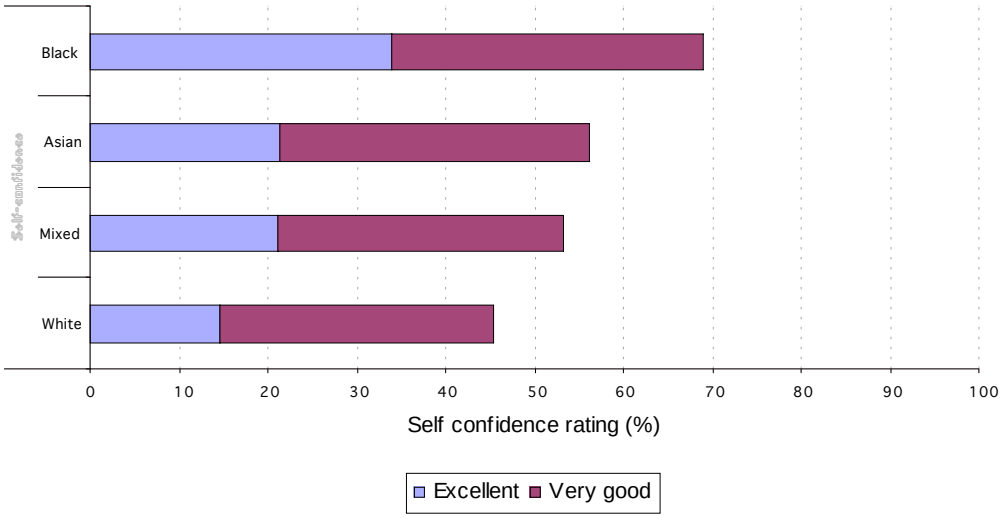
Figure 2.9: Self-rating on self-confidence and core skills



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted.

Within the four broad ethnic groupings (Black, Asian, Mixed and White) we notice that the non-white population of accepted applicants reports higher levels of self-confidence generally. Figure 2.10 illustrates this clearly, showing that two thirds of black students rate their self-confidence as excellent or very good, compared with less than half of white students.

Figure 2.10: Self-rated self-confidence among accepted applicants, by broad ethnic groups



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted.

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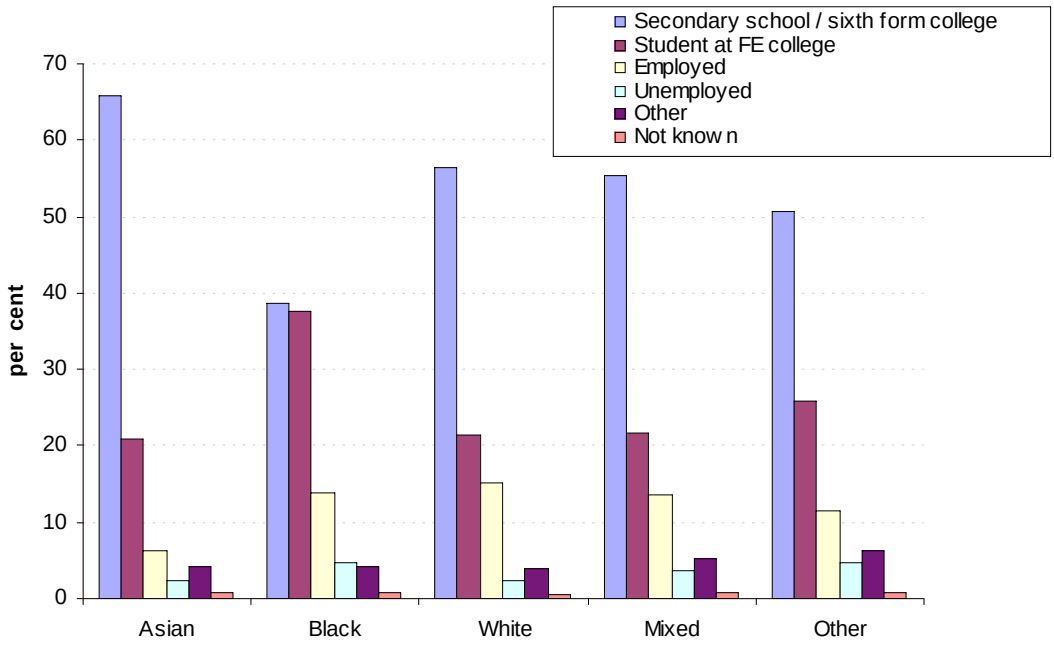
Asian students were more likely to rate themselves as excellent or very good in terms of numeracy (54 per cent compared to 45 per cent overall) and computer literacy (69 per cent compared to 58 per cent). In terms of written communication and spoken communication, Black students were most likely rate themselves highly (65 per cent in spoken and 66 per cent in written, compared to averages of 59 per cent and 60 per cent) – which is likely to contribute to their overall higher self-confidence, along with, perhaps, their slightly average age at application. We explore the relationship among these variables and HE choices in Chapter 3, for accepted applicants.

One of the strengths of the Futuretrack enquiry comes from the sheer scale of the survey. With almost 100 thousand accepted applicants responding to the first stage of this enquiry, we are in a position to investigate the characteristics of various groups which are often underrepresented in other surveys, or for which the sample numbers are not sufficient for accurate analysis. Of particular note here is the ethnic background of the sample. Figures 2.11 - 2.15 give some indication of the ethnic variation in the responses and the relationship between ethnicity and some characteristics of respondents.

Figure 2.11: Situation at time of HE application of accepted place UK applicants



Source: Futuretrack 2006: UK-domiciled accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

However, Figure 2.12 shows that there is an intriguingly systematic pattern in the likelihood of UK-domiciled applicants achieving accepted places in their preferred HEI, with white students most likely to be accepted via the normal scheme to study at their preferred university or college and black students least likely.

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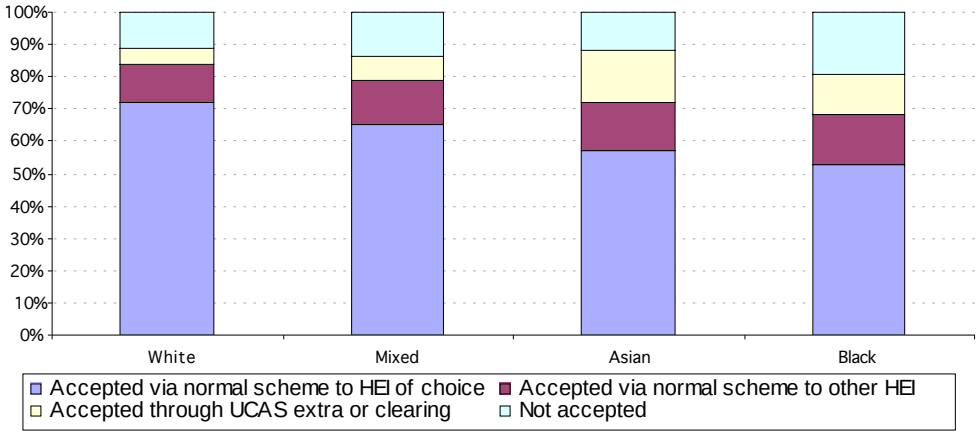
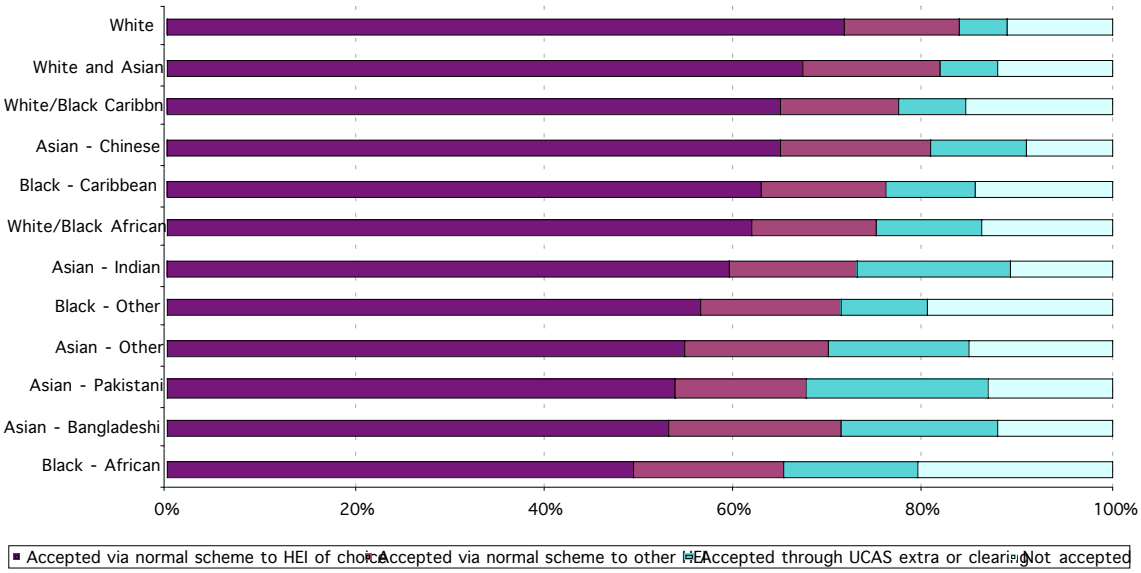
Figure 2.12: Success and failure in achieving preferred HE application outcomes, by broad ethnic group where known (UK domiciled applicants only)



Source: Futuretrack 2006: UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

The survey size permits a more detailed examination of these broad ethnic groupings, showing the extent of diversity within some of these groups, notably the Caribbean and African subgroups within the 'Black' category and the Chinese, Indian and Pakistani groups within the 'Asian' category.

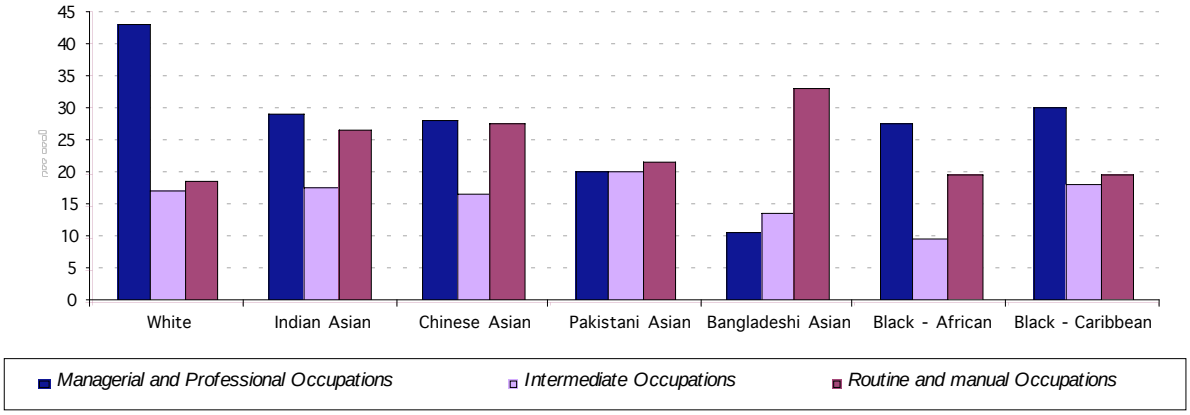
Figure 2.13: Success and failure in achieving preferred HE application outcomes, by detailed ethnic group where known*



Source: Futuretrack 2006: UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

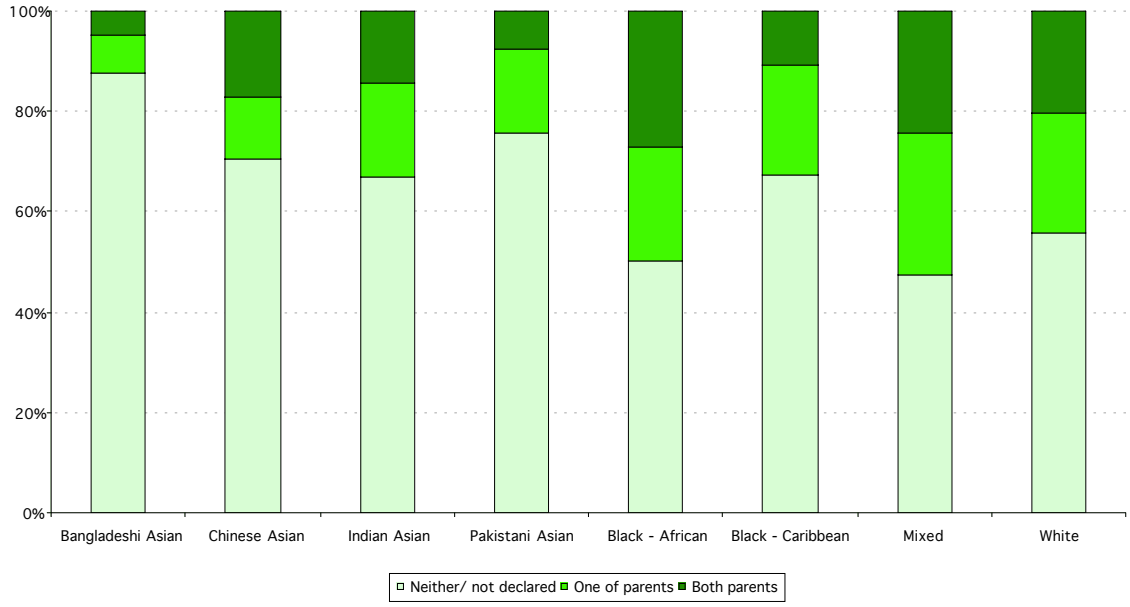
These detailed ethnic groupings also show major variation in social background for the different groups as Figure 2.14 shows. White students have the highest proportion from managerial and professional backgrounds, with Bangladeshi Asians having the highest proportion from routine and manual occupational backgrounds. Figure 2.12 shows that this correlates with the parental experience of higher education. Just over half of white students indicated that neither parent had a degree (or were not prepared to answer the question) compared with 90 per cent of Bangladeshi Asian students.

Figure 2.14: Social background of applicants by ethnic groups



Source: Futuretrack 2006: UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

Figure 2.15: Parental experience of higher education by ethnic groups



Source: Futuretrack 2006: UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

Multivariate analysis of acceptance to HE

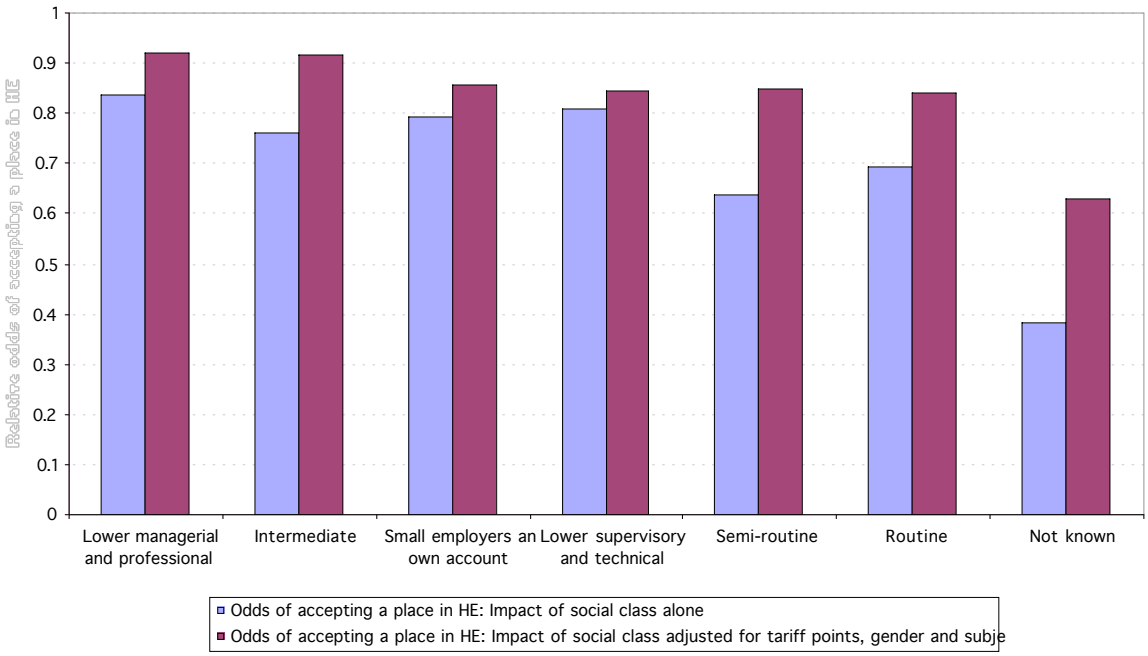
The preceding analysis has indicated the multiplicity of factors associated with the chances of being offered and having accepted a place in higher education (HE) in 2006. In this section we employ multivariate methods to determine the relative strengths of these factors and their independent influences on the chances of accepting a place in HE.

From what has been shown earlier in this chapter, it is clear that there is a very strong relationship between entry qualifications and the acceptance rate. This is as expected and illustrates the importance of obtaining good grades for successful application. Equally well established is the relationship between subject choice and the chances of gaining a place in HE. Medicine and dentistry courses are popular first choices for many potential students, so much so that the chances of being offered and accepting a place in HE when medicine and

dentistry courses are marked as the first choice course on the UCAS application form are significantly reduced.

Less clear from the preceding analyses are the roles of social background and the potential influence from the type of school attended prior to application. Social background effects may reflect many different influences on the educational process – not just the outcome of an application to enter HE, but probably also the decision to apply. Families from different social backgrounds may place varying values on higher education – from positive encouragement and active engagement with their children's choices, to disinterest or even discouragement where higher education has not been the norm. Social background may also act as a proxy for the financial resources available to a potential applicant, or to the assessment of the potential benefits to be gained from higher education. Given that the survey is based exclusively on applicants to HE, the potential impact of social background may not be apparent. We observe only those people who have chosen to apply. Social background effects may operate in such a way that it is the applicant rate that varies between different groups, rather than the success of an application. Despite this obvious limitation, we do observe an apparent relationship between social background and the probability of an application being successful. The effect appears to be fairly significant and is indicated in the left hand bars in Figure 2.16 below, which shows the odds of accepting place relative to the reference category 'Higher managerial and professional'.

Figure 2.16: Acceptance rates by socio-economic background



Note: The 'Not Known' category consists predominantly of persons who applied from outside the UK

As we have also shown, ethnicity appears to play a part in the process of being offered and accepting a place in higher education. The issue we address in this section is the extent to which these factors are interrelated. Is the social background effect related to the role of entry qualifications? Does ethnicity exert a separate influence on the probability of accepting a place in higher education, or is this also related to the varying social background and entry qualifications of different ethnic groups?

To explore these issues further we have estimated a logistic regression model, where the dependent variable is the binary outcome of the application (1 = accepted, 0 = not accepted). We examine the impact of a large number of categorical variables on this dependent variable, including: tariff points: subject area of first choice: gender: age: social background; school type attended at time of application: mother's education: father's education and a variable

indicating whether or not the respondent felt that he/she had had good access to information when making the decision to apply for a place in higher education.

The detailed results of this analysis are shown in Appendix Table A1. Here we comment upon the most significant results obtained from the analysis.

Entry qualifications

These remain as the single most important factor associated with acceptance. Compared to the reference group (200-259 tariff points), an applicant with low points (80-19) has odds of acceptance reduced by 70 per cent. A highly qualified applicant (540 plus tariff points) sees the odds of acceptance raised by 63 per cent relative to the reference category.

Subject of application

Up to six choices may be made on the UCAS application form. We have estimated a series of regression models, where we included different sets of choices. We concluded from this that it is the first choice which has the greatest impact upon the probability of accepting a place in HE. Unsurprisingly, we find that the subject choices which have the greatest **negative** impact on the odds of acceptance (relative to the reference category: social studies) are medicine and dentistry and subjects allied to medicine. First choice subjects with the highest **positive** impact on the chances of being accepted (controlling for application grades) are: physical sciences, biological sciences; mathematics and computer sciences; linguistics, classics and related subjects; combined sciences; and sciences combined with social science.

Gender

Perhaps the most striking result to emerge from this analysis is the impact of gender on the outcome of the application process. After controlling for entry qualifications and subject choices, women show odds of acceptance which are ten per cent lower than for men. While we were aware that women had a lower chance of being accepted into HE, this was thought to be a consequence of different entry qualification and subject choices (with more men gaining places in mathematics, engineering and some of the sciences where there is often a shortage of applicants). However, after controlling for entry qualifications and subject choices we show that women still exhibit a lower probability of acceptance. This warrants further detailed investigation.

Age

We find that, relative to the youngest age group of applicants (18 and under at the time of application), older applicants have a higher probability of being accepted. Those applicants with the highest age-related acceptance rate are in the 21-24 age range.

Ethnicity

As was shown in the earlier section, there is evidence of variations in acceptance rates by ethnic group. Relative to white applicants, these stating that they are from 'Asian' backgrounds (combining Chinese, Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani) have a higher probability of acceptance. Conversely, the 'Black' group (African, Caribbean and Other) shows a lower probability of acceptance relative to the 'White' reference category.

Social background

Social background influences on acceptance rates are modified when examined in a multivariate framework which includes entry qualifications. Referring back to Figure 2.12, we see that the apparent relationship between social background categories and the odds of being accepted to a place in HE are ameliorated when other factors are taken into account. The right-hand bars in this figure show the impact of social background on the odds of acceptance in the presence of all the other variables shown in Annex Table A8. Nonetheless,

a significant relationship still remains. Relative to the reference category 'Higher managerial and professional', the categories 'Lower managerial and professional and Intermediate' have odds of acceptance 10 per cent lower. For the remaining social background categories, the odds are about 15 per cent lower.

School effects

We examined for a possible link between acceptance rates and the type of educational establishment attended at the time of application. These range from: further/higher education; comprehensive school; sixth form college; sixth form centre; grammar school; independent school; other maintained school and 'other types'. We find that taking all other factors in the statistical model into account, those attending an independent school have a lower chance of being accepted, relative to those who attended a comprehensive school. Those at 'other maintained schools' have a higher acceptance rate relative to the comprehensive school reference category.

Access to relevant information

We investigated whether or not a range of factors, which may have played a part in the application process, had any separate impact upon the success of the application. One factor alone stood out here. If applicants stated their positive agreement with the statement that they had 'had access to all the information they needed', they were much more likely to have been offered and accepted a place.

Parental education

Using information provided by respondents about the higher education of their mother or father, we tested to see whether or not there appeared to be any link with parental education and the outcome of the application process. We find a small negative relationship between the outcome of the process and father's education – those applicants stating that their father had a degree were **less likely** to have had a successful outcome, but the effect is small and only marginally significant.

Region in which first choice HEI is located

Figure 2.4 revealed that applicants who chose Higher Education Institutions in the South West, Greater London, Scotland or Northern Ireland as their first choice HEIs were less likely to be successful with their application. The reasons for this are probably varied, but are likely to reflect the difference between the demand for places in Higher Education and the available supply of places in these areas. Greater London and the South West are attractive locations for study. Scotland and Northern Ireland HEIs have fewer available places per head of resident population than is the case for England and Wales.

These imbalances might go some way towards providing a better understanding of the differences in acceptance rates by region in which the HEI is located. They could also reflect significant regional variations in entry qualifications and subject choices. The multivariate analysis helps to unravel these various effects. It shows that strong regional effects still exists after controlling for the other factors listed above. For Northern Ireland the effect is enormous – applicants who make a Northern Ireland HEI their first choice have odds of acceptance 60 per cent lower than the reference category (West Midlands HEIs). This finding is well established in other studies and reflects the extreme shortage of places in NI HEIs for Northern Ireland applicants

In summary, this analysis points to a number of key factors which related to the success or otherwise of an application to study full-time in a UK Higher Education Institution in 2006. These are:

Subject choices – Medicine, dentistry and subjects allied to medicine have much lower rates of acceptance than other courses. Subjects with high rates of acceptance were: Physical Sciences, mathematics and computing, engineering, mass communications and documentation, combined sciences and languages.

Age – 21-24 year olds have the highest age-related chance of success

Entry qualifications – the better these are, the higher the chances of gaining a place

Ethnicity – Asian applicants fare better than whites, blacks fare worse.

Social background – applicants from 'middle class' backgrounds have a higher chance of success even after controlling for their higher entry qualifications

Access to information about the occupations the applicant wanted to follow; those who responded positively to this question were more likely to have a successful application

Region – applicants who apply to Higher Education Institutions in Greater London, the South West, Scotland or Northern Ireland as their first choices were less likely to have a successful application

For the sections that follow, we focus on accepted applicants who had completed the full survey. Some of these may have accepted deferred places prior to taking a gap year, but the majority are currently first year students.

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CHAPTER 3

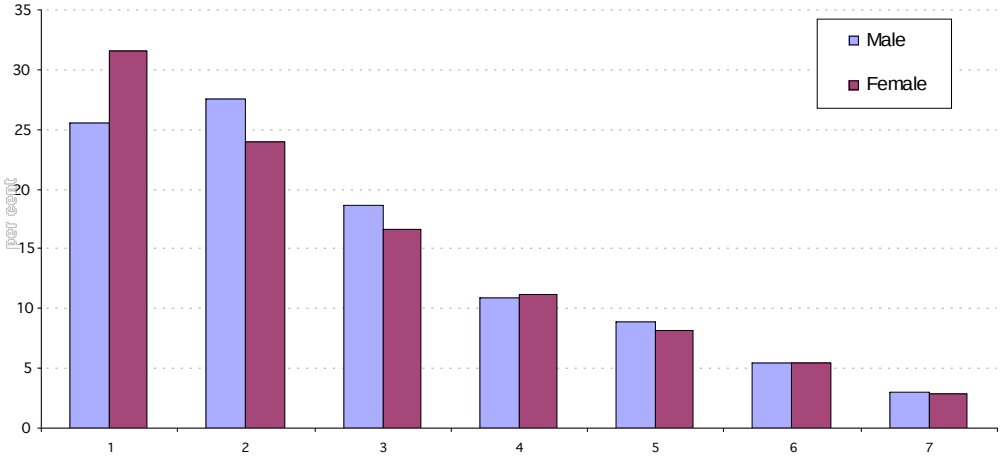
Mapping undergraduate education: subject choices and occupational plans

Making sense of the diversity of courses

Studies of higher education decision-making (Connor *et al.* 1999) and higher education outcomes (Purcell *et al.* 2005) have drawn attention to the diversity of the higher education undergraduate population and the importance of social and demographic characteristics for options considered, choices made and career trajectories followed. There has been little investigation until recently (Bekhradnia *et al*. 2007) of the range and complexity of what undergraduate study involves in terms of relating substantive information about the quality and content of programmes of study, the skills and knowledge that are inculcated in the course of the higher education experience and the opportunities to which HE qualifications provide access. Much that is written about the graduate labour market, both in the popular press and in academic and policy discourse, implicitly posits a theoretically meritocratic contest where, on the supply side, graduates compete for the best jobs (and may end up classified as 'under-employed') and on the demand side, employers compete for 'talent' and complain about both over-supply and shortages of particular skills. The reality, however, is a complex and interrelated series of parallel specialist and generalist, local/national/global labour markets, where graduates with different educational histories and achievements have access to some opportunities but not to others. Graduate employers range from seekers of highly-specialist graduate skills to those who seek flexible, adaptable problem-solvers who can communicate effectively. Those who seek the latter are less concerned about the subject area in which qualifications have been achieved (Harvey *et al.* 1997), but are increasingly concerned about 'employability skills' and about the extent to which potential graduate recruits with skills and knowledge obtained in higher education could add value to their organisations. In the same way, aspiring students ranged from those who had clear ambitions and well-reasoned career plans to those who were drifting into higher education without having given much thought to where it might lead and or what they would do subsequently.

Figure 3.1 provides the overall picture, by gender, of respondents' assessment of where they would put themselves, on a scale of 1-7 where 1 means 'I have a clear idea about the occupation I eventually want to enter and the qualifications required to do so' and 7 means 'I have no idea what I will do after I complete the course I have applied for'.

Figure 3.1: Clarity of ideas about career prior to course*

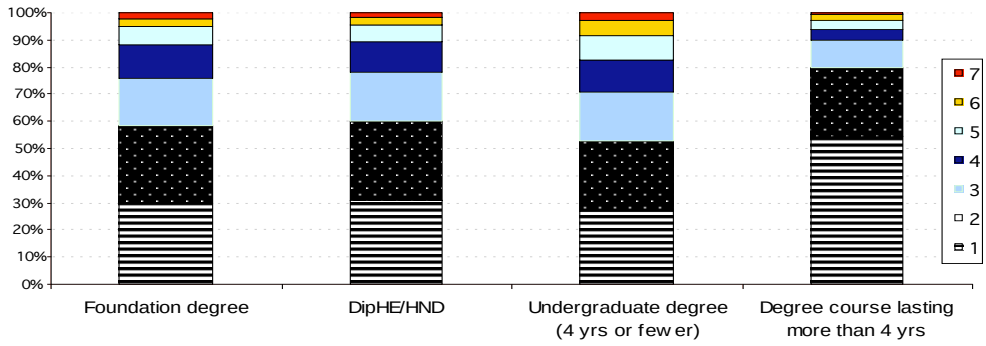


* Where 1 means 'I have a clear idea about occupation and qualifications required' and 7 means 'I have no idea'

Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

This distribution of responses illustrates a bias towards the 'instrumental' rather than the 'drifter' end of the scale (Purcell and Pitcher 1996) and may well reflect the increased awareness of higher education and the labour force as markets within which participants compete – and where education is seen as an investment by students and their families who have increasingly been required to contribute to its cost. It is perhaps not surprising that there is an association between the type of course applied for and the degree to which applicants had clear vocational perspectives. Figure 3.2 shows that just under 80 per cent of those embarking on courses lasting more than four years scored themselves as 1 or 2, those doing Foundation degrees or HNDs next most likely to do so, with just under 60 per cent respectively. Just over half of those doing 3 or 4 year undergraduate degrees were similarly focused and they were more likely than others to be at the 'no idea' end of the spectrum. Figure 3.3 shows a clear relationship between age and likelihood of embarking on HE with a clear sense of where it is designed to lead to. Perhaps unsurprisingly, well over half of those who were aged 25 and over at the time of application had a very clear vocational perspective.

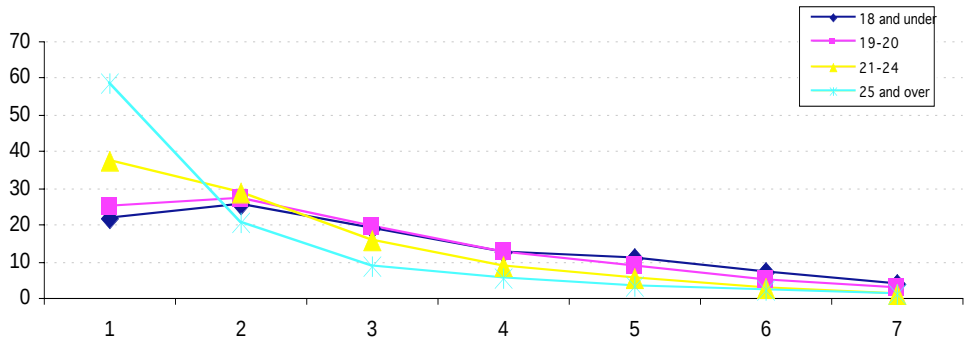
Figure 3.2: Clarity of ideas about career prior to course* by type of course



* Where 1 means 'I have a clear idea about occupation and qualifications required' and 7 means 'I have no idea'

Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

Figure 3.3: Clarity of ideas about career prior to course* by age-group



* Where 1 means 'I have a clear idea about occupation and qualifications required' and 7 means 'I have no idea'

Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

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These three figures show clearly how choice of course, age and gender relate to the clarity of vocational plans. Other factors are probably relevant here, but we need to disentangle the separate influences that these factors have on this 'clarity of ideas' scale. For this purpose we use a multivariate approach, where the dependent variable is the position on the seven point self-assessed score that the survey respondent gave us, and we test for the separate influences of age, gender, subject choice, ethnicity, entry qualifications, social background and type of school attended prior to application for a place in Higher Education. The technique we use is termed 'ordered logistic regression' and full results from this analysis are shown in Appendix Table A2. Here we summarise the key findings from this analysis in Table 3.1 below. This analysis confirms the relationships shown in Figures 3.1 to 3.3 as separate and significant influences. Older applicants, women and those choosing clearly vocational subjects score towards the 'clarity' end of the scale. What also emerges from this analysis are the separate effects of ethnicity (Black applicants have a clearer idea about their subject choices and subsequent career plans than White applicants), and social background. The latter effect is intriguing – after controlling for entry qualifications, those from higher managerial and professional backgrounds indicated that they were less clear about their subject choices and vocational plans than those from other social backgrounds

Table 3.1: Factors associated with clarity of ideas about 'the occupation I eventually want to enter and the qualifications required to do so'

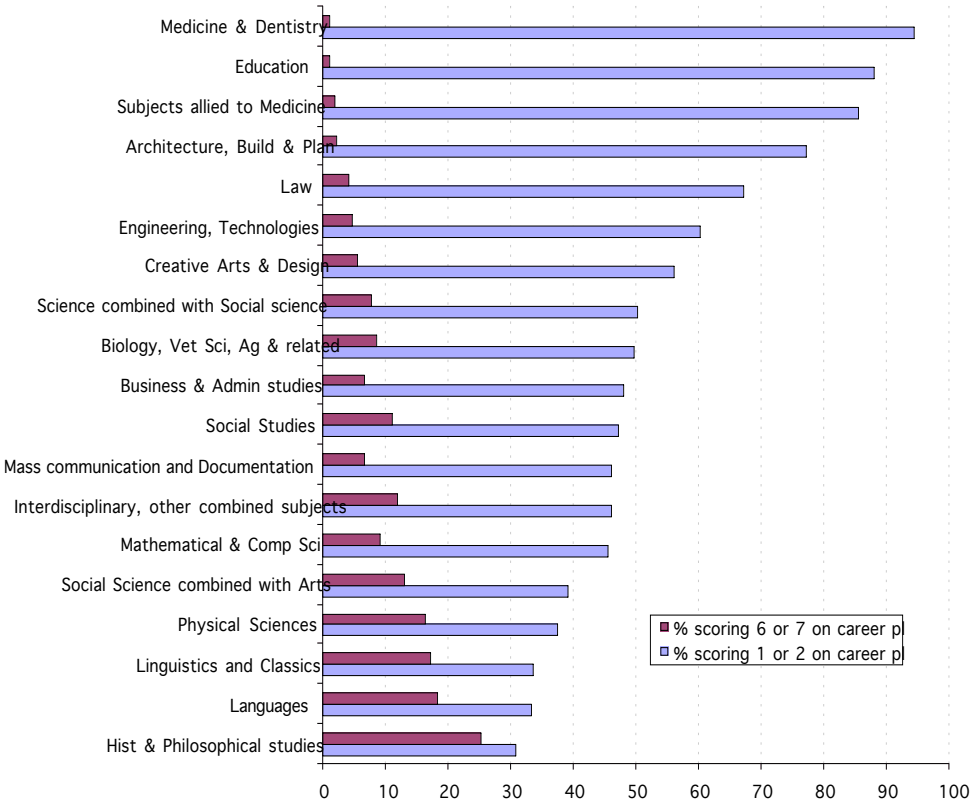
Factors associated with less clarity	Factors associated with greater clarity
Male	Female
Young (under 19) at time of application	Older applicant (21+ at time of application)
White, Asian ethnic groups	Black ethnic groups
Lower entry qualifications	Higher entry qualifications
First choice subjects are: Languages, history and philosophical studies	First choice subjects are: Medicine, dentistry, education
Higher managerial and professional social background	Other social background
Independent school at time of application	

See Annex Table A2

There has been considerable debate over the years about the relative values of vocational and more general academic courses. In the Leitch Report (HM Treasury 2006) it was argued that the needs of the economy would be better met by increased participation in vocational higher education programmes, with greater involvement of employers in higher-education planning from a national level to individual course-content level. The existing UK system is predominantly based on student demand, which has resulted in both vocational and more general higher education expansion. 'Vocational' is a broad category, but if we examine the extent to which 2006 UCAS applicants chose their course believing that they would lead directly to particular occupations, it is possible to classify courses into different broad categories – and this is something that we will be seeking to do as we collect successive waves of information from the student population. In Figure 3.4, below, we do this according to the standard 19 broad categories used by UCAS and HESA to allocate courses to broad discipline/subject groups, but given the scale of this investigation, we are also able to consider responses at a considerably disaggregated level, since we can identify 183 categories of course. Among sub-groups for which we have a sufficient number of survey responses, these range from 'Pre-clinical Veterinary Medicine', where 87 per cent of respondents scored themselves at the 'career-planner' end of the 7-point scale, to 'Classical Studies', where only 5 per cent did so.

Figure 3.4 provides a preliminary picture, by broad subject group, of where students did and did not have clear career plans.

Figure 3.4: Broad subject by extent to which applicants had clear occupationally-focused career plans



* Where 1 = 'I have a clear idea of the occupation I eventually want to enter and the qualifications required to do so' and 7 = 'I have no idea what I will do after I complete the course I have applied for'

Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

These are subjective evaluations, but whether or not courses are vocational is to some extent relative to the aspirations of students undertaking them – and there is further discussion of differences among courses and students' reasons for choosing to study different disciplines and areas of study in Chapter 6. The fact that there are minorities of respondents at both ends of the spectrum (for example, applicants planning to study history because they have a firm ambition to be a history teacher or lecturer, and students of Pre-clinical medicine who, in having no firm views about the area of medical practice that they will opt for, see their options as extremely wide-ranging) illustrates this well. However, on the basis of this distribution and further investigation of relevant variables, it is possible to group courses into three or four broad categories:

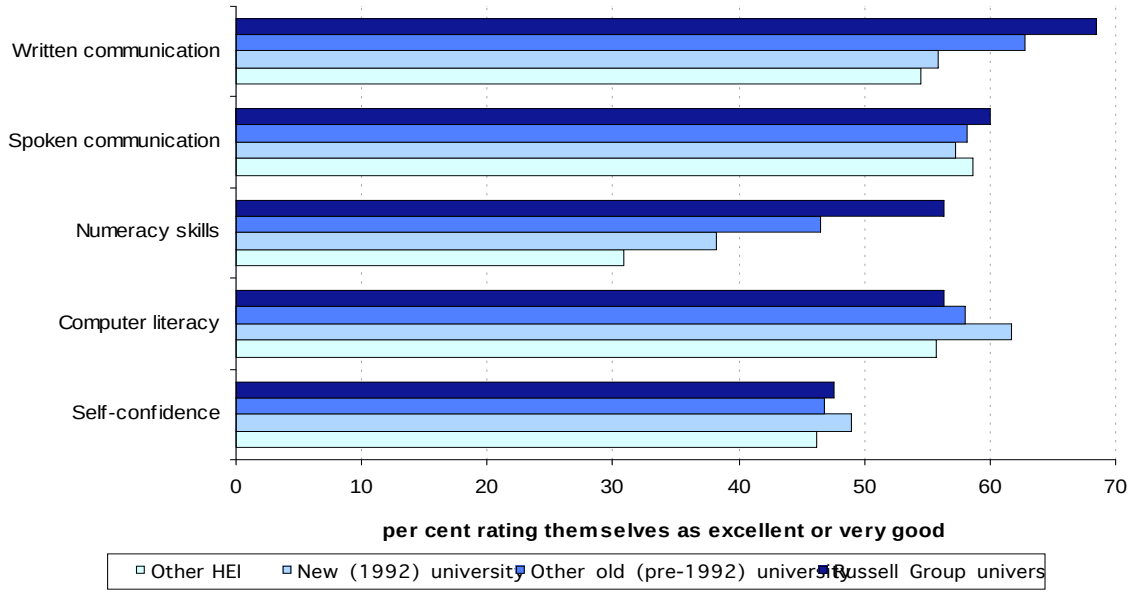
- those that are clearly most often specialist vocational ones – Medicine, Education, Subjects allied to medicine, and Architecture and related, Law, and Engineering and Technologies – where the skills and knowledge acquired on courses is geared to development of a particular professional occupational corpuses of knowledge and where over 60 per cent of accepted applicants had a clear idea of occupational orientation;
- those where are occupationally-orientated routes within more general areas of study which varies within the broad group according to particular courses, and where well

over 40 per cent of respondents claimed to have clear career trajectories in mind; creative Arts and Design through to Mathematical and Computing Sciences (and this category is likely to divide into two as course progress, ideas about options change, and the realities of employment opportunities are encountered);

- the remainder, which again, may or may not contain two distinct sub-groups – where the focus of study, in terms of knowledge, is more likely to be intrinsically rather than extrinsically-focused, and the skills general transferable skills rather than specialist occupational ones.

We use this 'vocationality' variable to explore patterns of decision-making in Chapter 5, but in this chapter we are concerned to understand the different distribution of students among subjects, and how far these reveal inequalities of access to courses or to information about the range of options available and career implications of the trajectories upon which they propose to embark. We do this below, drawing on another useful indicator of the extent to which subjects and disciplines require students to have numeracy-based skills prior to entry. We saw in Figure 2.9 in Chapter 2 that this was the skill category where applicants were least likely to feel confident of their abilities – with only 45 per cent rating their numeracy skills as excellent or very good, compared to 60 per cent thus rating their written communication skills. As discussed earlier, 'numeracy skills' appears to be a more sensitive indicator of the range of diversity than the others investigated. Figure 3.5 supports this, showing the self-evaluations by the type of university at which students had been accepted

Figure 3.5: Self-rated 'excellent' or 'very good' core skill areas, by type of HEI where accepted

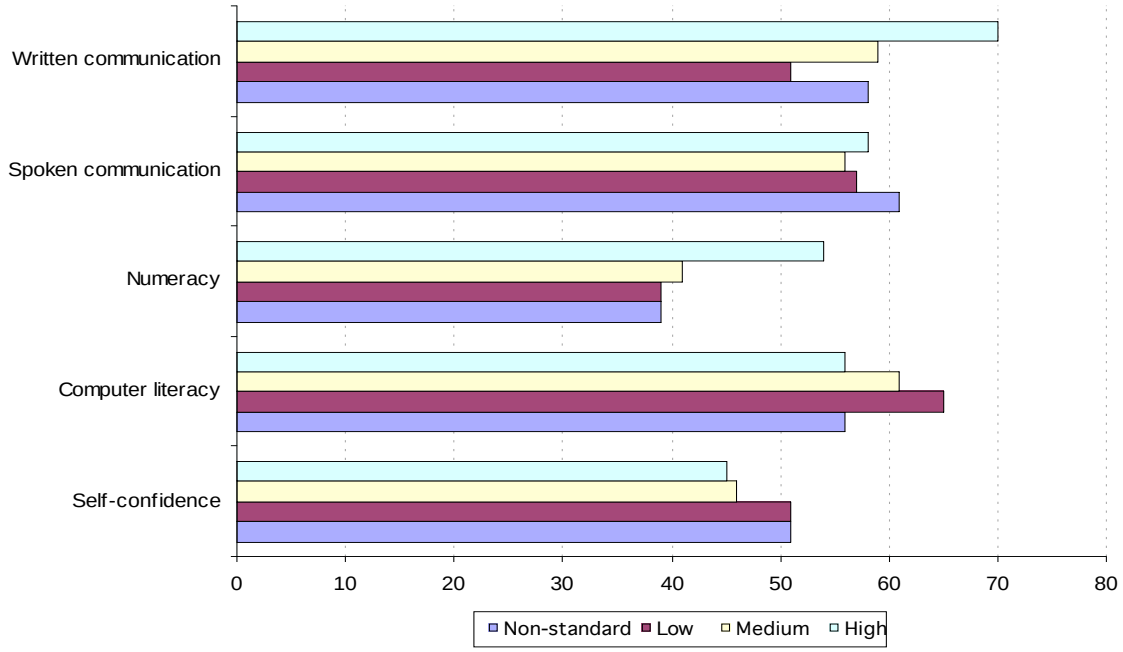


Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

Access to these different groups of institutions reflects prior educational achievement. Figure 3.6 shows how self-evaluation of both written communication and numeracy skills are related to recorded educational achievement. For written communication and numeracy skills there is a clear link between entry qualifications and these self-ratings. Non-standard prior educational entry qualifications include completion of access courses, vocational qualifications and experience prior to application and academic qualifications acquired in non-UK. Students with non-standard qualifications are more likely to have applied as mature applicants. The average age of accepted respondents with non-standard qualifications was just under 26 years old, those with low tariff scores was 19 and those with medium and high scores was 18. It is not surprising, thus, that those with non-standard qualifications might be relatively confident about

skills that might be assumed to increase with maturity and experience, like spoken communication and self-confidence.

Figure 3.6: Self-rated 'excellent' or 'very good' core skills, related to prior academic achievement



High = UCAS Tariff score over 360 (27 per cent of UK-domiciled accepted applicants); Medium = UCAS Tariff score of between 240-359 (20 per cent of UK-domiciled accepted applicants); Low = UCAS Tariff score of 1- 239 (20 per cent of UK-domiciled accepted applicants); Non-standard (Tariff score of zero, with entry on the basis of other qualifications, that could included vocational and other non-standard academic qualifications that were not converted to the UCAS tariff currency).

Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

However, the norms and values that influence self-assessment, as well as the standards of comparison explicitly or implicit drawn upon to make the assessment, reflect individual experiences, networks and cultural values.

- Female applicants we more likely than men to rate themselves as excellent or very good in written communication (63 per cent compared to 57 per cent) and spoken communication (58 per cent compared to 48 per cent);
- Male applicants were more likely to rate themselves as excellent or very good in numeracy (52 per cent compared to 37 per cent), computer literacy (69 per cent compared to 51 per cent) and overall self-confidence (54 per cent compared to 43 per cent).

This gender comparison of accepted applicants is particularly interesting the light of the finding in Chapter 2 that men had a higher probability of gaining an accepted place, and in the light of the fact that female accepted applicants had higher UCAS tariff scores at entry, on average, than males. These data provide the opportunity to explore this further.

Skills, self-confidence and different attributes and cultural contexts

As far as age differences in these core skills and self confidence ratings were concerned among accepted applicants, there was no age-related difference found with reference to written communication, a very slightly greater propensity for applicant high self-rating to increase with

age, strong age differences in numeracy and computer literacy between the oldest and younger groups, and no difference in self-confidence scoring.

However, it appears that self-rating on these dimensions reflects elements of cultural diversity, in skills or in the ways that individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others. This is apparent in the different self-rating patterns exhibited among minority ethnic groups.

- On written communication, Black Africans were most likely to rate themselves highly (68 per cent), compared with White applicants (60 per cent), Asian Bangladeshis (63 per cent) and at the other extreme, only 40 per cent of the Asian Chinese.
- On spoken communication, the patterns of response were similar, with Black applicants from both African and Caribbean backgrounds most likely to rate themselves highly (64 per cent) and Asians slightly less likely to do so, and within the Asian communities, Bangladeshi Asians were most likely at 63 per cent. White respondents did so in 58 per cent of cases, compared to only 38 per cent Asian Chinese respondents.
- On numeracy, the reverse patterns are apparent, with Chinese Asians most likely to rate themselves excellent or very good (59 per cent), followed by Black Africans (57 per cent) Asian Indians (56 per cent) – with White and Black Caribbean applicants least likely to be confident of their skills in this area (42 per cent and 38 per cent respectively rating themselves highly).
- Minority ethnic applicants are all more likely to rate their computer literacy highly than White applicants, ranging from Asian Pakistanis (72 per cent), Asian Bangladeshis (67 per cent), the other minorities around 60-62 per cent, with Black Caribbeans (59 per cent) and White applicants (58 per cent) last likely to score highly.
- Finally, the 'excellent and very good' proportions for overall self-confidence ranged from Black Africans (72 per cent), Bangladeshi Asians (61 per cent), White (62 per cent), to Asian Chinese, with only 39 per cent doing so.

Overall self-confidence is correlated most closely with written and spoken communication skills, which intuitively makes sense: poor communication skills are likely to be inhibiting and foster low self-esteem. However, it is important to remember the subjectivity of the evaluation. How do gender and other cultural differences reinforce or challenge one another? Although the data are weighted to take account of gender bias and there did not appear to be significant bias in terms of minority ethnic responses, the ethic groups have different proportions of males and female respondents.

We find that, with reference to Spoken Communication, Asian Bangladeshi and Black African women rated themselves more highly than their male peers, but otherwise there was little gender difference within ethnic groups. Chinese Asian women rated themselves lower than their male equivalents on every dimension, and Asian Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean women were as likely as their male peers to rate their written communication skills highly, but on Computer Literacy and Numeracy, women in all communities were less likely to rate themselves highly than men. In Table 3.2 we explore responses to the self-confidence self-rating item further to examine the interaction of gender and cultural background. In all cases, males were more likely to rate themselves highly than females.

Table 3.2: Self-rated excellent or very good self-confidence, by ethnic origin and gender

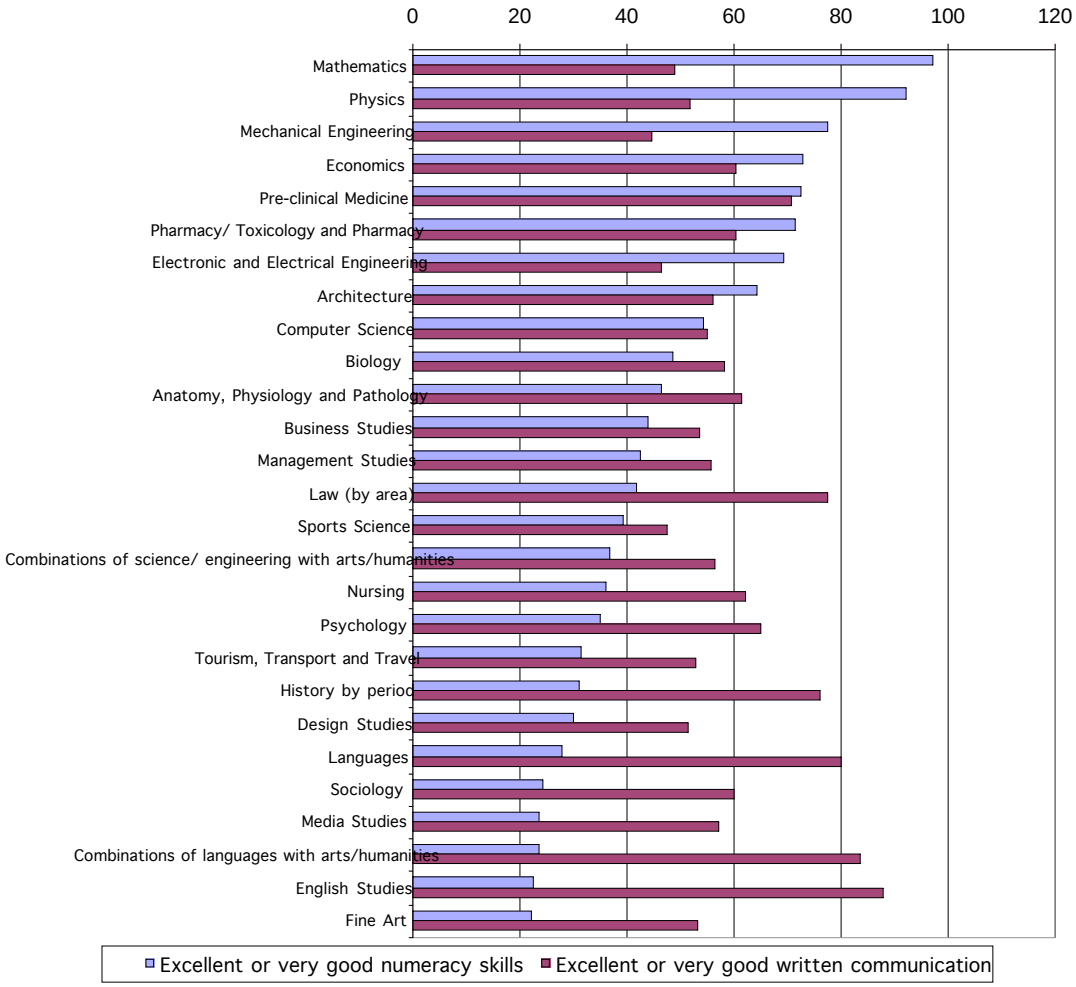
Ethnic origin	High self confidence rating (%)	
	Males	**Females**
Asian		
Bangladeshi	64	58
Chinese	44	34
Indian	62	51
Pakistani	63	54
Other	67	53
Black		
African	76	66
Caribbean	72	57
Other	70	57
White	51	40
Mixed	56	48
Total	54	43

Source: Futuretrack 2006: All UK accepted applicants, selected groups weighted.

In all the groups, we find a 'gender confidence gap', ranging from 5 per cent for Bangladeshi Asians to 15 per cent for Black Caribbeans. Chinese Asians of both sexes stand out as least likely to express confidence about their self-confidence, Black applicants generally have exhibited self-confidence on their self-rating on this dimension, and those from a mixed race background do exhibit patterns between the relative lower likelihood of confidence among White respondents and the higher rates of the majority of minority ethnic groups. How far the relative confidence patterns are borne out, or changed, in the course of HE experiences and outcomes, will be monitored as the longitudinal study proceeds. How far will the gender confidence gap contribute to inequalities of graduate outcomes, most graphically illustrated by the persistent gender pay gap found among recent graduate cohorts even at the earliest stages of career development?

If we assume that self-rated numeracy skills are indeed more robustly correlated with propensity to achievement then consideration of the subjects where high numeracy skills are required, and applicants rate themselves as possessing these, is revealingly – and is skewed towards subjects more likely to be studied by men. Figure 3.7 shows the proportions of accepted respondents who rated themselves as excellent or very good in terms of numeracy and written communication.

Figure 3.7: Self-rated 'excellent' or 'very good' numeracy skills by selected subject groups



Source: Futuretrack 2006: selected subject groups of accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

The figure reinforces the finding of a clearer pattern for the numeracy than written communication skills. We have examined these groups further and grouped them into three broad categories, according to the extent to which those who had been accepted to study them rated their numeracy skills: those attracting students with a high, medium or low average self-rated numeracy quotient. Examination of the characteristics of students in these groups reveals very different student populations. Tables 3.2 to 3.4 illustrate the extent to which successful HE applicants' HE destinations reflect their social, educational and cultural backgrounds and, it would seem, the different mappings of opportunities and possibilities that they have encountered.

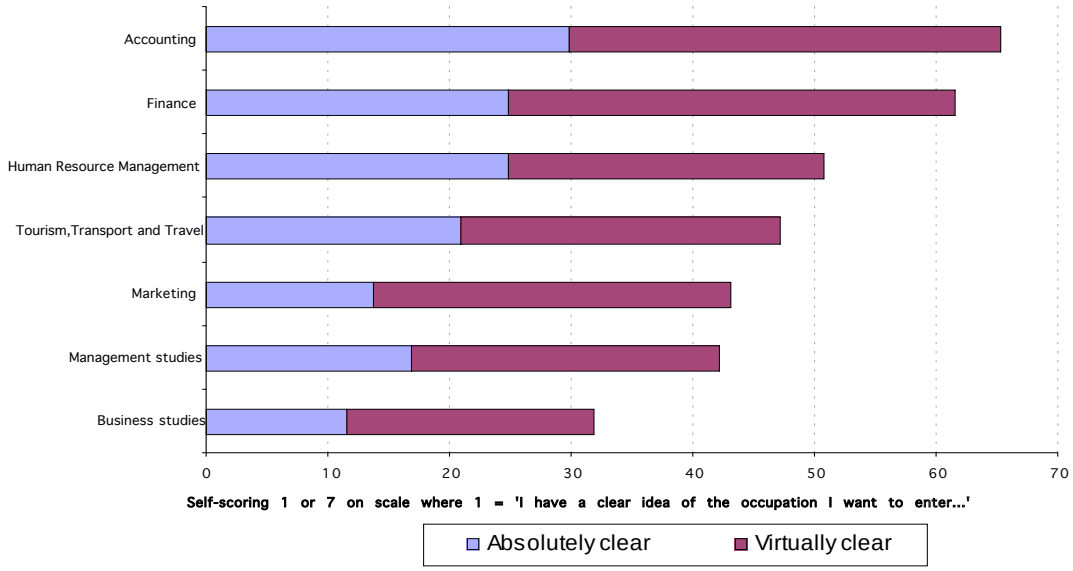
Tables 3.3 to 3.5 show how the characteristics vary according to this key dimension of subject requirements – numeracy. We categorise subjects according to the respondents self-rating numeracy as 'high' (Table 3.3), 'medium' (Table 3.4), or 'low' (Table 3.5), showing the characteristics of students within selected subject groups in each category.

- The interesting thing about most of the 'high numeracy' subjects depicted in Table 3.2 is that, apart from in Pre-clinical Medicine and Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy,

women are under-represented (sometimes radically) in comparison to their numbers in the student population as a whole, and Asian students tend to be over-represented. Apart from Computer science and Electronic and Electrical Engineering subjects, entrance qualifications are well above average, and most have attracted standard rather than non-standard applicants; school-leavers from relatively-advantaged social backgrounds. Pharmacology group students and Economics students are disproportionately likely to have achieved their places via the Clearing or 'UCAS extra' route, suggesting that it may have been a second choice option. In further analyses, we will explore the implications of these choices for progression and outcomes. Most places for these subjects are offered by pre-1992 universities. It is particularly noteworthy that most of these subjects have disproportionately recruited EU and other overseas students; in particular, Mechanical Engineering and Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy from other overseas countries, and Economics and Architecture students from both EU and other countries.

- The selected 'medium numeracy' subjects cover a more diverse range, but also tend to be associated with vocational routes or broad occupational orientation. Students from the highest socio-economic categories do not predominate in any of them, women predominate substantially in some (particularly Nursing and Psychology), and in the areas of Business Studies, Management Studies and Law, Asian and Black students are disproportionately represented. Apart from Biology students, those studying in these subjects are more likely to be at a 1992 university of other HE college than an older-established university. Business and Management Studies have disproportionately attracted overseas students from non-EU countries, but EU students are more likely to have opted for Management Studies, more likely to be offered by pre-1992 universities. Nursing stands out as having a very different population profile to the majority of subjects – 90 per cent female, disproportionately White, three-quarters from 'non-traditional' backgrounds, well over half entering with non-standard entry qualifications, over two-thirds not progressing from secondary education, reflecting the fact that 42 per cent were over 25 when applying for their places.
- The selected 'low numeracy' subjects (most of which are 'high written communication' subjects as revealed by Figure 3.6) are essentially non-vocational, with the possible exception of Tourism, Transport and Travel. The exploration of the clarity of career plans among the main Business and Management sub-groups shown in Figure 3.8 reveals that within this broadly 'can be vocational' group as a whole, there is interesting, although not very surprising, variation, with those opting for specialist areas with a more clear vocational direction more likely to score themselves at the 'clear idea' end of the scale than those opting for general Business Studies or Management Studies degrees. It will be interesting to see how far these initial aspirations and plans are borne out when students complete their courses. Students in such non-vocational subjects at the Arts and Humanities end of the spectrum are those who, in previous cohort studies (Purcell *et al.* 2005, Elias *et al.* 1999) have been found to take longer to access employment that enables them to use their graduate skills and knowledge.

Figure 3.8: Clarity of ideas about eventual occupation, main Business and Management sub-groups



Source: Futuretrack 2006: selected subject groups of accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

Table 3.3: Characteristics of student population in subjects where accepted students' self-rated numeracy was high

Subject of study	Demographic characteristics					Mode of access					Total number of accepted UK respondents in survey *(unweighted)*	% Overseas applicants		Total number of accepted respondents in survey *(unweighted)*
	% Female	% Asian	% Black	% 25+	% 'traditional' socio-econ[7]	% through UCAS extra or Clearing	% at pre-1992 university	% non-standard entry	% with high entry qualific.[8]	% of 'standard' applicants[9]		EU[10]	Other overseas[4]	
ALL 2006 accepted UK applicants	**55.4**	**9.6**	**5.0**	**11.8**	**41.3**	**7.5**	**46.7**	**27.8**	**26.9**	**56.3**	**88,237**	**6.6**	**7.0**	**99,887**
Selected 'high numeracy' subjects														
Mathematics	43.5	14.8	2.1	2.9	48.9	7.6	87.9	6.3	64.3	83.2	**1,520**	4.9	9.4	**1,724**
Physics	19.4	5.3	1.5	2.9	57.8	6.5	98.3	8.8	62.8	82.4	**893**	8.6	5.4	**1,000**
Mechanical Engineering	6.7	10.4	4.6	5.5	44.9	5.5	62.5	24.8	34.9	67.8	**802**	8.5	20.8	**1,084**
Economics	29.0	22.8	6.5	1.5	51.9	10.2	82.6	11.2	48.6	77.6	**923**	14.7	21.2	**1,356**
Pre-clinical Medicine	57.5	18.5	2.7	16.3	58.2	2.7	100.0	30.5	61.6	55.3	**2,804**	4.7	8.4	**3,160**
Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy	57.3	42.7	13.2	13.3	35.6	13.3	51.3	23.9	32.2	62.7	**832**	7.2	14.3	**1,035**
Electronic and Electrical Engineering	11.3	13.4	10.9	11.6	35.3	8.8	57.0	34.3	22.9	50.6	**708**	6.9	29.0	**1,063**
Architecture	38.5	10.4	5.8	7.3	50.9	5.7	38.5	22.4	41.5	66.3	**780**	13.6	10.9	**986**
Computer Science	12.1	15.0	6.1	9.3	34.1	7.5	36.8	31.1	14.2	51.6	**2,341**	5.8	5.8	**2,618**

Source: Futuretrack 2006: selected subject groups of accepted UK-domiciled applicants (overseas columns: all accepted applicants), full survey, weighted (except totals).

7 Professional/managerial background
8 UCAS Tariff score of 360+
9 Applying from secondary school or sixth form college.
10 Of all accepted applicants

Table 3.4: Characteristics of student population in subjects where accepted students' self-rated numeracy was medium

Subject of study	Demographic characteristics					Mode of access					Total number of accepted UK respondents in survey *(unweighted)*	% Overseas applicants		Total number of accepted respondents in survey *(unweighted)*
	% Female	% Asian	% Black	% 25+	% 'traditional' socio-econ[11]	% through UCAS extra or Clearing	% at pre-1992 university	% non-standard entry	% with high entry qualific.[12]	% of 'standard' applicants[13]		EU[14]	Other overseas[4]	
ALL 2006 accepted UK applicants	**55.4**	**9.6**	**5.0**	**11.8**	**41.3**	**7.5**	**46.7**	**27.8**	**26.9**	**56.3**	**88,237**	**6.6**	**7.0**	**99,887**
Selected 'medium numeracy' subjects														
Biology	59.6	6.0	1.9	7.4	49.4	9.6	76.2	17.5	37.4	69.6	**1,215**	6.3	4.8	**1,335**
Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology	69.6	6.4	2.7	22.9	44.1	9.1	49.2	31.8	36.9	52.1	**1,072**	7.7	3.4	**1,180**
Business Studies	47.6	14.6	8.5	6.0	37.1	9.5	20.2	20.1	15.6	62.8	**1,791**	11.4	9.2	**2,182**
Management Studies	45.4	12.9	7.7	6.2	42.5	7.6	35.6	25.6	21.4	58.7	**2,044**	13.8	12.9	**2,678**
Law (by area)	61.4	18.9	8.2	8.2	41.2	9.5	55.2	16.7	42.4	67.5	**3,382**	6.1	14.1	**4,063**
Sports Science	37.7	2.4	2.2	5.0	40.1	7.9	21.4	34.1	8.9	54.7	**1,526**	2.0	0.9	**1,566**
Combinations of science/ engineering with arts/humanities	54.4	4.4	3.6	7.7	40.9	6.1	24.6	32.7	18.2	52.4	**1,272**	4.4	1.6	**1,341**
Nursing	90.5	2.9	6.1	42.2	25.7	7.9	34.6	58.9	7.7	29.6	**1,762**	1.6	0.3	**1,791**
Psychology	80.1	7.8	5.3	11.2	40.0	9.0	51.1	20.7	32.3	62.9	**3,673**	6.2	3.5	**3,992**

Source: Futuretrack 2006: selected subject groups of accepted UK-domiciled applicants (overseas columns: all accepted applicants), full survey, weighted (except totals).

[11] Professional/managerial background
[12] UCAS Tariff score of 360+
[13] Applying from secondary school or sixth form college.
[14] Of all accepted applicants

Table 3.5: Characteristics of student population in subjects where accepted students' self-rated numeracy was low

Subject of study	Demographic characteristics					Mode of access					Total number of accepted UK respondents in survey *(unweighted)*	% Overseas applicants		Total number of accepted respondents in survey *(unweighted)*
	% Female	% Asian	% Black	% 25+	% 'traditional' socio-econ[15]	% through UCAS extra or Clearing	% at pre-1992 university	% non-standard entry	% with high entry qualific.[16]	% of 'standard' applicants[17]		EU[18]	Other overseas[4]	
ALL 2006 accepted UK applicants	**55.4**	**9.6**	**5.0**	**11.8**	**41.3**	**7.5**	**46.7**	**27.8**	**26.9**	**56.3**	**88,237**	**6.6**	**7.0**	**99,887**
Selected 'low numeracy' subjects														
Tourism, Transport and Travel	78.7	6.1	7.8	9.6	30.5	6.6	3.0	35.2	5.4	45.7	**622**	10.9	5.0	**726**
History by period	45.5	2.6	0.6	7.2	52.4	4.6	76.3	14.2	49.3	74.4	**1,878**	2.9	2.7	**1,964**
Design Studies	62.1	6.1	3.2	9.4	36.6	3.8	14.5	41.0	9.9	23.5	**3,146**	6.0	4.0	**3,459**
Languages	71.3	3.0	2.0	6.8	52.2	6.4	73.3	15.9	46.1	72.9	**4,185**	7.8	3.2	**4,582**
Sociology	74.7	8.2	6.2	13.6	37.1	12.6	47.6	23.6	19.3	55.3	**938**	3.9	2.7	**996**
Media Studies	48.8	5.3	4.4	4.8	37.5	6.9	16.9	26.4	11.9	54.7	**1,071**	6.7	3.2	**1,176**
Combinations of languages with arts/humanities	73.3	3.3	1.9	9.3	47.0	6.3	54.1	19.2	38.1	67.0	**1,841**	5.3	3.6	**1,982**
English Studies	72.9	4.8	1.4	8.6	48.4	6.8	64.2	16.3	45.5	67.9	**2,434**	4.2	2.3	**2,568**
Fine Art	70.2	2.7	1.1	23.9	36.8	3.9	23.0	47.1	10.9	14.2	**971**	5.2	2.3	**1,042**

Source: Futuretrack 2006: selected subject groups of accepted UK-domiciled applicants (overseas columns: all accepted applicants), full survey, weighted (except totals).

[15] Professional/managerial background
[16] UCAS Tariff score of 360+
[17] Applying from secondary school or sixth form college.
[18] Of all accepted applicants

Summary

This chapter has attempted to 'unpack' the complexity of undergraduate higher education. It has two objectives: to identify the different types of HE trajectory and to develop a classification of these different categories of 'HE package' in order to monitor and assess the extent to which, as applicants become students and progress through HE, the skills, knowledge and career attitudes and orientations that they develop will restrict or extend the range and quality of opportunities that they encounter. To do this, we examined the range of subjects taught, the extent to which applicants had a clear idea of the occupation they hoped to work in after completing their courses of study, and their self-evaluation of the extent to which they possessed core skills and self-confidence at the outset of their HE studies. The following findings emerged:

- The majority of applicants had a reasonably clear idea about the occupational direction that they wished to take after completing their courses and the qualifications required to achieve it.
- This was, however, related to the course of study they were about to embark on. A clear pattern emerged that enables us to map the extent to which different areas of study are regarded by the students opting for them as vocational.
- Females, older applicants, those from Black minority ethnic groups, those with higher entry qualifications and those opting for areas of study at the most occupationally-directed end of the spectrum exhibited greatest clarity about their career directions.
- Males, those under 19 when they applied for HE, those from White and Asian ethnic backgrounds, those with lower educational qualifications and those opting for languages, historical and philosophical studies (– subjects at the least vocational end of the course spectrum) – had a lower likelihood of having a clear career direction.
- Coming from a higher managerial and professional background, and having attended a fee-paying school, were associated with lower probability of having a clear career direction, illustrating how many 'traditional' HE applicants move on into HE without much thought of where it will lead.

In this chapter, we also discuss five other subjective assessments that we asked participating applicants to provide: their views about their competence in four core areas of skill; written communication, spoken communication, numeracy, computer literacy and, in addition, self-confidence. We know from earlier research that all of these are related to access to opportunities, performance and relative success and failure in education and the labour market. Relating how respondents evaluated themselves with respect to these skills and attributes on a five-point scale (from 'Excellent' to 'Not very good') to evidence of their educational achievement so far, modes of HE access and course choices, we find a clear relationship between self-rated written communication skills and numeracy skills and outcomes, particularly the latter.

We also find that there are strong cultural differences in terms of ethnic background in the extent to which respondents subjectively rated themselves in terms of their possession of these skills. Between and within the major ethnic groups, we find distinct patterns – most dramatically, on the dimension of self-confidence, where over 70 per cent of Black African respondents considered that their self-confidence was excellent or very good, compared to well under half of White respondents and only 39 per cent of Asian Chinese. These assessments are not congruent with educational achievement and clearly reflect cultural diversity, in terms of classifications and values relating to self-evaluation. They do, however, reflect consistent ethnic differences in the patterns of self-assessment in the other core areas. Apart from in Computer literacy, Black Africans are among the most likely to rate themselves highly and, apart from in Numeracy and Computer Literacy, Asian Chinese appear to be unwilling to do so.

We also discovered an unexpected regularity – independent of cultural variation, there appears to be a systematically gendered pattern of response on these scaled items that conform to gendered educational performance. Women rate themselves more highly than their male peers in written communication (apart from in the case of Chinese Asian women, who are less willing to rate themselves highly than men on every dimension), there is little gender difference in self-rating on spoken communication, and women rate themselves significantly lower on numeracy and computer literacy. This is reflected in a 'gender confidence gap' that is very clear on the self-rated self confidence measure. Given gendered patterns of educational achievement and occupational outcomes, we will monitor these relationships carefully as the longitudinal study proceeds.

Finally, classifying areas of study according to their position on the 'vocationality' scale and the extent to which applicants accepted to study them evaluate their numerical competence, we then selected academic sub-categories to illustrate high, medium and low numeracy areas of study – and we examined the profiles of each sub-group to demonstrate how they differ radically, in terms of the educational, socio-economic and demographic characteristics of students. This raises questions about the value of higher education experiences in different regions of this HE map, where some subjects are mainly or exclusively taught in particular types of HEI, attract different types of student – with greater or lower proportions of women, representatives of minority ethnic groups, non-traditional students, and offer different access to educational and social facilities and access to opportunities. This is not a new finding, as was discussed earlier in this report, in the sense that it is well-attested that social and educational advantage prior to HE entry leads to greater likelihood of acceptance at elite institutions – but this continuing programme of research provides the opportunity to monitor the dynamics of the interaction of privilege and equal opportunities policies and practices within higher education.

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CHAPTER 4

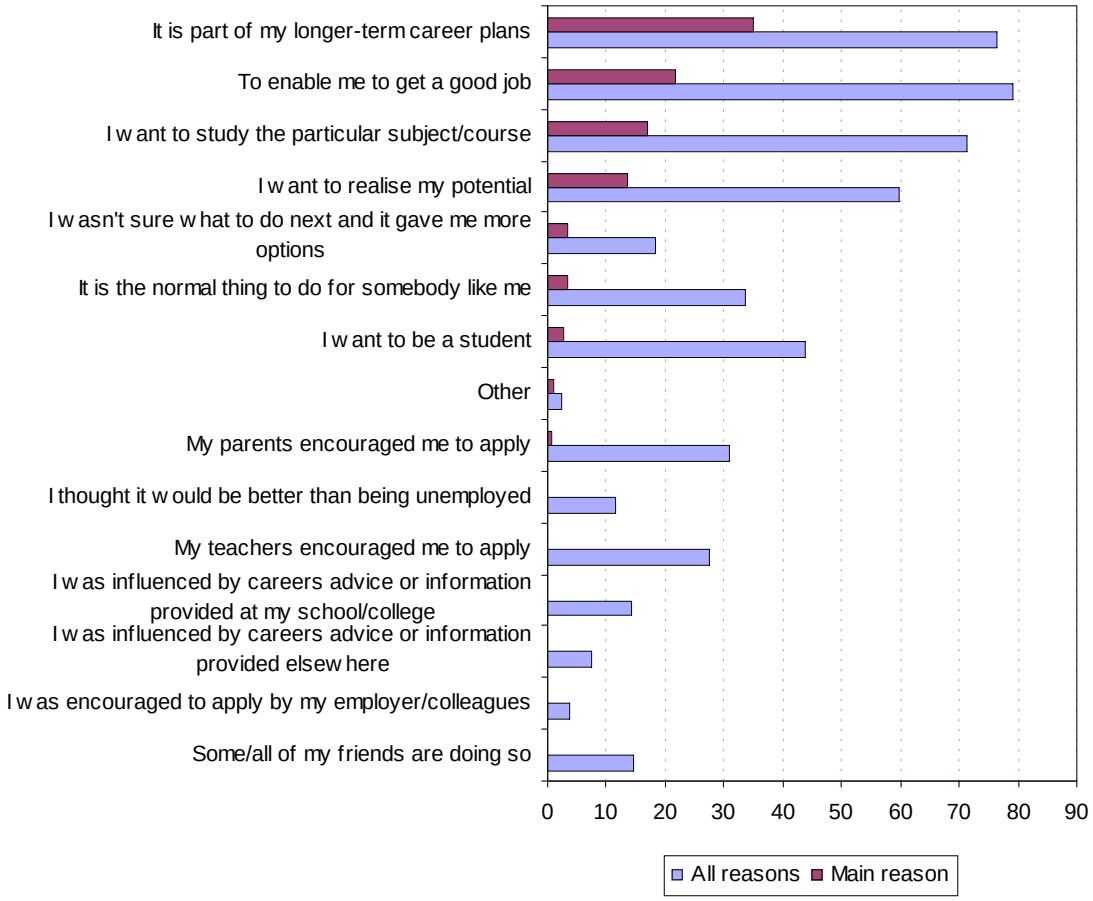
Decisions

In workshops with groups of students at a range of schools and FE colleges, it became clear that once students had made the initial decision to proceed to HE, some students then focussed on choosing the institution or location where they hoped to study, some on the area of study or discipline, and some had very clear ideas about the exact course they aspired to enter. The most frequent order of choice of 'traditional' students appeared to be broad subject area, followed by institution, whereas older students and others from communities where there was a less established tradition of HE participation were more likely to be restricted, or choose to restrict their options, starting with location or even particular institution. Influences on HEI choice will be discussed below, in section 4.2. The most fundamental decision, however, is the initial one to apply for a full-time HE place, so first we asked respondents why they had decided to do so.

4.1 Why did students decide to apply to enter HE?

The evidence about the Futuretrack sample already presented shows clearly that routes into HE and courses applied for reflect a combination of social, educational and cultural factors. In Figure 4.1 we examine accepted UK-domiciled applicants' reasons for opting for HE; their main reasons and all the other reasons that applied to them.

Figure 4.1: All reasons and main reasons for applying to enter higher education



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

The more detailed analyses that follow indicate that socio-economic and cultural factors clearly impact significantly on the decision to proceed to HE, but the main reasons were

similar for all subgroups: as part of long-term career plans, to enable them to get a good job, to study a particular course or subject and to enable them to realise their potential. For a third of respondents, it was the normal, next step for someone like them, as natural as the transition from primary to secondary education.

Normal thing to do?

A large number of 'traditional' applicants commented that completing the UCAS application had been the norm at their school and regarded as inevitable by their families and friends. An aspiring student who had applied to study Mathematical and Computer Sciences at a Russell Group university made the common assertion that:

'"Everybody in my school goes for higher education - there was no question or doubt in my mind as to whether or not I would apply'. [Male, 18 and under, Eastern, White, Independent school, Professional/Managerial background, Mathematical and Computing Sciences, Russell Group]

Another applicant made the point even more explicitly about how not only was HE application expected, but deviation from the norm would have been almost unthinkable:

> *'Because I go to an independent school, the only options presented to me were university, possibly with a gap year or year in industry. The way I see it, leaving school after A Levels would be a huge step in a completely unknown direction, and I really don't feel ready for complete independence yet'.* [Female, 18 and under, Scotland, White, Professional/Managerial background, Linguistics and Classics, Other old university]

Such experiences reflect very different circumstances to those of applicants like the 18 year old Black student from a Greater London FE college applying to study Social Sciences, who wrote on her questionnaire

> *'No one of my family members have gone to university so I want to achieve more than my parents and other relatives ever have'*,

or the white West Midlands school-leaver applying to study a subject allied to Medicine who wrote:

> *"I live in a council estate and come from a single parent family and wanted to prove that I can achieve no matter what my background!"*

Being the first from the family to have the opportunity to study in HE was frequently mentioned by applicants, as was the desire to prove that they could achieve more than schools or members of their social networks expected of them. Mature applicants also noted the need to prove themselves, and to make the most of their 'second chance', having not done so when they were younger.

'I didn't make the most of the educational opportunities I had when I was 18 and always regretted not working harder at school and getting to university. There are the opportunities now for mature students like me and I feel ready to study for a proper academic degree'. [Female, over 50, South East, White, Professional/Managerial background, Linguistics and Classics, Russell Group]

> *'I want to be able to provide for my children and be a good role model for them. Also, I will be the first person in my family to attend university and I was told by a family member that I couldn't do it so it made me more determined'*. [Female, 26-30, Yorks & Humber, White, 1992 University, Education]

In addition to 'to prove I can do it' and 'being the first in my family to do it', the main other reasons for entering HE were the following:

- emphasis of personal conviction – "I've *always* wanted to go to university/be a doctor/be a teacher….";
- mature applicants referring to the lack of opportunities they had encountered without a degree;
- the need for qualifications to access better career opportunities; and
- their desire to gain recognition for their potential, as the following diverse examples illustrate:

> *"The job I have right now is awful and depressing and I can't see myself doing it for the rest of my life - I need more options"*.
> [Female, 19-20, Eastern, White, New university, Education]

> *"I reached a point in my life, where I realised that walking into an office everyday and staring at a computer monitor, could, if I didn't make a change, be for the rest of my life. I want to do something fulfilling"*.
> [Male, 26-30, North East, White, New university, Linguistics and Classics]

> *"I have tried different jobs after my 'A' Levels and there don't seem to be any prospects for progression without a degree. All the jobs that I have done were mundane and unchallenging. Also, in some positions I was grossly underpaid. Many jobs available to those without a degree are telephone based and quite frankly degrading for anyone with an ounce of intelligence"*. [Female, 21-25, Yorks & Humber, White, SES Intermediate, Interdisciplinary and other combined subjects, Russell Group]

> *"I was not happy with what I was getting paid or the respect in the kind of job that I was qualified to do, so therefore decided to do the HND and am now applying to do a top-up degree in order to give me even more opportunity".*
> [Female, 21-24, South East, White, 1992 university, Mass communication]

Other mature applicants had experienced changes in their lives that had triggered the decision to pursue higher education. Many mature applicants, particularly women who had spent their early adult life bringing up children, mentioned that their children growing up had given them time to embark upon higher education, either to enable them to change career or simply out of interest.

> *"My family is now grown up and in higher education, and I have always wanted to do something 'for me', now the time is right, and I wouldn't have been capable of doing this when I was younger"*.
> [Female, 41-50, West Midlands, White, 1992 university, Languages]

It was not only the freedom that transition from family-rearing to the next stage of life provided, but widening of horizons. Many respondents, like the following female mature student studying social studies, commented that "*Seen my children achieve degrees, and made me realise I could*." [Female, 41-50, South East, White, Professional/Managerial background, Social Studies, Other HEI]

In other cases, it was less positive developments that had precipitated an application for higher education. These events included changes in their employment, including being made redundant or some other event that made them aware of, or to recognise the need for, alternatives.

> *"I was made redundant after working for one organisation for 21 years. Further education has given access to higher education and the opportunity to fulfil my dream of becoming a school teacher"*. [Female 41-50, Scotland, White, Russell Group, Education]

> *"I had an accident which has left me in a wheelchair. This meant I had to give up my job as a Gas service engineer as it is a manual job that I can't do from a wheelchair. Therefore I need to gain qualifications that will help me find a suitable job".*'[Male, 26-30, Scotland, White, New university, Mathematical and Computer Sciences]

For others, changes in personal circumstances gave rise to the application. These changes included bereavement and divorce.

> *"I've always wanted to study this subject but haven't had the opportunity before now, plus the death of my husband has made me realise life is too short to put it off any longer"*.
> [Female, 26-30, Eastern, White, New university, Law]

> *"My husband left [me] and three children. I decided I wanted to do something I had always wanted to do as well be a good carer in order to provide for my children and give them and myself a decent future".* [Female, 31- 40, West Midlands, White, Subjects allied to medicine, other HEI]

As surprisingly high number of applicants had previously embarked on, and sometimes completed, HE programmes. They were aiming to return to higher education as mature students to complete unfinished degrees, to undertake career changes, or to study new subjects either for career advancement or to follow new or neglected interests.

> *"I will be 50 this September. I have four teenage children, two of whom are going to University this September. I started the same degree as I will be doing, at the same site (though now it is a University, not a Polytechnic!). I have done loads of part-time jobs to fit around my children, but now it's ME Time! I've always regretted leaving my degree course, so now I have the opportunity to finish it*".
> [Female, 41-50, South West, White, New university, Creative arts and design]

Reasons other than those given in Table 4.1 ranged from idealism to cynicism – with many more examples of the former than the latter – as the two Languages students below illustrate.

> 'I enjoy learning and the challenges it presents'.[Female, 18 and under, white Professional/managerial, Yorks and Humber, Other old university].

> *"Didn't want to start full-time work yet....I got 50 years of working full-time; nothing wrong with delaying it for a few more years!"* [Male, under 18, Eastern, White, Other old university, Languages]

Gender in itself did not appear to be a significant determinant of reasons, although males were somewhat more likely to have seen the transition to He as 'the normal thing' (36 per cent compared to 32 per cent of accepted UK applicants), to be more likely to cite 'want to realise my potential (63 per cent compared to 58 per cent) and refer to the fact that 'friends are doing so' (16 per cent compared to 13 per cent). Women were somewhat more likely to mention 'part of longer term career plans' (78 per cent compared to 75 per cent of males) and a desire to study the subject or course (16 per cent compared to 13 per cent).

As has been mentioned, socio-economic background was found to have a significant impact on the decision to enter higher education. Table 4.1 shows the reasons applicants gave for applying to enter HE, broken down by broad socio-economic background.

Table 4.1: Reasons for applying for higher education place, by broad socio-economic background

Reasons (multiple choice)	**Socio-economic background (%)**			
	Managerial and Professional Occupations	**Intermediate Occupations**	**Routine and manual Occupations**	**All UK accepted**
It is the normal thing to do….	42.7	32.3	25.9	33.7
Want to realise my potential	59.9	59.1	59.8	59.7
Want to be a student	51.8	43.6	38.6	43.7
Part of my longer-term career plans	76.3	77.0	77.5	76.5
Enable me to get a good job	81.2	80.2	80.0	79.2
Want to study particular subject/course	74.4	72.0	69.4	71.4
Friends are doing so	18.4	15.2	12.0	14.8
Parents encouraged me to apply	38.0	30.3	25.4	31.0
Teachers encouraged me to apply	31.8	28.0	25.4	27.4
Employer/colleagues encouraged to apply	3.2	3.8	4.1	3.6
Influenced by careers advice at school	15.2	15.0	14.5	14.2
Influenced by careers advice from elsewhere	7.6	7.2	7.8	7.5
Not sure what to do next	20.6	19.0	17.6	18.4
Better than being unemployed	12.3	11.3	11.0	11.5
Other	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.4
N	146249	60382	68458	353585

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK accepted respondents to full survey, weighted

At the extremes of the socio-economic spectrum, using a more detailed classification, 47 per cent of those from Higher Managerial and Professional backgrounds chose 'it is the normal thing for somebody like me' as one of their reasons, compared with 23 per cent of those from Routine Manual occupational backgrounds; 21 per cent compared to 10 per cent stated that most or all their friends were also applying, 41 per cent compared to 23 per cent cited parental encouragement and 34 per cent compared to 25 per cent cited teachers' encouragement. The norms of background expectations are clearly important in discouraging as well as encouraging students to apply, particularly those who come from non-traditional backgrounds. One applicant reported:

> *"When I left college, although I had good grades (2 As and a B 'A' Levels) I thought I didn't want to go to Uni despite my tutor's best efforts to persuade me, particularly as I was not sure what area of work I wanted to go into and I didn't want to go just for the sake of it and get into loads of debt. However, after working in shops for three years I decided that I should do a degree".* [Female, 21-25, Yorks and the Humber, White, Creative Arts and Design, Other HEI]

Looking in more detail at these reasons behind decisions to apply for a HE course, Table 4.2 shows that applicants whose both parents had participated in HE (second generation applicants) were twice as likely as first generation applicants to have given as a reason 'it is the normal thing for somebody like me' (51 per cent compared to 26 per cent).

Table 4.2: Reasons for applying for higher education place, by parents' HE experience

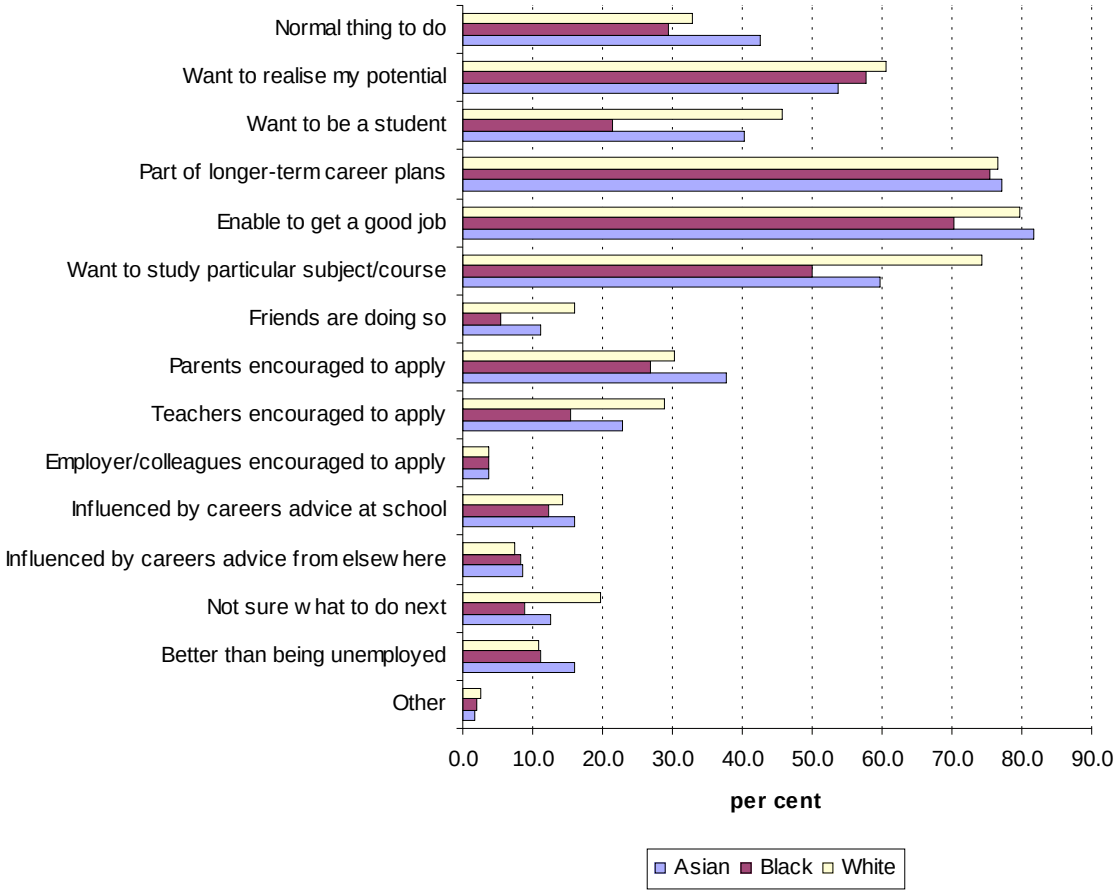
Reasons (multiple choice)	**Parental HE (%)**			
	Neither parent has HE experience	**One parent has HE experience**	**Both parents have HE experience**	**All UK accepted**
It is the normal thing to do…	26.2	37.2	50.8	33.7
Want to realise my potential	58.9	59.4	62.2	59.7
Want to be a student	38.4	46.5	55.3	43.7
Part of longer-term career plans	76.1	77.2	76.7	76.5
Enable me to get a good job	78.3	80.2	80.4	79.2
Want to study particular subject/course	69.1	73.2	75.8	71.4
Friends are doing so	12.3	16.1	20.2	14.8
Parents encouraged me to apply	25.0	35.7	42.5	31.0
Teachers encouraged me to apply	25.1	28.5	32.7	27.4
Employer/colleagues encouraged me to apply	3.8	3.5	3.2	3.6
Influenced by careers advice at school	14.2	14.3	13.9	14.2
Influenced by careers advice from elsewhere	7.4	7.9	7.6	7.5
Not sure what to do next	17.8	19.3	19.2	18.4
Better than being unemployed	10.9	12.0	12.5	11.5
Other	2.6	2.2	2.0	2.4
N	199426	82763	71396	353585

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK accepted respondents to full survey, weighted

Furthermore, more than two fifths of the second generation applicants stated that their parents had encouraged them to apply, compared to just a quarter of the first generation applicants, reflecting the different support and information available to applicants. Significantly, one in five second generation applicants gave 'because some / all of my friends are doing so' as a reason, compared to less than one in eight first generation applicants and a third of second generation students had been encouraged by teachers, compared to a quarter of first generation students. It will become apparent as the analysis proceeds that first generation students were more likely to be undertaking HE for *instrumental* reasons – as a route to a particular occupation, or improved employment prospects – rather than for the intrinsic objective of being a student: 38 per cent of them included 'I want to be a student' as one of their reasons for HE entry, but 55 per cent of second generation students had done so. Conversely, first generation applicants were more likely to give career or employment-orientated reasons for their HE application. Looking at *main* reasons for applying to HE, 37 per cent of applicants for whom neither parent had experience of HE gave 'it is part of my longer term career plans' as their main reason, and 23 per cent 'to enable me to get a good job'. This compares to 31 per cent and 19 per cent respectively of applicants whose parents had both attended HE.

Asian applicants were more likely than the other broad identifiable groups to have applied as 'the normal thing to do, or because their parents encouraged them to apply, suggesting a mixture of socio-economic and cultural influences. On other dimensions, they resembled white students more closely than other ethnic groups. We saw in Figure 2.12 in Chapter 2 that ethnic background and socio-economic background are related, with white students considerably more likely to come from Managerial and professional backgrounds than applicants from minority ethic backgrounds, but that there is diversity within the ethnic community.

Figure 4.2: Reasons for applying to enter higher education, comparing Asian, Black and White accepted UK applicants



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, selected groups, weighted.

Differences among different sub-groups are reflected in their reasons for entering HE show socio-economic as well as cultural differences in the communities in question, particularly with reference to subject choice and gender. In the four figures that follow, we compare the extent to which accepted applicants in the main ethnic sub-categories gave selected reasons for applying to HE. Figures 4.3(i) and (ii) compare male and female reporting of 'instrumental' reasons for participation, directly related to career plans, and show little significant differences in male and female propensities among the Asian sub-groups (although Asian Chinese women appear to have been somewhat more 'career- motivated' than their male peers), but we find big differences between Black Caribbean and White applicants according to gender, with women in both groups more likely to have given instrumental reasons.

Comparing extent to which 'traditional applicant' responses were given by the sub-categories in question, we find the same similarities and discrepancies, between relative uniformity among the males and females in the Asian groups and considerably higher propensity to give these reasons, that suggest applying from 'traditional' rather than non-traditional family and educational contexts, and substantial differences between women and men among Black Caribbean and White respondents.

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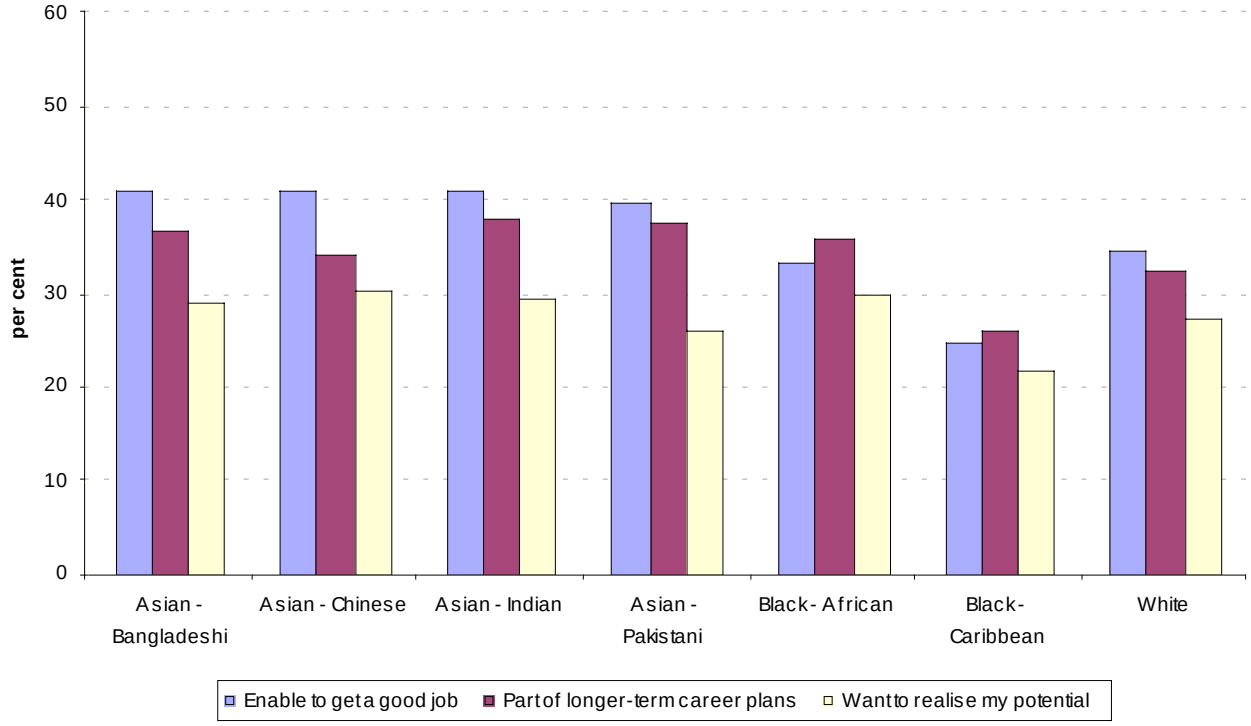
Figure 4.3(i): Selected reasons for HE application for selected ethnic groups: MALES



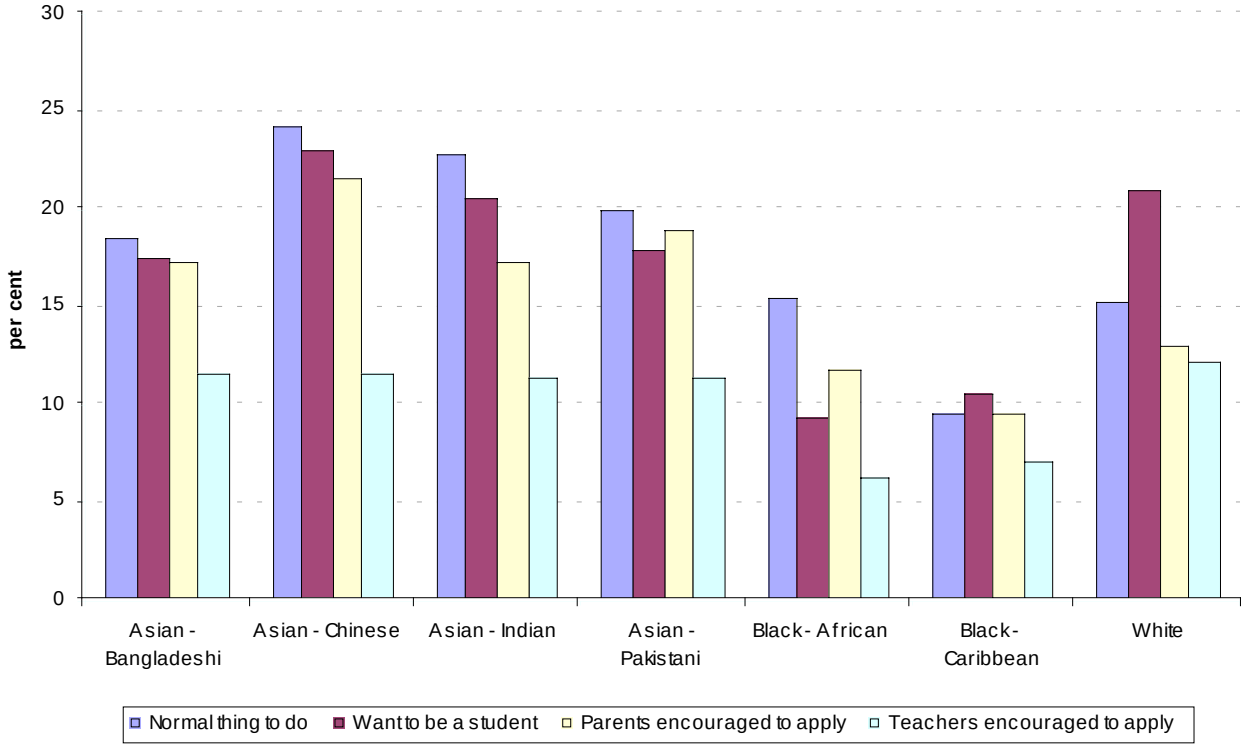
Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, selected groups, weighted.

The discrepancy between the responses of Black Caribbean men and women is particularly striking.

Figure 4.3(ii): Selected reasons for HE application for selected ethnic groups: FEMALES

Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, selected groups, weighted.

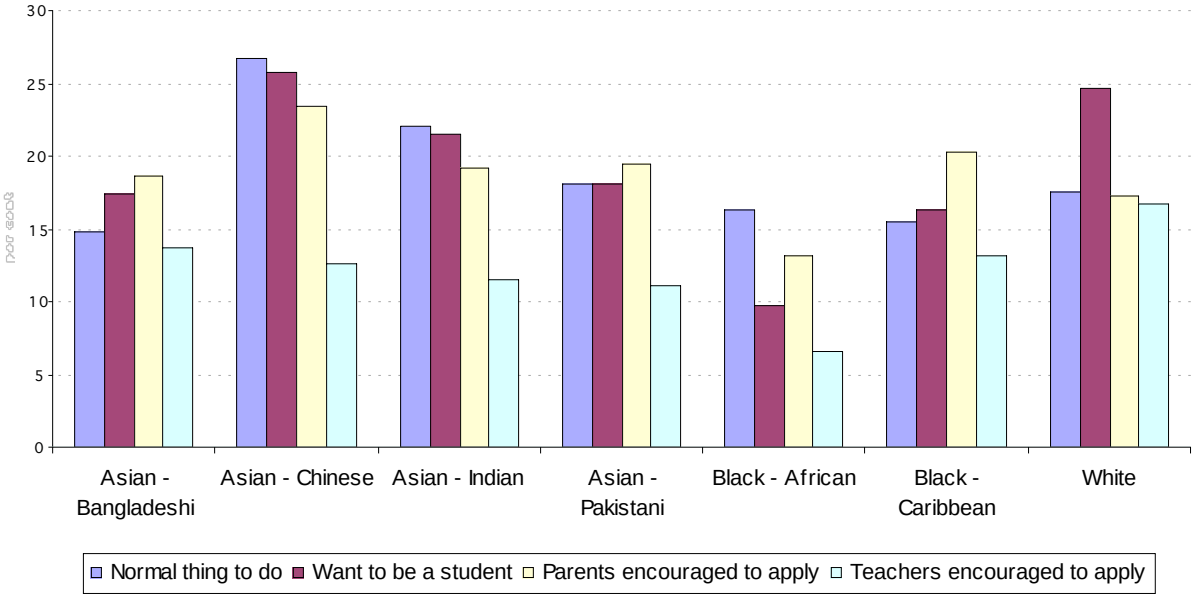
Figure 4.3(iii): Selected reasons for HE application for selected ethnic groups: MALES



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, selected groups, weighted.

The 'normal thing' response differences is indicative of the greater likelihood of those from an Asian Chinese and Asian Indian background to have progressed straight from secondary to higher education as relatively high achievers. Teachers' encouragement was less often cited by Black applicants, reflecting their greater likelihood of having applied as mature students, but the differences between the Black Caribbean females and other Black applicants on this dimension requires further investigation.

Figure 4.3(iv): Selected reasons for HE application for selected ethnic groups: FEMALES



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, selected groups, weighted.

Finally, accepted applicants' situations while applying for their courses show the very strong differences in motivations by context. Table 4.3 shows the clustering among essentially similar 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' groups that highlights the bifurcation of these groups – although the point needs to be made that similarities across the board are greater than diversity: it is only that the patterns of diversity reflect different access circumstances, and it is important to be able to evaluate how far these have affected options, choices and ability to recognise and take advantage of opportunities.

Table 4.3: Reasons for applying for higher education place, by situation prior to study

	Situation when applying					
Reasons they applied	**Final year in secondary school / sixth form college**	**Gap year**	**HE or Foundation student**	**Student at FE college**	**Employed**	**Unemployed**
Normal thing to do	44.6	45.6	20.7	19.0	17.6	21.4
Want to realise my potential	58.0	60.0	65.5	60.4	64.3	63.5
Want to be a student	53.9	54.9	31.3	29.2	30.4	33.0
Part of longer-term career plans	76.5	73.8	75.1	76.3	78.4	70.6
Enable me to get a good job	85.3	77.3	68.6	75.5	65.5	66.7
Want to study particular subject/course	73.2	75.4	70.6	67.9	70.5	66.4
Friends are doing so	19.9	18.1	6.7	7.8	7.8	8.0
Parents encouraged me to apply	40.6	34.7	17.4	19.8	15.4	17.4
Teachers encouraged me to apply	35.7	33.1	18.4	19.5	11.7	13.2
Employer/colleagues encouraged me to apply	2.7	3.0	3.0	3.7	7.1	3.4
Influenced by careers advice at school	18.4	13.7	8.0	10.8	5.3	5.6
Influenced by careers advice from elsewhere	8.0	7.3	6.9	7.1	6.6	6.8
Not sure what to do next	22.0	20.0	11.4	13.9	13.1	16.2
Better than being unemployed	14.5	7.5	9.6	9.1	3.5	16.2
Other	1.3	3.0	8.2	3.0	4.2	4.7
N (UK accepted applicants in categories, weighted)	199281	4318	2256	78861	51071	9127

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

As already illustrated by earlier quotes, older applicants, building on very different experiences and after gaps from education, were most often instrumentally orientated, seeking to improve their employment prospects. Some had found that their credentials were no longer enough and others wished to improve their quality of life or pursue a long-held dream.

> *'After working in IT with a "mere" HND and 20-odds years experience, it is almost impossible to get past the recruitment agencies that IT firms use (no newspaper adverts) unless you have a 2.1 honours degree. Presumably because the universities are popping IT graduates out like sausages these days, unlike the 1980s*!'. [Male, 41-50, Scotland, White, SES Intermediate, 1992 University, Mathematical and Computer Sciences]

> *'I went on to work at the age of 17 after having stayed a few months in college. I worked as a legal secretary in Paris and London for the best part of 7 years and realised I would not be able to evolve into a better position and would always ever be in a secretarial position. I decided to move back to London and undertake an access course before being able to study International BA'*. [Female, 21-25, Greater London, Asian, 1992 University, Business and Administration Studies]

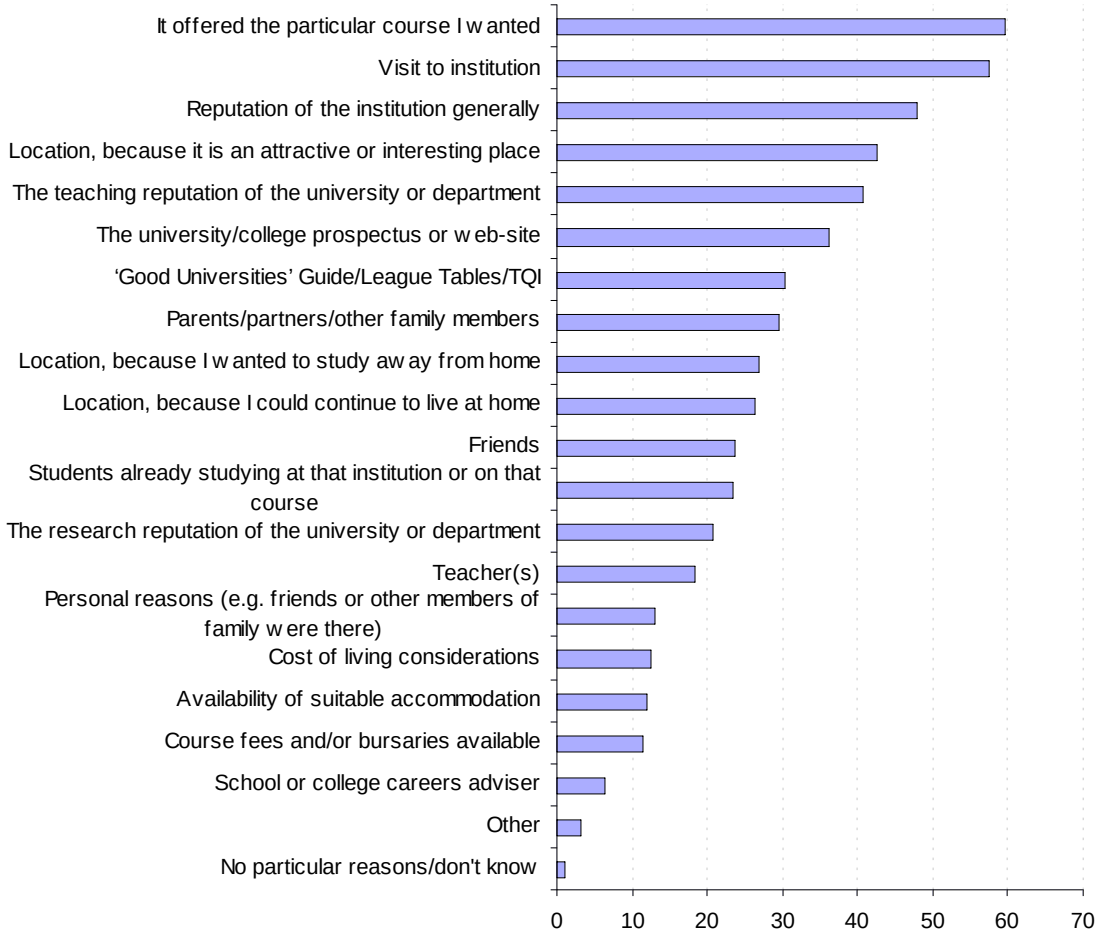
'*I have always wanted to be a teacher. I am a single parent and my daughter is now in full time education so there is nothing stopping me going into full time education. It is an opportunity to better myself and my daughter's future*". [Female, 21-25, North West, White, 1992 University, Education]

'*I have a highly responsible job at present which is well paid, however, I am taking redundancy this summer in order to pursue a different career that will provide me with more job satisfaction'*. [Female, 31-40, Wales, White, SES Intermediate, 1992 University, Subjects allied to Medicine]

How did students choose their higher education institutions (HEIs)?

Applicants were asked about the reasons why they chose their particular higher education institution. Figure 4.4 shows the reasons selected.

Figure 4.4: Which of the following influenced your choice of university or college?



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

It is not surprising that the most frequent influence on choice of higher education institution was that it offered the course sought, or that visits to universities and colleges were important for many, or that general reputation, teaching reputation and location figured strongly. Applicants are being encouraged to regard HE as an investment, and to evaluate it as a consumer, and there was considerable evidence that these applicants were doing just that, in terms of the initial decision to 'buy in', their choice of HEI and their choice of course. Sometimes applicants commented on the substance or design of the course:

> *'The course is continually assessed by coursework. So no exams! I excel in coursework but am terrible at exams'.* [Male, 19-20, East Midlands, White, other HEI, Creative arts and design].

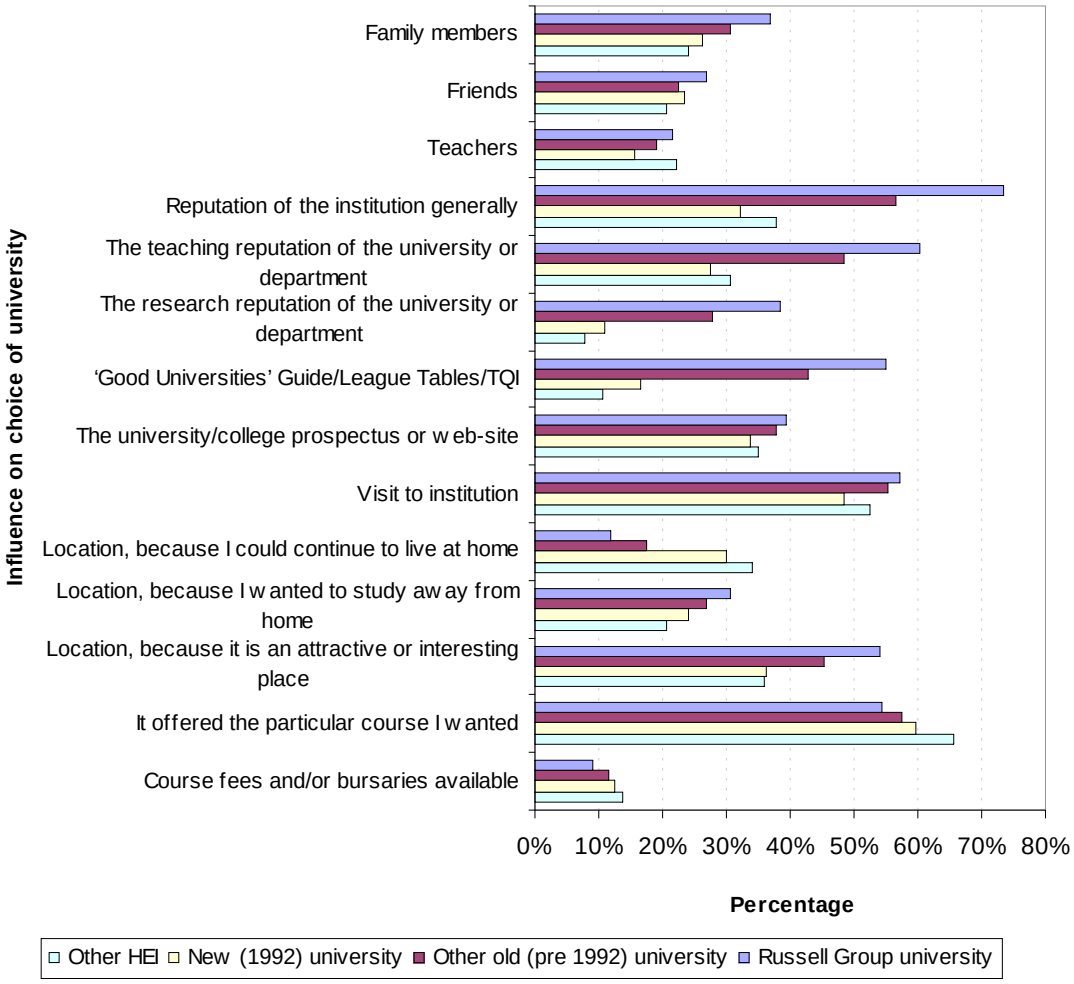
> *'It's a sandwich course so I can get the experience of having a year out to work in a real business environment, which I thought would be very valuable for me and would make me more employable in the future'.* [Male, 18 and under, Greater London, Asian, 'Routine & manual background, Business & administration, New university]

A clear relationship is seen between the factors applicants used to select their higher education institution, and the type of institution they ultimately chose. As would be expected, applicants planning to attend a Russell Group or other old (pre-1992) university were the most likely to cite prestige-related factors, such as teaching and research reputation, and to have used Good Universities-type guides to influence their decision.

> *'Records showing that graduates from the university I have chosen have no difficulty in finding employment. Leading firms in the field I will be studying have close links with the university'.* [Female, 19-20, Other overseas, Russell Group, Business and admin studies]

Members of this group were least likely to say that wanting to live at home was a factor in their decision, and the group most likely to say that wanting to live away from home was a factor. Applicants to Russell Group universities are also the least likely to have chosen a university because it offered the course that they wanted, suggesting that for many these applicants, the choice of university is more important than the choice of course. We saw in Chapter 3 that students from different educational contexts apply to different types of HEI, and our analyses reinforce recent research findings that selective and fee-paying schools encourage their pupils to target the most *elite* universities, whereas students from state schools, specially in socially-disadvantaged communities, less other aspire to these (Sutton Trust 2007).

Figure 4.5: Selected influences on choice of university by type of university



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

Generally, applicants planning to attend a Russell Group university cited the most number of influences on their decision. They received advice from a more diverse range of people, and possibly because they were more likely to have friends and family with experience of higher education and to have been encouraged by teachers.

Parental experience of HE had a significant effect on the reasons why students chose their institutions. To a considerable extent, parental experience of HE and socio-economic background are strongly related, but parental HE experience appears to have a stronger impact on responses throughout the questionnaire than social background itself. Indeed, as Table 4.4 shows, 37 per cent of students whose parents both had HE experience reported that their parents/partners or other family members influenced their choice of university compared to 26 per cent of students where neither father nor mother had HE experience.

The greater likelihood of second-generation HE applicants consulting sources of 'consumer information' about HE was also apparent, with the Good University Guide more likely to have been influential: 41 per cent of accepted students with both parents with HE experiences say that it influenced their choice – compared with only 26 per cent of accepted students whose parents did not (and 36 per cent of those from higher socio-economic backgrounds), which presumably had something to do with the type of school and community of origin, newspapers accessed and general 'cultural capital' that their relative environments provided (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Compared with HE applicants as a whole, the reputation of the institution generally was also more likely to be cited as influencing choice of university or college for students whose parents had HE experiences (58 per cent - compared with 54 per cent of

those from the socially-advantaged backgrounds generally), as was the teaching reputation of the institution (49 per cent – and 45 per cent within socially-advantaged backgrounds).

Table 4.4: Influences on choice of HEI, by parental participation in HE

Influenced choice of university	Neither parent has HE qualification/ Not declared	One of parents has HE qualification	Both parents have HE qualification	Total
Family	26.2	31.3	37.0	29.5
Friends	22.8	23.8	25.4	23.6
Teachers	18.1	18.2	19.9	18.4
Students already studying there	22.2	23.9	26.1	23.4
School careers adviser	6.5	6.0	7.2	6.5
Good universities' Guide etc.	26.0	32.2	40.5	30.3
Teaching reputation	36.5	42.8	50.5	40.7
Research reputation	18.0	21.5	27.5	20.7
Reputation generally	43.2	50.2	58.6	47.8
University prospectus/website	35.0	37.0	39.1	36.3
Visit to institution	54.4	59.4	63.8	57.4
Could continue to live at home	31.8	22.6	14.4	26.3
Wanted to study away from home	24.2	28.6	32.8	26.9
Attractive place	37.6	45.9	53.5	42.7
Offered particular course	58.7	61.0	61.1	59.7
Course fees/bursaries available	12.9	10.5	8.6	11.5
Cost of living considerations	13.3	12.4	11.0	12.6
Availability of suitable accommodation	11.4	13.2	12.7	12.1
Personal reasons	12.7	13.5	13.3	13.0
No particular reasons	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.2
Other	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.1
N	189688	77149	64626	331463

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

The simple correlation of parental HE, socio-economic advantage and wider boundaries of (or opportunities for) choice is illustrated by three further significant differences:

- more students whose parents had HE experience (54 per cent) chose the university or college because it was an attractive or interesting place than those whose parents didn't have any HE experience (38 per cent), suggesting consideration of the wider attractions of HE study beyond its intrinsic educational or 'employability-development' value;
- more students whose parents did not have any HE experience chose the university or college because they could continue to live at home (32 per cent, compared with 14 per cent of students whose parents *had* HE experiences);
- also, course fees and/or available bursaries and cost of living considerations were more important for students whose parents did not have any HE experiences – related to both socio-economic differences and the higher average age of first generation HE applicants.

Some groups were found to experience particular limits on their choices which were liked to their socio-economic and cultural situation, and the sources of information and support they had available to them. The need or desire to attend an HEI in a particular location constrained choices for some respondents, as did some disabilities. Existing relationships with some HEIs were also found to act as a constraint. While such relationships are usually seen to be positive, in the case of some respondents, having done prior course at an HEI or being

sponsored to study a particular course at a particular HEI meant that they were unable, or unmotivated, to investigate other options, as the following quotes show:

> *'I previously studied there, and enjoyed it. I know the tutors, and who to go to for help in a particular area. It makes concentrating on my course, and future career easier. Rather than worrying about living experiences etc…'* [Male, 19-20, South West, White, Other HEI, Creative arts and design]

> *'I am being funded by my employers as part of a scheme, therefore North East Worcestershire College was the only choice'* [Female, 21-24, West Midlands, White, Other HEI, Social studies]

Others were influenced by the treatment they had received in communication or interaction with those responsible for the recruitment of students or with delivery of the courses on offer:

> *'The staff at the university, through all my correspondence with them, were friendly people who appealed to me as a group I could spend four years living and working with*.' [Male, 18 and under, South West, White, Other old university, Physical Sciences]

It is perhaps not surprising, but certainly a very important consideration in analysing the options available to different group of HE applicants and students, that 57 per cent of all students over 25 years of age stated that they chose their university or college because they wanted to continue to live at home. As the quote from a female mature applicant shows, many of these had already set up adult households which made moving difficult, but they are generally more likely to be integrated within a community and social networks which make mobility difficult or less attractive.

> *'I am a mature student with two children and my husband works in Scarborough. We live locally and our eldest is in school locally. I had no real choice really*'. [Female, 31-40, Yorks & Humber, White, Other old university, Languages]

Others made location choices involving moving that that were sometimes related to family responsibilities. For example, one young mature applicant gave, as a reason for her choice of university:

> '*My mother lives in the area, and I need her support with child care. Originally I was living in London, and was planning to go to a London university'*. [Female, 26-30, South West, White, New university, Subjects allied to medicine]

Community ties that bound people to localities also included extra-curricular activities and interests, particularly sport, as the following examples show:

> '*My athletics coach wanted me to stay around so I could keep training* [Female, 19-20, North West, White, SES Intermediate, New university, Mass communications]

> '*I am currently training to become a dance teacher at my dance school so can still continue with that at the same time'*. [Female, 18 and under, East Midlands, White, SES Intermediate, New university, Science combined with Social Science]

Applicants wishing to move away also targeted particular universities because of the facilities they had that would enable them to pursue existing interests. For example

> '*Am member of Wasps rugby club and this university has a very good reputation for my subject and meant that I could still train at Wasps'*. [Male, 18 and under, Greater London, White, Managerial background, Other old university, Historical & Philosophical Studies]

> '*I am an ice skater and there is an ice rink in Cardiff* '[Female, 21-25, Yorks & Humber, White, New university, Biological, Vet & Agricultural Sciences]

Disabilities and the importance of supporting facilities for students with special needs was an important theme, as the following selection of responses shows:

> *'I have a disability and the university I have chosen for my first choice offered the correct facilities for me to undergo the course without problems'.* [Female, 18 and under, East Midlands, White, New university, Mass communications]

> '*I have a medical condition. If I moved I would have to change hospitals and my doctor and do it alone'*. [Male, 19-20, White, Wales, New university, Biological, Vet & Agricultural Sciences]

> *'I am profoundly deaf and I receive support from [my local authority] Support Service. [chosen] University is in [the same administrative area] and the support is available. That is another reason'*. [Female, 18 and under, Greater London, White, Other HEI, Creative arts & design]

> '*Because of my disability I need the support of family and friends'*. [Male, 31-40, South West, White, New university, Social Studies]

The need to earn money while studying, and the emerging trend for organisations to seek to retain tried and tested part-time workers were also apparent in influencing HEI choices:

> '*It will also be possible to get a job transfer with my part time job, to a store within easy manageable distance of the Campus and Accommodation'*. [Male, 19-20, East Midlands, White, New university, Creative arts & design]

> 'I *can get a transfer from my current job, to one where I hope to be studying'*. [Female, 18 and under, Greater London, White, Intermediate background, Other HEI, Languages]

As a whole, younger students were more likely to have been influenced in their choice of institution by the location because they wanted to study away from home (33 per cent of those 18 and under gave this as a factor).

> *'It is a middle way step to moving away from home - something I have wanted to do for years. I couldn't stand the thought of staying at home and getting a low paid job in a rough, poor city.'* [Female, 19-20, Wales, White, Russell Group, Creative arts and design]

Some were more cautious than others, choosing their institution because it allowed them to move away from home but still live within visiting distance of their families.

> *'Though I wanted to live on campus, the university is still close to home so I could come back and visit mum!'* [Female, 18 and under, North West, White, New university, Interdisciplinary, other combined subjects]

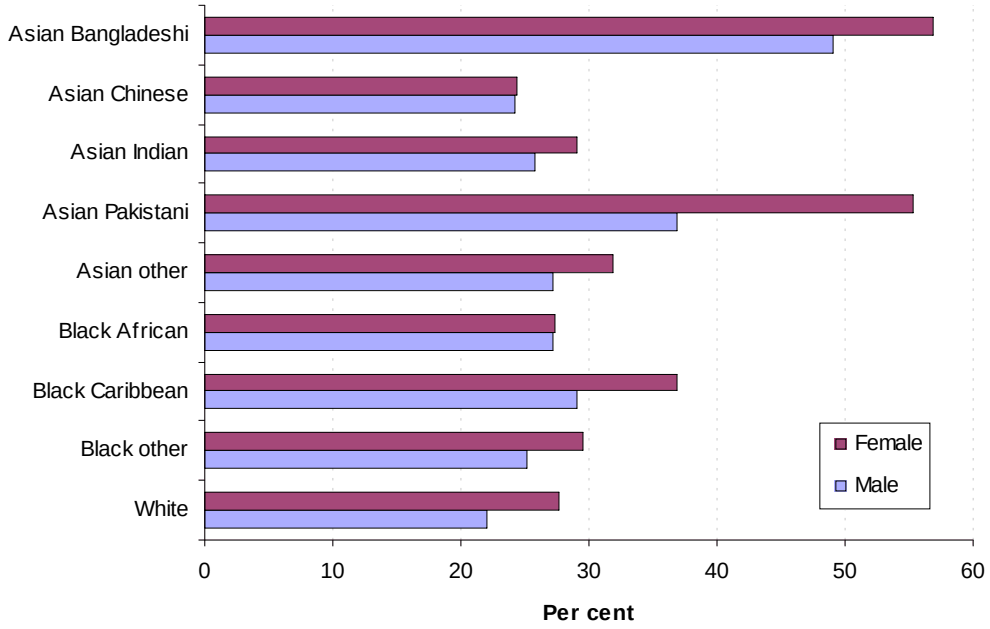
Over a third (35%) of Asian students chose on the basis of wanting to continue to live at home, compared to 29 per cent of black students and 26 per cent of all (accepted UK-domiciled) applicants. Table 4.5, distinguishing among ethnic sub-groups, reveals the potential for more detailed exploration of similarities and differences among these groups – and Figure 4.5 shows the variation of gender differences in different communities. White males were least likely to choose an HEI in order to stay at home; Asian Pakistani and, to a lesser extent, Asian Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean females most likely; and in all the identified communities, females were more likely to have given this reason than males except in Asian Chinese and Black African, both of which exhibited no gender difference.

Table 4.5: Influences on choice of HEI by broad ethnic group

Influences	Asian	Black	White	Mixed
Family	39.9	23.8	28.5	29.6
Friends	29.4	18.0	23.1	24.4
Teachers	21.2	15.3	18.2	20.0
Students already studying there	25.1	19.7	23.5	22.7
School careers adviser	9.3	6.8	6.1	6.9
Good universities' Guide etc.	37.9	31.2	29.1	32.9
Teaching reputation	37.9	32.2	41.6	42.1
Research reputation	22.7	20.2	20.3	23.1
Reputation generally	45.1	37.4	48.8	50.3
University prospectus/website	29.2	27.3	37.9	36.2
Visit to institution	41.7	38.3	61.1	53.3
Could continue to live at home	34.5	29.0	25.2	22.6
Wanted to study away from home	19.1	21.6	28.4	28.1
Attractive place	31.1	25.7	45.3	43.4
Offered particular course	45.2	41.6	63.0	57.3
Course fees/bursaries available	10.0	11.8	11.7	11.8
Cost of living considerations	10.0	11.5	13.0	13.3
Availability of suitable accommodation	8.7	9.8	12.7	11.7
Personal reasons	10.9	8.9	13.5	13.5
No particular reasons	2.0	1.8	1.0	1.7
Other	1.8	2.3	3.3	3.5
N	32829	17042	263792	8996

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

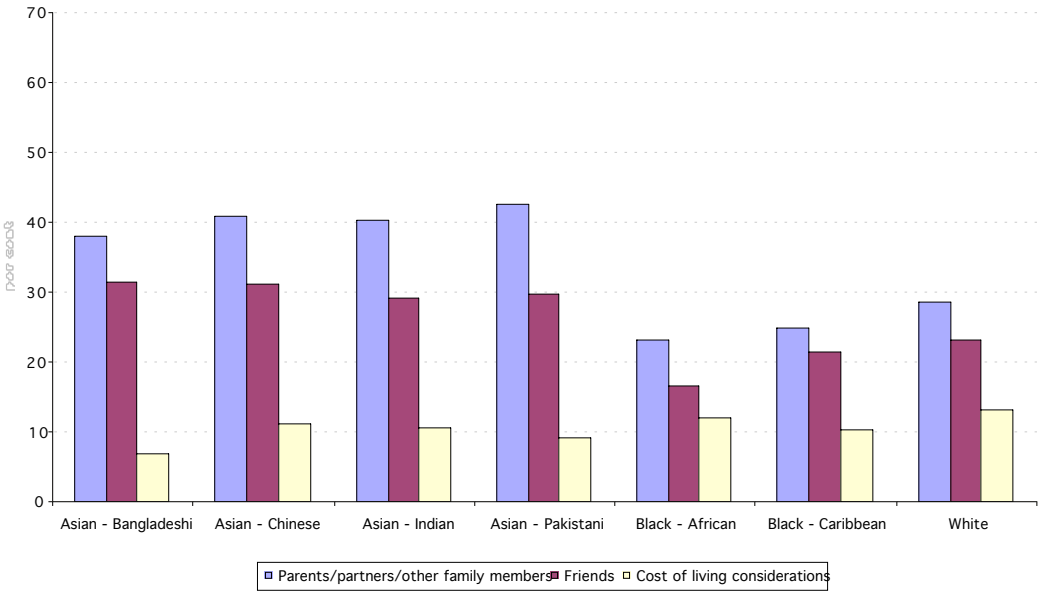
Figure 4.6: Percentage giving 'it will enable me to stay at home' as reason for choice of HEI, comparing ethnic origin by gender



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted. N=313,662

Proximity to parents and other family members was a consideration for Asian students to a considerably greater extent than for black or white applicants, as was proximity to friends, whereas White and black African applicants were most likely to identify cost of living considerations as an issue taken into consideration.

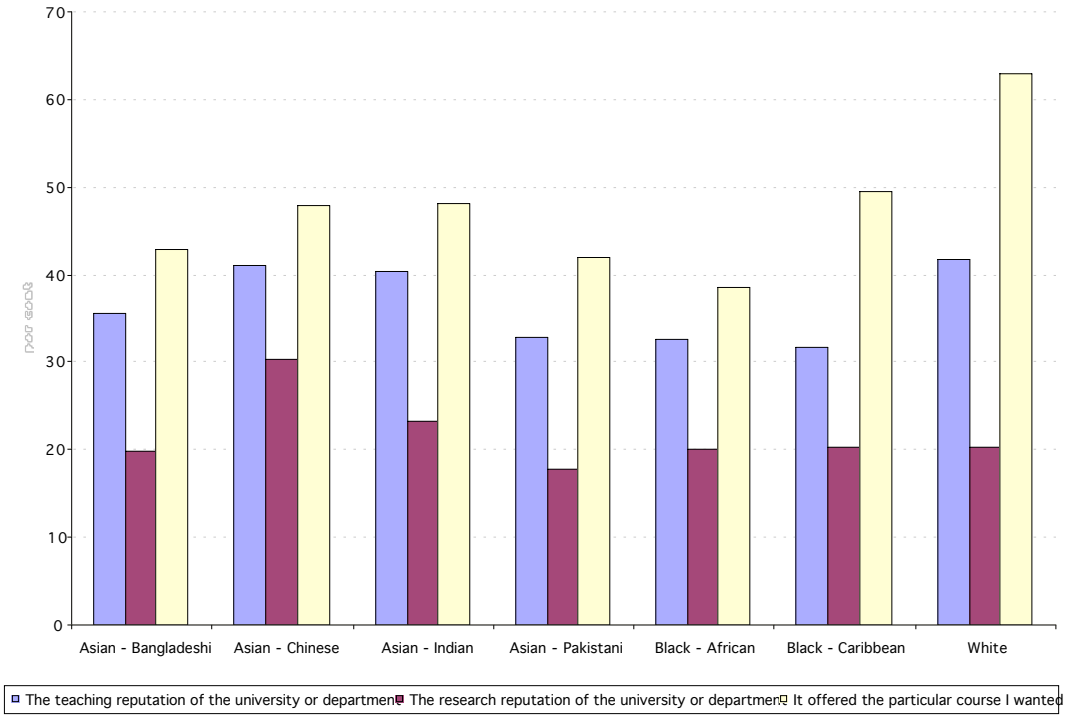
Figure 4.7(a): Percentages of selected ethnic groups citing family, friends and cost of living as influences on choice of HEI



Source: Futuretrack 2006*. UK accepted applicants, selected groups.*

There are intriguing differences in the propensity of applicants from the different ethnic communities to cite teaching and research reputations as having influenced their choices, that we will follow up in the Stage 2 analysis. The significantly higher likelihood of White, followed by Asian Chinese and Asian Indians, as having identified targeting of an HEI because of a particular course, also requires further exploration. Preliminary analysis indicates that it does not appear to be related to the subject or type of course in an easily-identifiable way.

Figure 4.7(b): Percentages of selected ethnic groups citing academic-related reasons as influencing choice of HEI



Source: Futuretrack 2006*. UK accepted applicants, selected groups.*

Interestingly, black students cited fewer influences on choice of HEI than the other groups, almost as if HEI was less important to them than the course that they aspired to study – which certainly reflects more employment and vocationally-orientated motivations and may also reflect a less consumerist approach. The relationship between choices of HEI, courses and the extent to which applicants considered course options on a national, regional or local level – or indeed, internationally – is a significant theme to be followed up in the qualitative interview programme. Not all applicants achieved the options they hped for, and began rather negatively:

> '*The grades I got limited my choice and this uni was the best of a bad bunch of options I h*ad' [Female, 19-20, Greater London, Black, New university, Social Sciences]

Such students often entered through Clearing and as the project proceeds, it will interesting to see which of these experienced relative success and failure as their academic careers proceeded, in relation to others who opted to improve grades and re-apply a year later, or postpone entry to HE for alternative options.

Decision to enter HE related to subject studied

Following from our argument in Chapter 3 that subject choice is probably the single most significant variable in determining not only the trajectory embarked upon and range of opportunities to which they give access, but also the quality of opportunities and subsequent life-chances, we devote the next chapter to exploring it in detail. However, subject choices and choices of HEI are intimately related and indeed, mutually constraining. Many subjects and disciplines are offered at a restricted range of universities: for example, Medical Schools, Chemistry, Fine Art and Hospitality Management Departments are found in a limited number of HEIs, and within areas of study, he design and content of courses varies considerably. Consequently, we need to examine the reasons for the initial HE decision by subject applied for. It is not surprising that patterns as were revealed by the 'clear plans' variable are apparent in this exploration too, with their implicit vocational-to-non-vocational range, and this will be explored further below. Having applied for HE in order to get a good job varied by subject opted for – with those who had applied for Maths & Computing, Law and Physical Sciences (interestingly, the discipline areas found in the recent graduate cohort studies as likely to lead to relatively high earnings) most likely to give this option, as will be seen in the comparison. Those studying less vocationally-oriented subjects, as suggested in the preceding section, were among the more likely to have given desire to study the particular subject as an option, and teachers' encouragement was most likely to have been mentioned by those opting for these subjects too: Physical sciences, Linguistics and Classics, Languages, and Historical and Philosophical subjects. Conversely, careers advice was most likely to have been regarded as influential by those opting for Engineering and Technology , Mass Communication and Documentation, and most likely to have influenced those in the highest socio-economic category – as was the desire to be a student. Table 4.6 shows clear differences by the broad subject groups, covering all rather than the selected sub-groups examined according to self-rated numeracy in Chapter 3.

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Table 4.6: Comparison of key characteristics of accepted applicants by subject/discipline groups

Item	All accepted applicants %	Medicine & dentistry %	Subjects allied to medicine %	Biology, vet sci, agric etc. %	Physical sciences %	Maths & computing sciences %	Engineering & tech %	Architecture building & planning %	Social studies %	Law %
Per cent female	**54**	57	74	64	40	22	14	32	59	61
Average age	**20.5**	20.615	23.7	20	19.3	19.9	20	20.4	21.5	19.9
Per cent high soc-econ.[19]	**18**	34	13	17	22	16	20	21	17	16
Reasons for HE:										
- normal thing…	**35**	44	27	35	41	39	39	33	38	39
- part of career plans	**77**	91	83	78	72	73	77	84	75	84
- to get good job	**78**	70	73	80	82	84	80	78	78	83
- to study subject	**71**	87	71	76	78	67	68	68	64	69
- friends doing it	**14**	14	9	15	18	16	15	13	15	13
Reasons for subject										
- enjoy studying it	**77**	76	59	85	89	84	77	63	71	60
- get good grades	**41**	50	26	42	55	52	44	27	37	29
- to enter profession	**43**	90	76	48	32	35	47	65	34	64
- difficulty deciding	**8**	3	5	8	10	8	8	8	10	8
Excellent written communication*	**20**	27	19	17	16	16	14	16	20	30
Excellent numeracy skills*	**17**	36	15	13	30	34	34	19	14	13
Average UCAS tariff[20]	**5.2**	6.7	4.1	5.3	6.5	5.2	5.3	5.2	5.1	6.1
Average career plan score[21]	**2.7**	1.4	1.6	2.9	3.4	3.0	2.5	2.0	3.0	2.3

* Self-evaluation as 'Excellent' on range of 'Excellent', 'Very good', 'Good', 'Adequate' or 'Not very good' [19] From higher managerial or professional household (SES1), UK-domiciled respondents only

[20] From categories 1 - 11, where 1 = 0 and 11 = 540+ (NB non-standard qualifications zero-rated), UK-domiciled respondents only

Table 4.6 (cont): Comparison of key characteristics of accepted applicants by subject/discipline groups

Item	All accepted applicants%	Business & admin. studies %	Mass comm. & docum. %	Linguistics and classics %	Languages %	Hist. and philosoph. studies %	Creative arts & design %	Education %	Science with social science %	Social science with arts %	Interdisc. & other combined %
Per cent female	**54**	48	56	73	72	50	60	86	53	62	59
Average age	**20.5**	19.8	19.5	20.1	19.5	20.2	21	22	20.2	19.7	20.4
Per cent high soc.econ[1]	**18**	15	14	21	23	23	15	11	15	18	18
Reasons for HE:											
- normal thing…	**35**	35	32	43	47	44	25	19	32	42	38
- part of career plans	**77**	76	72	69	71	64	74	85	76	76	73
- to get good job	**78**	82	80	77	80	73	70	74	79	80	77
- to study subject	**71**	53	71	77	80	79	81	65	69	71	75
- friends doing it	**14**	13	13	20	20	21	11	9	14	16	17
Reasons for subject											
- enjoy studying it	**77**	68	77	93	90	92	90	56	78	81	81
- get good grades	**41**	35	36	67	58	54	42	14	37	42	45
- to enter profession	**43**	30	33	21	23	16	38	79	40	26	37
- difficulty deciding	**8**	9	7	10	10	10	4	3	8	10	11
Excellent written communication*	**20**	15	23	47	35	32	17	15	16	25	21
Excellent numeracy skills*	**17**	18	5	6	7	9	7	8	14	9	17
Average UCAS tariff[2]	**5.2**	4.9	4.8	6.5	6.6	6.4	3.9	4.0	4.7	5.7	5.3
Average career plan score[3]	**2.7**	2.9	2.9	3.6	3.6	3.9	2.6	1.5	2.8	3.3	3.1

Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted applicants, full survey, weighted.

[21] On scale of 1-7 as in previous figures.

We draw on these data to give just a few examples of the typical students found in subject/discipline groups, not yet scrutinised:

- It seems that Maths and Computing students are most often young males applying directly from secondary schools, generally providing a profile of 'traditional HE applicants', although slightly under-representing those from the most advantaged socio-economic backgrounds; and more likely than students generally to have entered HE to enable them to study their subject. It is not surprising that over a third rated their numeracy skills as 'excellent', or that they were considerably more likely than most students to have chosen their subject on the basis of having obtained good grades in it at school - or perhaps that they were less likely than average to rate their written communication skills as excellent; but the finding that their average UCAS Tariff score is exactly that – average – and their average career plan score is above average, might be considered more surprising. In terms of the experience of previous cohorts of mathematics and computing students, their greater likelihood of entering HE as part of their career plans and in order to get a good job suggests well-founded decisions, given Mathematics and Computing graduates' high earnings premia and well-above average likelihood of achieving a job that uses their skills and knowledge, related to the perennial graduate labour market finding that employers complain of a shortage of numerate graduates (refs). Engineering students have a similar profile – slightly older on average but similar on most dimensions, although more likely to have a profession in mind, as befits the more vocational orientation of most engineering courses.
- Business and Administrative Studies students are, and surprisingly, younger on average than either of these groups, and than students generally, almost as likely to be women as men, less likely to come from high socio-economic backgrounds, and among the most likely to be instrumentally rather than intrinsically-orientated, with the lowest propensity to have given desire to study the subject as a reason for applying for higher education. Their self-rated written communication scores are less likely to have been excellent, but their UCAS tariffs, numeracy and career plan scores are around average for all accepted applicants. In terms of the likelihood of having a clear idea about the occupation sought at the outset of study, Business and Management Studies has the median score in relation to the subject classification: *the* classic mid-point between vocational and non-vocational subjects (Wilton 2006).
- Nearly three-quarters of Languages students are female, most likely to be young school-leavers whose likelihood of coming from the highest socio-economic category is second only to Medicine and dentistry – so it is not surprising that they are most likely of all the groups to have give 'it is the normal thing for someone like me' as one of their reasons for HE study, along with desire to study the subject – chosen, most often, because they had enjoyed it and got good grades at school. They are also among the most likely to have self-rated excellent written communication skills, and very substantially lower excellent numeracy skills than average. They do, however, believe that choice of subject will enable them to enter a specific profession and get a good job.

Summary

This section has discussed the reasons applicants gave for deciding to enter HEI and choosing their particular higher education institution.

- Career goals, enjoyment, and personal fulfilment were the most common reasons for applicants choosing to enter HE.
- Availability and content of particular courses, location, and reputation were all important factors when applicants were choosing their HEI.
- The decision to enter higher education and choice of higher education institution is influenced by both socio-economic and cultural factors

- Parents' socio-economic background and experience of higher education had a clear impact upon whether a student decided to apply for higher education. Traditional applicants who had parents with experience of higher education were the most likely to state that they had chosen to apply for higher education because it was the normal thing for someone like them to do, and in many cases it was what they were expected to do, with alternatives not being considered. These applicants also appeared to have received advice from the widest range of sources.
- Choice of HEI was influenced by socio-economic background, parental experience of HE, age
- Certain groups faced particular constraints when making when deciding which HEI they would attend. Mature students were often limited by their need to study locally because of family or work commitments. Asian students, particularly female applicants from Asian Pakistani communities, were also likely state that they had chosen their HEI out of a desire to study while living at home – as were Asian Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean applicants.
- The analyses in this chapter reinforce the picture of patterned diversity discussed in Chapter 3, reflecting cumulative advantages, preferences and restrictions, that result in the student profile for different subject groups being systematically different and reflecting different access to routes within HE. They also reveal that type of university and types of course studied are closely related – as will be discussed in the chapter that follows.

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CHAPTER 5

How did students choose their courses and subjects?

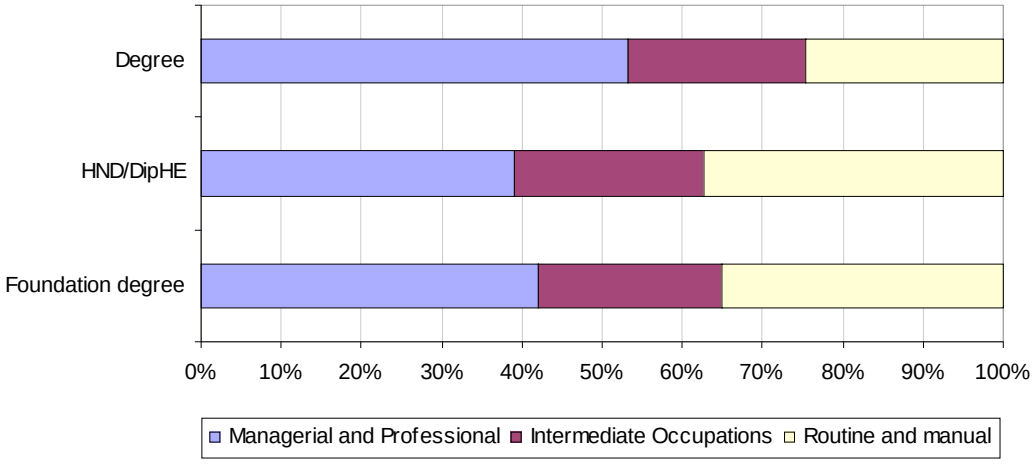
Types of course

The majority of respondents who were accepted onto higher education courses were planning to study degree level courses. Almost 94 per cent of respondents were planning to study for a degree, whilst 4 per cent were planning to study for a foundation degree and 2 per cent for an HND or DipHE.

There were few differences between students electing to study on different types of higher education courses. One noticeable difference between students studying for foundation degrees or HND/DipHEs and those studying for undergraduate degrees lasting three years or more was their gender distribution. The cohort of students planning to study for a three or four year degree was 56 per cent female, but within the cohort of students planning to study for foundation degrees or HND/DipHEs, there was larger proportions of men (slightly over 50 per cent of foundation degree students and 51 per cent of HND/DipHE students). This reflects the types of subjects available for study at foundation degree and HND/DipHE level. Traditionally 'male' subjects such as engineering and other technological subjects are more common at these levels than at degree level, whilst, with the exception of Creative Arts and Design, the more 'female-dominated' humanities subjects such as languages and historical and philosophical studies are less common.

Social class also appeared to have an impact on type of course chosen. Whilst 41 per cent of the sample was from a managerial and professional background, students from these backgrounds made up only 31 per cent of the students planning to study for a foundation degree and 28 per cent of those planning to study for an HND or DipHE. Conversely, students from routine and manual occupational backgrounds made up 20 per cent of the total sample, but 26 per cent of students planning to study for a foundation degree or an HND/DipHE. Students planning to study for foundation degrees and HND or DipHEs were also less likely to have at least one parent with experience of higher education, with 35 per cent of those planning on foundation degree and 32 per cent on HND/DipHEs having at least one parent who had studied for a higher education qualification or who was currently studying, compared to 43 per cent of those planning to study for a degree course.

Figure 5.1: Type of higher education course by occupational background



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted applicants to full survey, weighted, excluding unknown occupational backgrounds

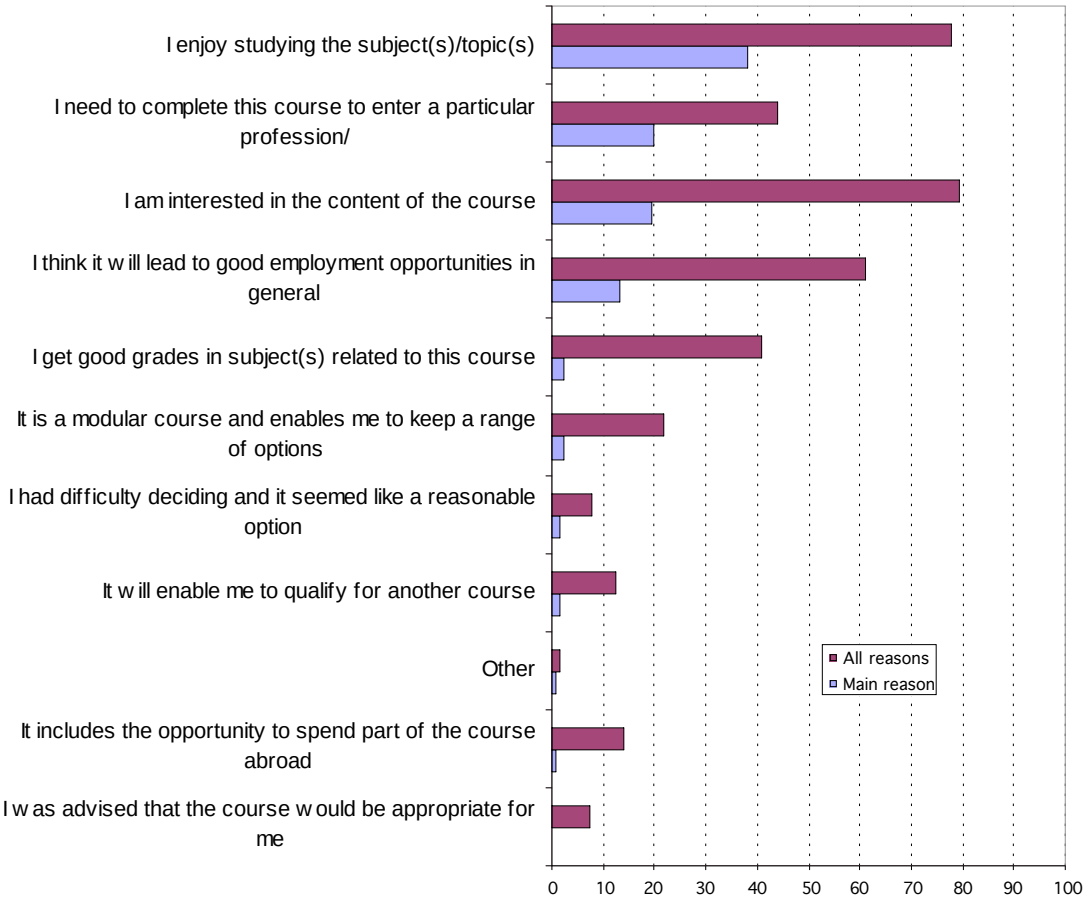
As would be expected, students studying for foundation degrees or HND/DipHEs were likely to be older, more likely to be in employment, less likely to be planning to study at an old (pre-1992) university, and less likely to rate their numeracy and literacy skills highly than students studying for 3 and 4 year degrees.

When comparing foundation degrees and HND/DipHEs, some regional variation was evident, with students from the North East represented disproportionately among foundation degree students and HND/DipHE students (7 per cent of foundation degree students and 4 per cent of HND/DipHE students) whilst the West Midlands showed the opposite pattern with students from the West Midlands comprising 6 per cent of the foundation degree cohort and11 per cent of HND/DipHEs. Students in Scotland made up 3 per cent of the foundation degree cohort and 14 per cent of the HND/DipHE cohort. Whether this reflects differences in demand, in terms of local employment demand, or student demand, or in differences in the range of HEIs or courses offered in these regions, is not clear – but the higher proportion studying HNDs in Scotland is likely to reflect the more established 'joined-up' thinking, practice and transition opportunities in the Scottish FE/HE education system, which is also characterised by slightly higher levels of participation of students from manual and unskilled operative backgrounds than in other UK countries (Raffe *et al.* 2007).

Reasons for choice of course

Respondents were asked their reasons for choosing a particular course of study. The four most popular reasons, both overall and as main reasons, are the same: interest in the course and employment or career-related reasons – and these were most important for all groups across the spectrum.

Figure 5.2: All and main reasons for choosing the particular course of study



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK applicants to full survey weighted.

Those doing Foundation degrees and HNDs responded similarly to those opting for traditional other undergraduate degrees in terms of main reasons. As far as other reasons were concerned, they were considerably less likely to have entered HE as 'the normal next thing' to have chosen their subject on the basis of previous study or god grades. (26 per cent o Foundation degree, 28 per cent of HND/DipHE and 42 per cent of undergraduate applicants

gave this reason). The other main difference was propensity to have chosen it because it will enable them to qualify for another course (22 per cent of Foundation degree, 21 per cent of HND/DipHE applicants and 12 per cent of undergraduates gave this reason): which is not surprising.

There were, however, more substantial differences in the extent to which reasons were more and less popular with different categories of applicant, in terms of socio-demographic and educational attributes. Younger applicants' reasons reflected their greater likelihood of progressing straight from school to study subjects they had enjoyed or performed well in, their less clear career plans and lower likelihood of having taken an instrumental, employment focused approach to subject choice, and older ones very considerably more likely to refer to the objective of entering a particular profession and less likely to refer to prior study.

Table 5.1: Reasons for choice of subject by age group

Reason	18 and under	19-20	21-24	25 and over	All accepted applicants
Enjoy studying the subject	82.2	79.7	71.9	57.1	77.6
Get good grades in subjects related to the course	50.8	41.2	26.3	14.4	41.7
Interested in the content of the course	82.7	79.3	76.7	66.3	79.3
Modular course, keeps options open	23.5	21.7	18.3	12.4	21.2
Opportunity to spend part of the course abroad	16.0	12.8	9.6	4.6	13.2
Need the course to enter particular profession	39.5	41.3	51.6	63.2	44.0
Will lead to good employment opportunities	64.4	60.8	57.4	49.8	61.1

Source: Futuretrack 2006. All UK accepted applicants weighted.

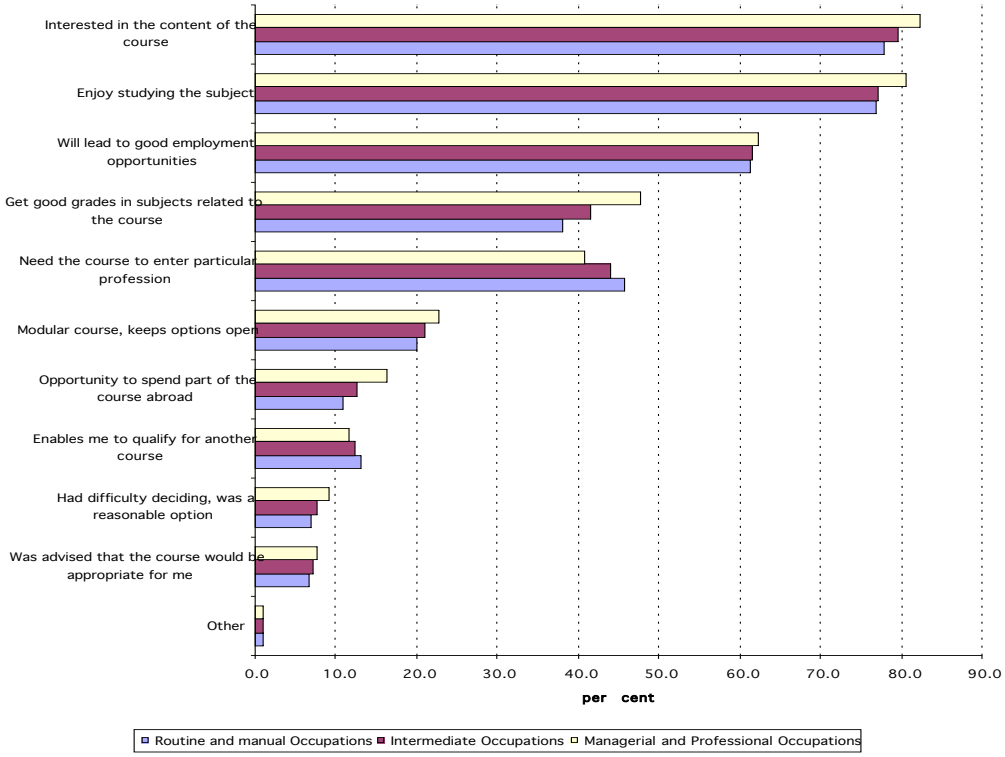
There is of course a correlation between age at which students applied for HE courses and socio-economic background, so it is not surprising that applicants from higher social classes were similarly more likely to have stated that they had already enjoyed studying the subject and were interested in the contents, whereas applicants from lower social classes were more likely to say they had chosen their course because they wanted to enter a particular profession or they thought it would lead to good employment opportunities in general.

In some cases this involved longer-term planning than others:

> *'I wanted to go into teaching but didn't want to go straight into an initial teacher training course, therefore I choose to do a subject I enjoyed and then progress to complete a PGCE course'.* [Female, 19-20, East Midlands, White, SES Intermediate, Other old university, Interdisciplinary and other combined subjects]

> *'This particular course, thus Accounting and Finance, is my dream come true on completion of the degree, and its part of my process to become a professional accountant'.*
> [Female, 21-24, North West, Black, Business & Admin, Other old university

Figure 5.3: Reasons for subject choice by broad socio-economic background



Source: Futuretrack 2006. All UK accepted applicants weighted.

These findings are reinforced by Table 5.2, showing reasons by situation when applying for the place, and by Figure 5.4, which illustrates the first and second generation HE differences.

Figure 5.5 shows gender differences, reinforcing the emerging picture of women more likely to be demonstrating career planning with a particular next step in mind, and men more likely to be intrinsically-orientated, but concerned about good employment opportunities generally.

Broad ethnicity, shown in Figure 5.6, highlights once again the lesser likelihood of Black applicants being subject-led and their tendency to provide less reasons overall.

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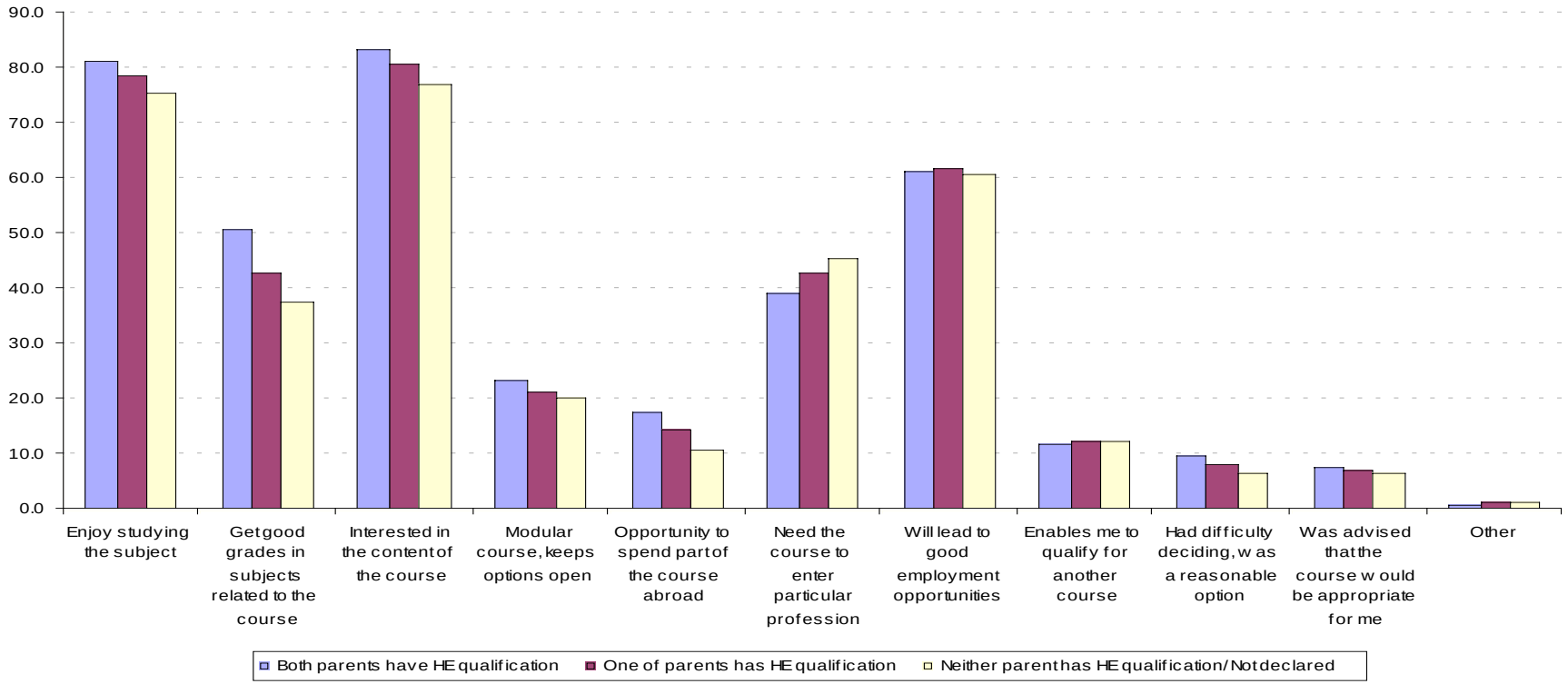
Table 5.2: Reasons for choice of subject by situation when applying

	Situation prior to application							
Reasons	**Final year in secondary school / sixth form college**	**Gap year**	**HE or Foundation student**	**Student at FE college**	**Employed**	**Non-employed**	**Unemployed**	**All accepted applicants**
Enjoy studying the subject	81.7	79.5	75.7	75.7	66.6	63.9	70.2	77.6
Get good grades in subjects related to the course	50.4	48.4	31.5	32.6	25.7	17.3	27.7	41.7
Interested in the content of the course	82.4	82.8	70.9	74.8	76.2	71.9	74.6	79.3
Modular course, keeps options open	23.5	23.2	19.5	19.3	16.4	14.9	17.3	21.2
Opportunity to spend part of the course abroad	16.1	18.9	8.4	8.6	10.1	6.1	7.9	13.2
Need the course to enter particular profession	39.6	35.2	47.5	48.0	53.8	53.0	45.5	44.0
Will lead to good employment opportunities	64.3	57.0	52.7	57.7	56.8	45.8	54.8	61.1
Enables me to qualify for another course	10.9	12.7	13.7	16.4	12.4	18.6	11.4	12.5
Had difficulty deciding, was a reasonable option	9.6	11.3	3.1	4.8	5.0	1.2	7.3	7.7
Was advised that the course would be appropriate for me	7.3	8.7	8.5	8.2	5.4	9.2	7.0	7.2
Other	0.8	1.8	4.1	1.2	2.0	3.6	2.8	1.2
N	198227	4290	2245	78482	50783	1367	9077	351750

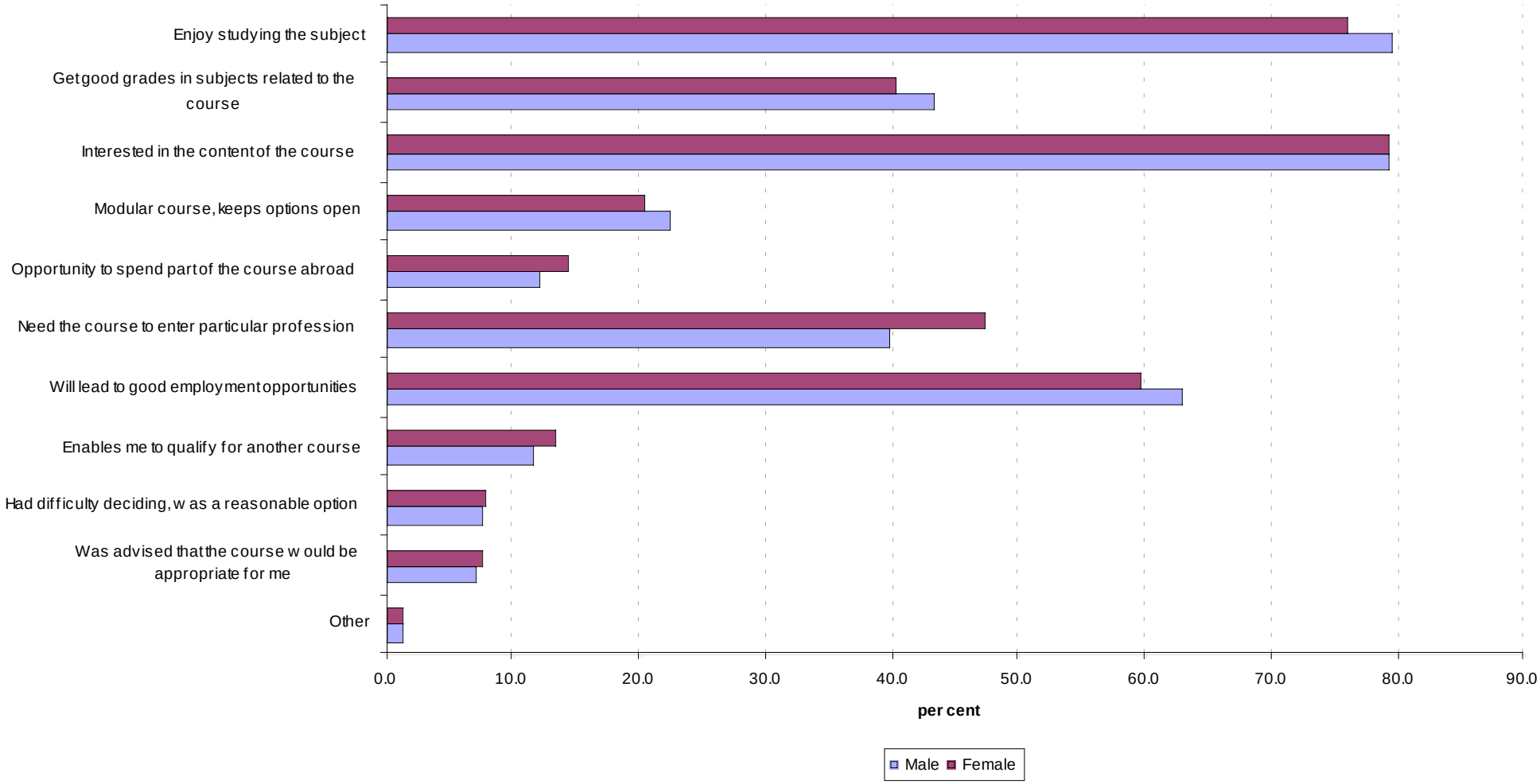
Source: Futuretrack 2006. All UK accepted applicants weighted.

Figure 5.4: Reasons for choice of subject by parental HE participation



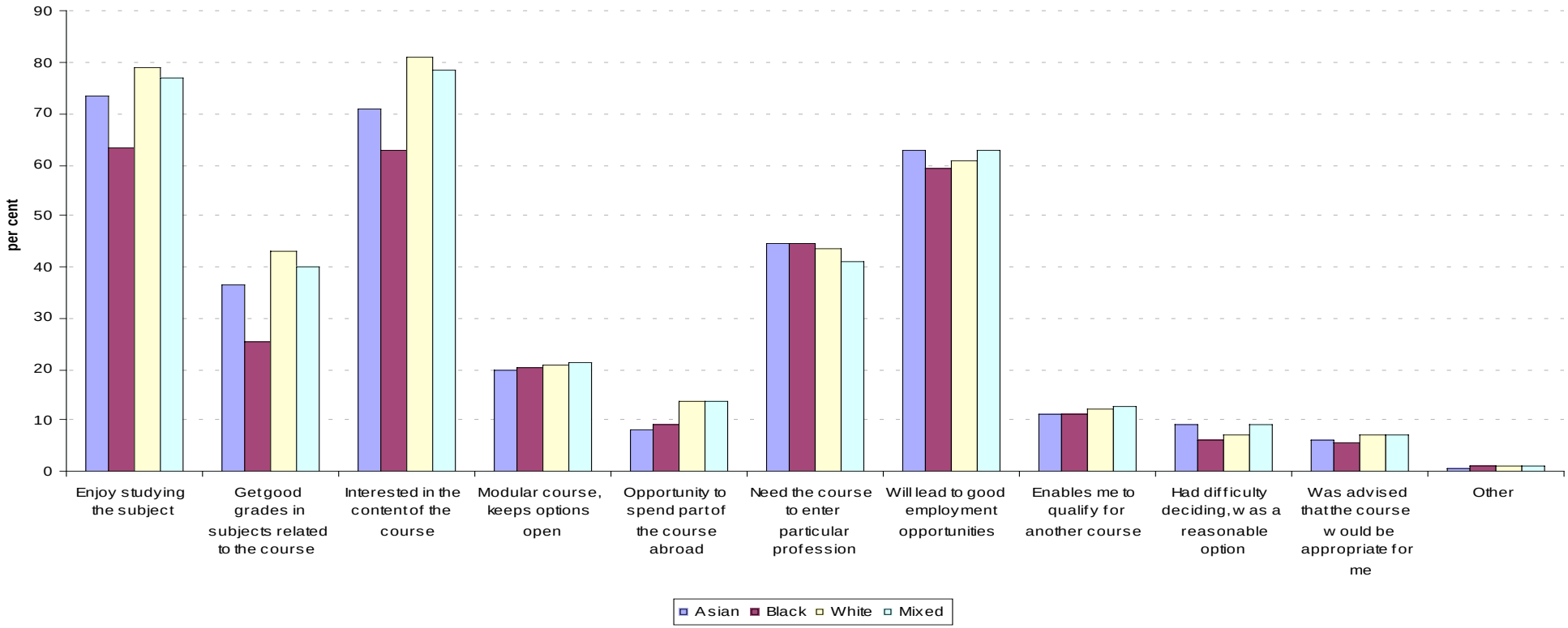
Source: Futuretrack 2006. All UK accepted applicants weighted.

Figure 5.5: Reasons for choice of subject by gender



Source: Futuretrack 2006. All UK accepted applicants weighted.

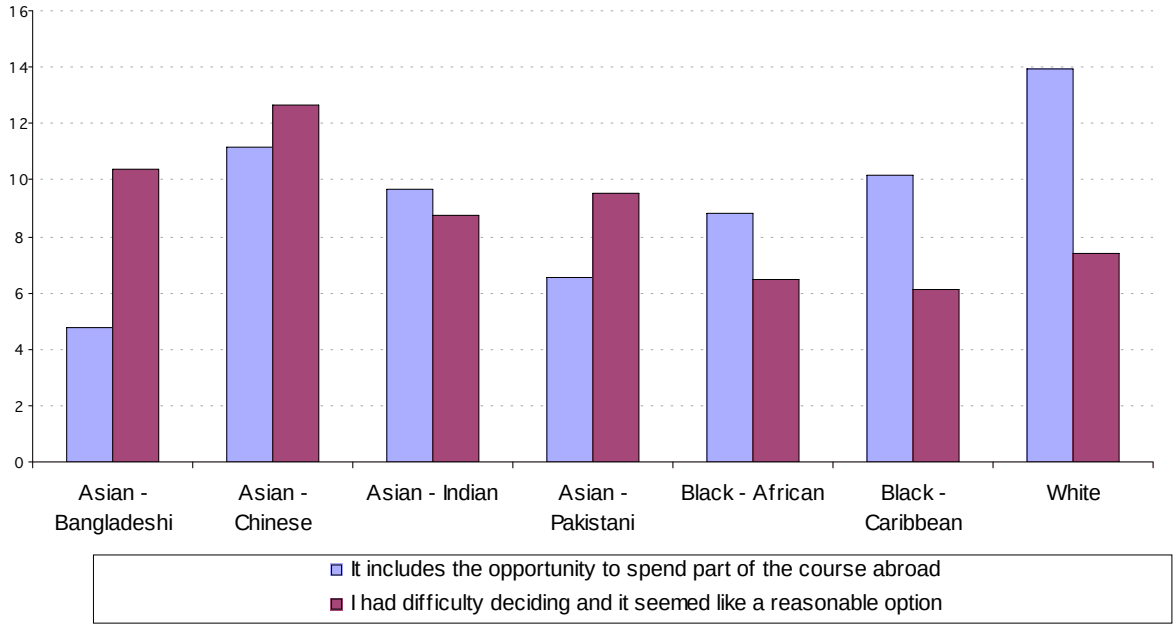
Figure 5.6: Reasons for choice of subject by broad ethnic group



Source: Futuretrack 2006. All UK accepted applicants weighted.

These differences, as in the questions about HE participation decisions discussed in the previous chapter, are amplified if we compare responses by more detailed ethnic identity. In particular, there were wide disparities in the opportunity to spend part of the course abroad as a reason for course choice, from 14 per cent of White students to less than 5 per cent o Asian Bangladeshis; and the range of responses that applicants had had difficulty deciding was also twice as frequent among Chinese Asian applicants as among Black Caribbean or Black African applicants.

Figure 5.7: Selected reasons for choice of subject, by ethnic group



Source: Futuretrack 2006, UK accepted applicants, Selected groups weighted.

The pressure to make choices was mentioned by respondents from all social backgrounds, and the following example perhaps shows why older applicants may be more clear about why they are making the choices they have opted for:

> *'At age 23, come September, this will my second time at university, I already have one degree. Although I enjoyed my time at University and grew as a person I did not enjoy my course. I believe too much pressure is put on 17/18 year olds to choose a university and course to spend 3 years and a lot of money on when they are unsure of what they want to do. At that age I was unsure and chose the thing that at Sixth Form I found easiest, Maths, which I hated at degree level. There were no options offered to me about delaying my application or doing a gap year like other people I know did. I think time out such as that should be encouraged in order to get life experience and find out what direction you want to go in and what you would enjoy doing before making such a hefty investment. Second time round, I think I have got it right!!'.* [Female, 21-24, North West, White, SES Intermediate, Other HEI, Subjects allied to Medicine]

The influence of family on subject choices

Some professions are known to have dynastic qualities, where children have a propensity to follow parents into them (Chevalier 2002) and successive studies have identified the importance of the influence of family and friends on the decision to enter HE and on choice of institution. Such advice is generally assumed to be helpful to those who have family able to provide it, and it tends to be associated with social advantage and parents with experience of higher education, as was revealed in analysis of why respondents had applied to enter HE in the preceding chapter. However, in relation to course choices, family influence was

mentioned both positively and negatively in relation to choice of subject of study, as the following examples show, in terms of maintaining family traditions, in relation to aspirations of social mobility and indicative of restraints:

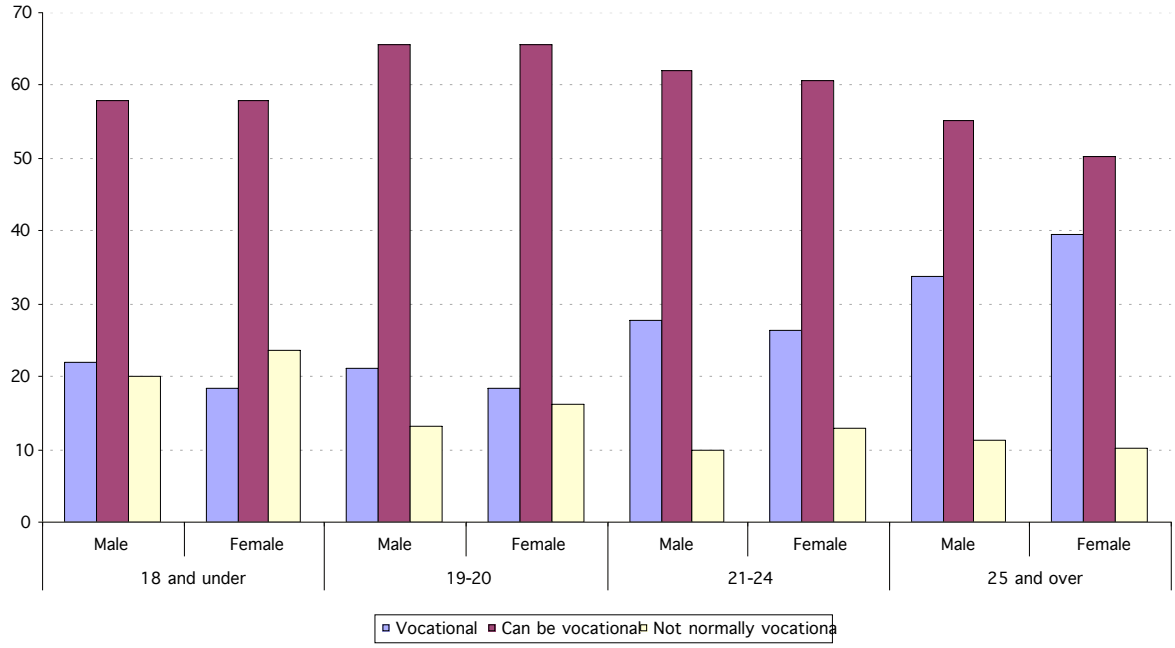
> '*Several family members have done the same course and I like the thought of carrying on the tradition'*. [Female, 19-20, North West, White, Professional/Managerial background, Law, Russell Group]
>
> '*Parents kinda pushed me into law* '[Male, 19-20, Yorks & Humber, White, Professional/Managerial background, Law, New university]
>
> '*My parents pushed me to study this course*' (Medicine). [Male, 19-20, North West, Asian, Routine manual background, Medicine & dentistry, other old university]
>
> *'My choices were limited, I was expected to either study Law or Medicine'*. [Female, 18 and under, Greater London, Asian, Managerial , Law, Other old university]
>
> *My husband encouraged me because he studied the same subject and wanted me to have the same career as him, so did I.* [Female, 19-20, Merseyside, Asian, Intermediate occupations, Mathematical & computer science, Russell Group]
>
> *I wanted to do Fashion Photography but my parents would not allow it.* [Female, 18 and under, West Midlands, White, Professional/Managerial background, Mass communications, New university]
>
> *'I have always wanted to study architecture but as my parents hadn't planned on me going to university they discouraged me from studying such along course. Instead (not wanting to miss-out on uni with my friends I opted to study an NHS funded course in radiography so that one day I may be able to go back and fund myself through a course in architecture working part time in a good job'*. [Male, 21-25, South West, White, SES Managerial, 1992 University, Architecture, Building and Planning]

Career planning and vocational choices

In Chapter 3 we discussed the extent to which students embarked on courses with a clear view of there these would lead, identifying a spectrum for vocational courses that effectively constitute the first stage of professional occupational training and induction, to general academic courses which develop knowledge and high level skills through study of particular subjects or areas of study, but do not lead clearly in one occupational direction for most of those who study them. On the basis of the responses given by course applicants to the 'clarity of view about career plans' in relation to their subject choice, we have classified these into three categories; clearly vocational subjects; subjects which generally develop broader (and sometimes, within the broad category, more specific) occupationally-related skills that may or may not be undertaken with a clear occupational destination in mind, and subjects which are not normally regarded as vocational[22]. An examination of how respondents who had accepted 2006 HE places were distributed among these categories indicates, as was indicated by Table 5.1, that older applicants are more likely to be embarking on clearly vocational courses, showing their more employment-orientated approach to HE than younger applicants, the youngest applicants were most likely to be choosing non-vocational options. Taking the analysis further, Figure 5.8 uses this variable to shows the significance of age and also reveals that women in all but the oldest group were slightly less likely than men to have opted for vocational courses, and slightly more likely than men to opt for non-vocational courses.

[22] See the discussion following Figure 3.4 on page…???

Figure 5.8: Extent to which course was likely to be vocational, by age group and gender



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

It is important to bear in mind that this figure also reveals the extent to which the majority of all groups, however, had chosen their course with some vocational direction, and their responses to the 'clarity of view about career plans' suggests that many of those in the 'possible' vocational options had embarked on them with a clear direction, if not destination, in mind – as some of the comments made by respondents reveal. For example, two contrasting examples of applicants opting for Hospitality Management and Physics, which are at different ends of the 'vocationality' spectrum, show an equally clear and confident subject-directed motivation that they expect to direct career decisions in a very direct way:

> '*I have chosen to do physics because my mind works in such a way that I can easily simulate situations in my head and easily finding solutions. so I want to make maximum use of this ability if mine, and using science to do some good to humanity. I am sure that I will contribute to the future innovations in the field of physics*'. [Male, 19-20, Other overseas, Russell Group University, Mathematical and Computer Sciences]

> '*I have worked in the hospitality industry for few years. I feel very self-confident performing this job. I would like to develop myself, studying this course*'. [Female, 21-25, EU, 1992 University, Business and Administration Studies]

It will be interesting to see how far ambitions and aspirations are revised in the light of experience – both widening of horizons and recognition of educational and labour market realities.

Students planning to study for a foundation degree or an HND or DipHE were less likely to give enjoyment of the subject as a reason, and more likely to say they were undertaking the course because it would lead to good employment opportunities or allow them to take another course. This is also reflected in the extent to which those with non-standard prior educational qualifications were substantially more likely to have opted for vocational courses than those with UCAS tariff scores, but as Table 6.3 shows, those with the highest of these are very much more polarised towards the vocational and non-vocational extremes, reflecting the 'traditional HE-applicant' patterns revealed throughout this analysis of opting for more

established courses: 'old profession' or discipline-based rather than subject-area based academic programmes of study that are more often based at the pre-1992 universities.

Table 5.3: Extent to which respondents had opted for vocational subjects, by qualifications at entry

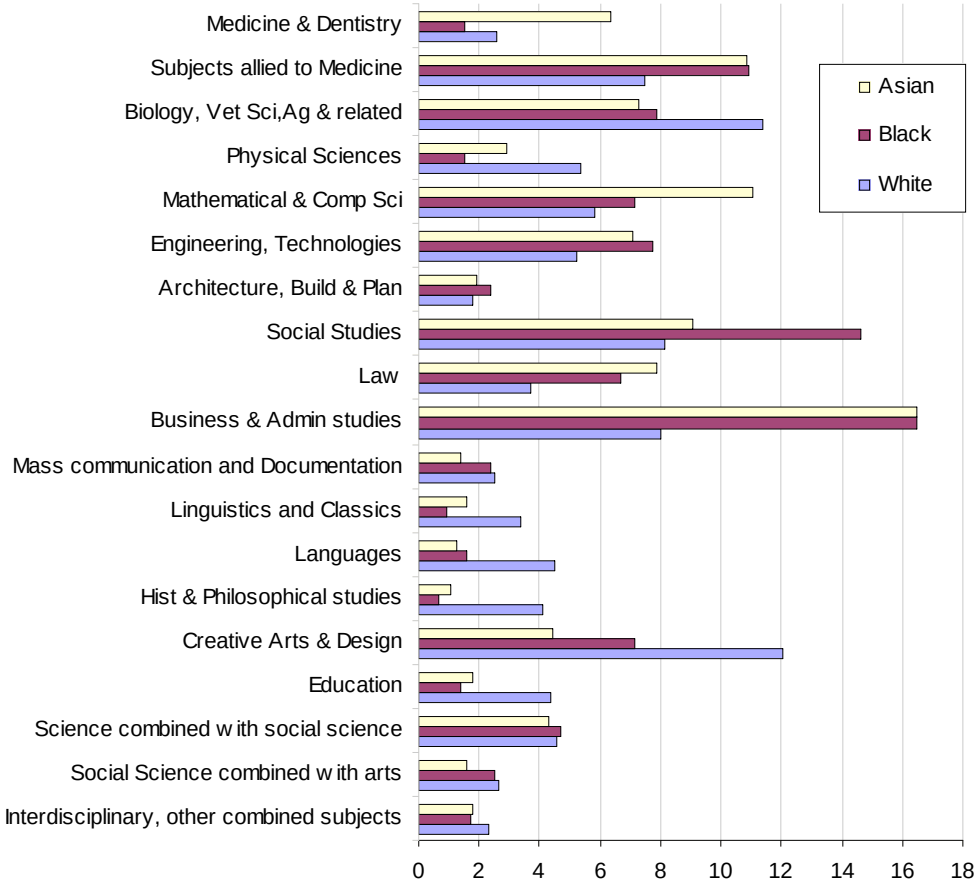
Category of subject studied	Educational Qualifications at Entry				All UK applicants
	Non-standard	Low	Medium	High	Non-standard
Vocational	27.4	18.5	18.4	23.2	22.7
Can be vocational	61.0	69.3	61.6	49.5	59.8
Not normally vocational	11.6	12.2	20.0	27.3	17.5

All UK-domiciled accepted respondents (N= 409957)

Answers about why they chose their subjects of study differed considerably according to broad ethnic group, as might be expected from their different choices over the subject and vocational spectrum, as illustrated in the comparison between Asian, Black and White applicants in Figure 5.2. More detailed interrogation of the data by ethnic sub-group allows for clearer understanding of the variables involved, as illustrated in the previous section by Figure 3.2 and will be discussed below.

The previous sections have revealed that those coming from homes where progression to HE was regarded as the norm were likely to perceive themselves as having wider choices and to be more likely to have had encouragement from parents, teachers and friends to apply for HE. However, the survey also provides evidence that those coming from homes where HE participation is the norm may be more likely to progress directly from subjects they enjoyed at school, to study of these same subjects in higher education without considering the implications of choices. The subjects for which students were most likely to have applied, for these reasons, are also the subjects from which most recent cohorts of graduates have taken longest to become integrated into jobs that use their skills and qualifications. They were also the subjects that where students were most likely to have given, as a reason for applying for HE, that they were unsure about what to do next. Seventeen per cent of all accepted applicants gave uncertainty about what to do next as a reason but it was given by around a quarter of applicants in these subjects: physical sciences (24 per cent), linguistics and classics (25 per cent), languages (23 per cent) and historical and philosophical studies (26 per cent whilst the proportions were considerably lower among those opting for the more vocational courses. Students from professional and managerial households were somewhat more likely to give this reason than those from less advantaged backgrounds. At the extreme, 67 per cent of Linguistics and Classics students indicated that having achieved good grades in their subject were one of the reasons to choose to study it and 4 per cent that this was their main reason for doing so (along with 5 per cent of Mathematical & Computer science students). Ethnic minority students, particularly those from Asian backgrounds, were less likely to opt for these, and more likely to opt for vocational areas of study, as Figure 5.9 shows.

Figure 5.9: Broad subject/discipline of course, comparing Asian, Black and White applicants



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

Prior achievement and experience of a subject are good reasons for studying it, but there is a danger that other options – and the longer-term implications of choices – may not be considered adequately in cases where students proceed without much thought or guidance to opt for their best school subject. The sections that follow, where respondents' evaluations of the information and guidance they had access to, suggest that there is some evidence of this – and the longitudinal analyses will reveal the extent to which the basis of choices affects progress and subsequent career options.

> *'This particular course, thus Accounting and Finance, is my dream come true on completion of the degree, and its part of my process to become a professional accountant'.*
> [Female, 21-24, North West, Black, Business & Admin, Other old university]

Summary

This section has discussed the reasons applicants gave for choosing their particular course. It related these choices to applicants' personal characteristics and previous experiences. The following key findings emerged:

- The majority of respondents who were accepted onto higher education courses were planning to study degree level courses.

- Applicants from higher social-economic backgrounds were more likely to be applying to study on undergraduate degree programmes, and less likely to be studying for HNDs or DipHEs than those from routine and manual backgrounds.

- Applicants planning to study for foundation degrees or HND/DipHEs were likely to be older, more likely to be in employment, less likely to be planning to study at an old (pre-1992) university, and less likely to rate their numeracy and literacy skills highly than students studying for three and four year degrees. There is also some regional variation in the types of courses applicants planned to study.

- The four most popular reasons for choosing to study a particular course were: interest in the course and employment or career-related reasons. Younger applicants were more likely to choose subjects they are good at or enjoy, and they were less likely than older applicants to give instrumental, employment related reasons for choosing their course. Applicants from higher social classes are also more likely to choose subjects they enjoy or are good at, whilst those from lower social classes were more likely to give employment related reasons. This reflects the correlation between the age at which applicants applied to enter higher education and their socio-economic background. Older applicants generally have clearer reasons for choosing their course.

- Differences in distribution over the range of subjects by ethnicity and gender are striking. Both women and those from minority ethic groups are most likely to have applied for courses at the vocational end of the spectrum and in the case of Asian applicants, are particularly concentrated in Medicine and Dentistry, Subjects Allied to Medicine, Maths and Computing and Business and Administration. Both Asian and black applicants were twice as likely to have applied for the last of these than White applicants. Conversely, White applicants were considerably more likely to apply for Creative Art and Design, Physical Sciences and Biological, Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences.

- Subject choice remains profoundly gendered, and women's greater clarity in ideas about the career they aspire to apparent in the analysis of vocational subject choices, as the discussion in chapter 3 revealed.

- Family influence was regarded both positively and negatively by applicants. When family members had experience of higher education, they were able to offer useful advice, but family pressure to study particular subjects was also seen to constrain choices.

- We discuss the extent to which areas of study were likely to be vocational, sometimes vocational or almost never vocational, and considered the profiles of applicants in relation to this. Non-standard, particularly older applicants, were more likely than others to apply for courses at the vocational end of the spectrum, as were those with non-standard or lower pre-entry qualifications; although some of the courses requiring high qualifications were at the vocational end of the spectrum.

- The majority of applicants had chosen their course with at least some consideration of its vocational direction. Older applicants were more likely to be embarking on clearly vocational courses, showing their more employment-orientated approach to HE. The youngest applicants were most likely to be choosing non-vocational options.

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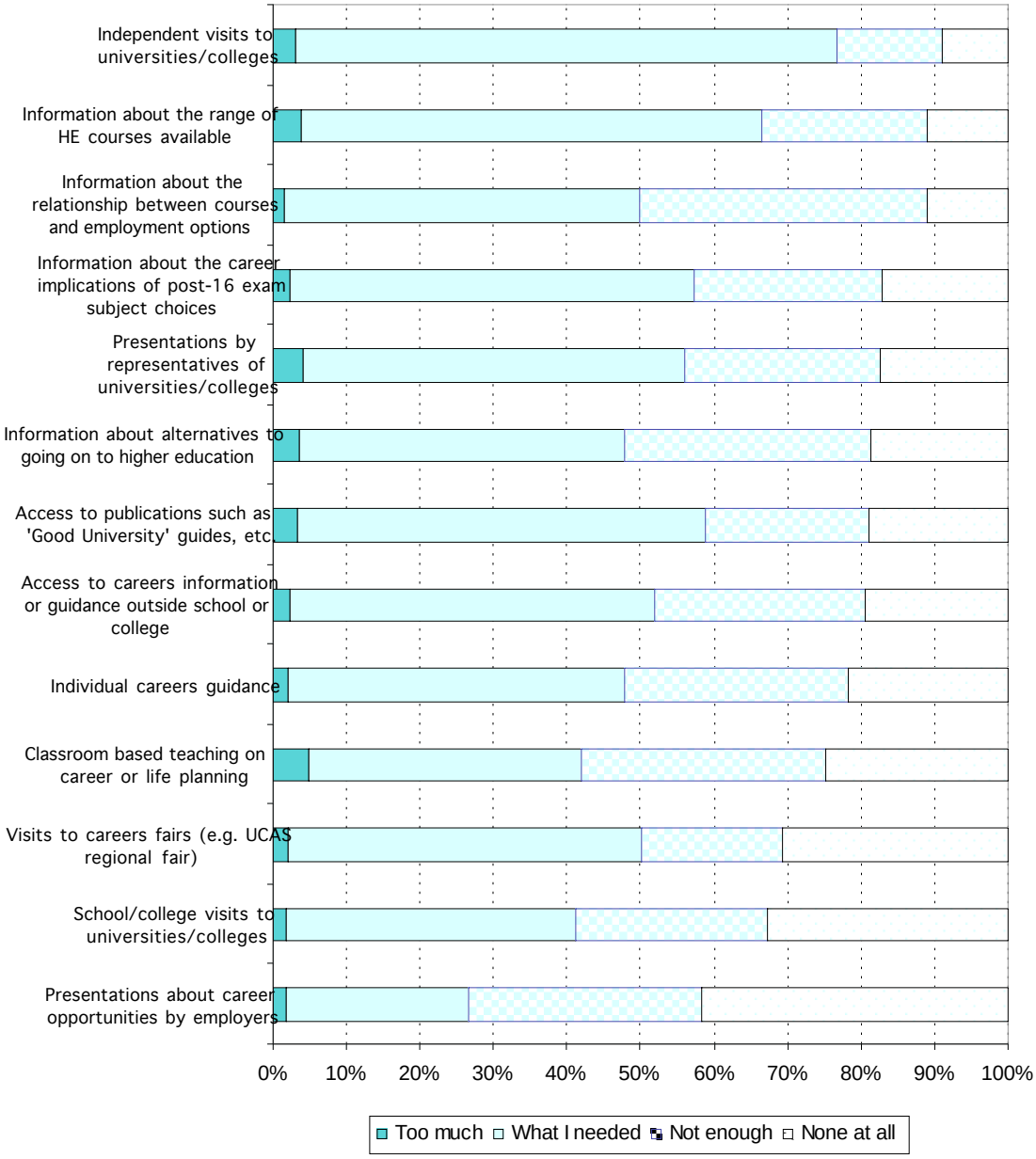
CHAPTER 6

Access to careers guidance and information

We have seen that the majority of applicants were embarking on full-time HE with relatively clear ideas about career direction, but the analysis shows that some categories of applicant were more likely to have claimed clarity of career plans than others: female, Black and older applicants, those coming from social backgrounds other than the most traditional HE recruit Professional and Managerial backgrounds, those with higher average UCAS tariff scores, those applying for subject areas at the most clearly vocational end of the spectrum. How far are such differences indicative of the extent to which applicants had access to careers information and guidance prior to making their choices of course? Figure 6.1 depicts respondents' reported access to relevant information.

Figure 6.1: Amount of careers information and guidance prior to HE



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

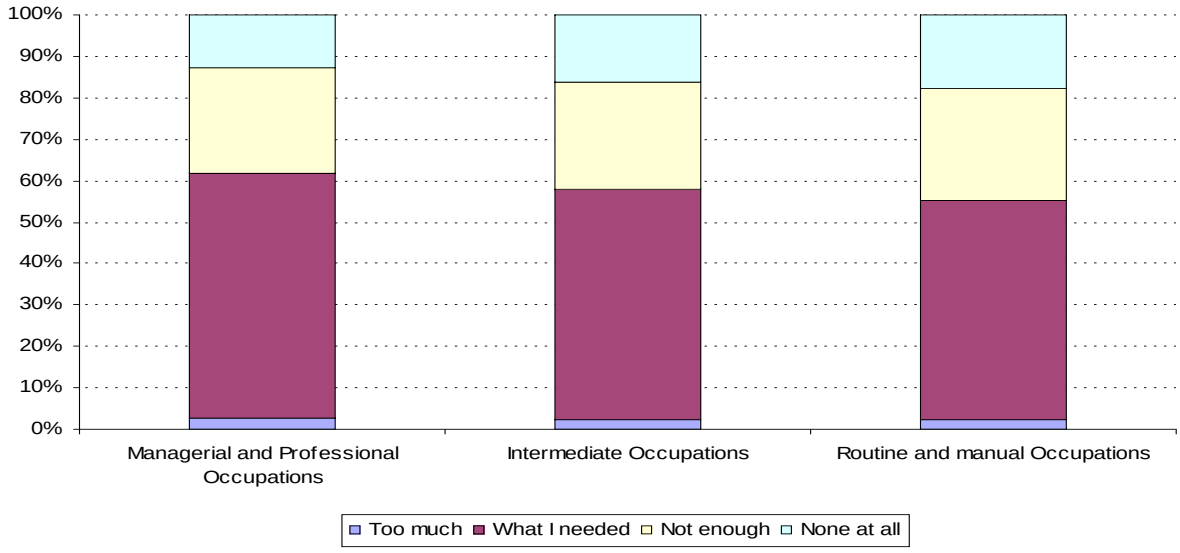
The figure provides the overall picture of the extent to which Futuretrack participants claimed to have had careers advice and information from a wide range of sources identified at the piloting stage as being important to applicants. Those items at the top of the Figure were those where lower proportions of applicants reported not enough or no access or information, and those at the bottom are those least often available to applications, but the degree to which different groups of respondents had different degrees of access to information and guidance was substantial and it is worth exploring the implications of this. We group these under the headings of information about HE options and choices and information about career options: two related but distinct categories.

Information about HE options and choices

Information about the implications of post-16 subject choices and information about the range of courses available

As Figure 6.2 shows, 38 per cent of those from Professional/Managerial backgrounds complained of having has not enough or no guidance on this, compared with 42 per cent of those from Intermediate occupational backgrounds and 45 per cent of those from Routine and manual occupational backgrounds. We also find that Black minority ethnic applicants, those applying as employees, non-employed or unemployed were more likely to have experiences a gap here, reflecting the greater likelihood of being mature applicants.

Figure 6.2: Extent to which accepted applicants reported access to information about the career implications of post-16 subject choices, by broad socio-economic background



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants who had provided socio-economic details to UCAS, full survey, weighted`

Over half (51 per cent) of those who applied as FE college students had had insufficient or no information about this, which may reflect previous school experience rather than FE experience. The high incidence of reported inadequate information about the implications of post-16 subject choices is a finding prompted by students who participated in the piloting workshops for the questionnaire, who raised the issue as a problem they were encountering as applicants, having chosen 'the wrong' GCSEs for HE options they had subsequently found

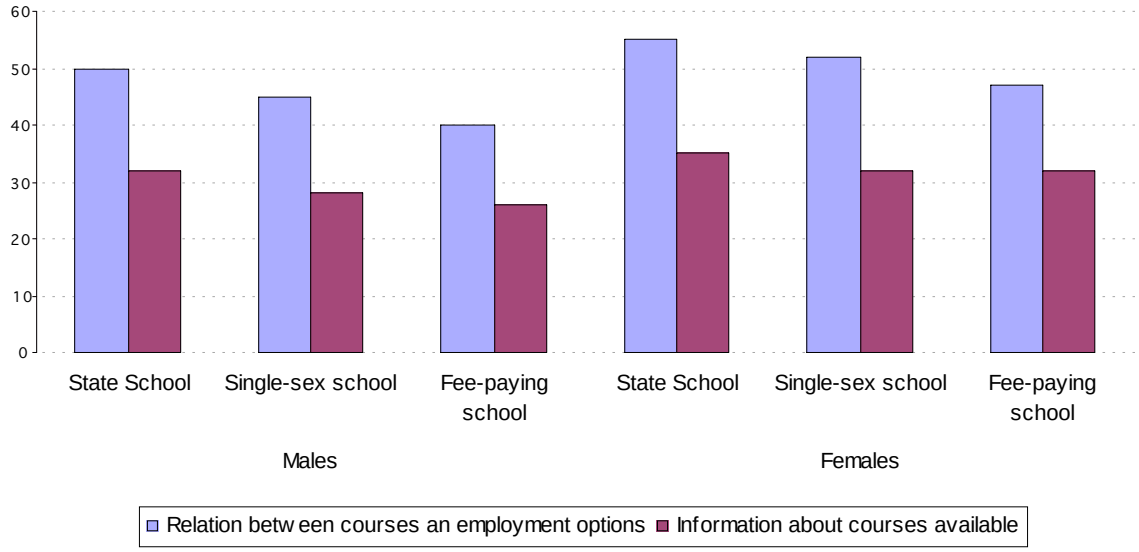
out about. This is a major policy finding that needs to be highlighted as an action point for schools and colleges.

> *'Not enough information is given quick enough. I believe that information about further education after post-16 should be given before post-16 options are chosen. As some universities require certain A-level subjects, some require specific grades at GCSE in certain subjects and others may not accept certain types of courses (maybe vocational courses) for non-vocational degrees. This information is vital to some students when choosing their A levels.'* [Male, 18 and under, East Midlands, Asian, SES Managerial, State School, Russell Group, Social Studies]

In analysing differences in responses by type of school attended, we find, predictably, that those who attended schools with most experience of and traditions of developing students who go on the apply for HE places, we find that the quality of information and guidance, on the whole is less often evaluated as having been inadequate. Given the gendered pattern of application by subject and of HE participation, we were concerned to asses whether males and females had reported different access to careers information – and we do find gender differences in line with patterns revealed in earlier chapters.

In the figures that follow, we have selected respondents from three of the school types that show significant differences and that enable us to explore the extent to which response patterns show a gender difference: State schools, which constitute the largest and most diverse group, single sex schools, which are mainly but not invariably also selective on other criteria; and fee-paying schools. There is a measure of overlap between categories 1 and 2, and between 2 and 3. We distinguish the different responses of males and females in each of these groups, so it is possible to make comparisons in the following three figures by type of school, and by gender within each and among them. Figure 6.3 examines responses to the two questions fundamental questions about the relationship between courses and employment options, and about courses available; Figure 6.4 examines the crucial question about information about the implications of post-16 subject choices and Figure 6.5 addresses responses to the options about the information available to applicants at their schools and community networks. Finally, Figure 6.6 examines the proportions of accepted applicants who reported that they had not enough or no career information provided by their schools or in their wider networks.

Figure 6.3: Proportions of accepted applicants who reported that they had not enough or no information about items identified, comparing selected school students' responses by gender



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, selected groups to full survey, weighted`

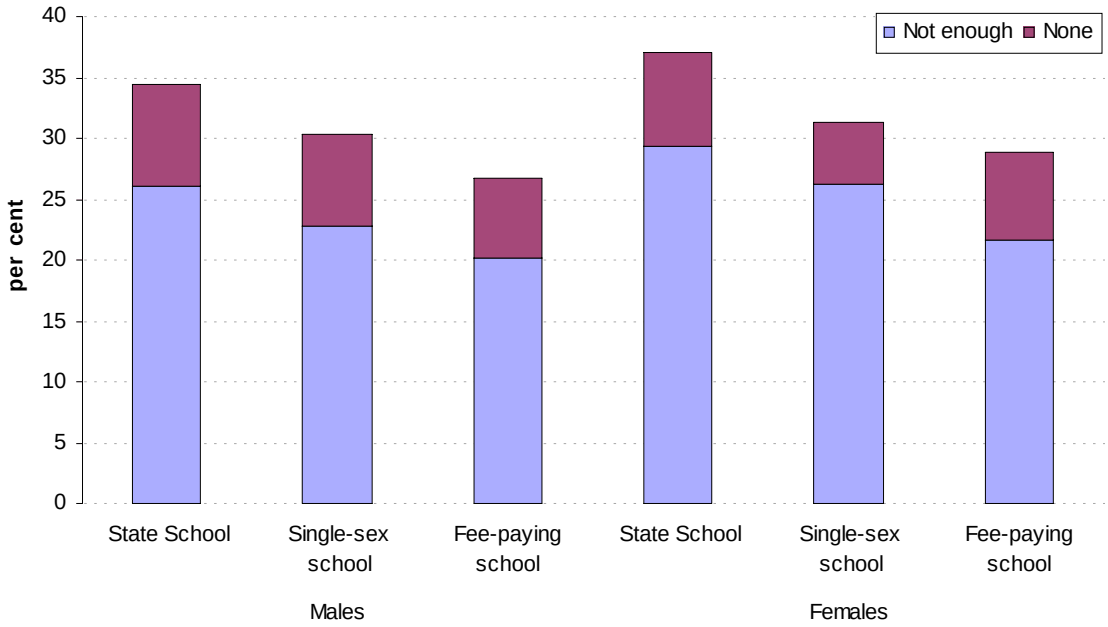
Type of school was the most important discriminator on both of these options. There were no significant socio-economic differences revealed in relation to information about courses available or about the relationship between courses and employment options, but Black applicants reported less access to information on both of these, and those applying as non-employed applicants reported les access to information about the range of courses available.

For many areas of HE study, entry to courses is restricted to those with possession of educational qualifications indicative of prior achievement of skills and threshold knowledge. Failure to have obtained these means that candidates can not apply to study on these programmes. The obvious examples, as illustrated by the quote below, are mathematics and sciences, which are essential for students wishing to study on scientific or medical programmes – and these tend to be areas where women are under-represented.

> *'Need better advice on entry requirements for specific university courses before choosing A-Level choices. I was not advised that many universities do not offer chemistry degree's to students without a maths A level'* (Male, 18 and under, North West, White, SES Managerial, State School, Russell Group University, Physical Sciences]

Figure 6.4, comparing male and female school-leavers from the main types of secondary school, shows the differences among these schools in reported shortfalls in information, with those at State school most likely to report these, but also shows that females were consistently more likely to report having received not enough or no information.

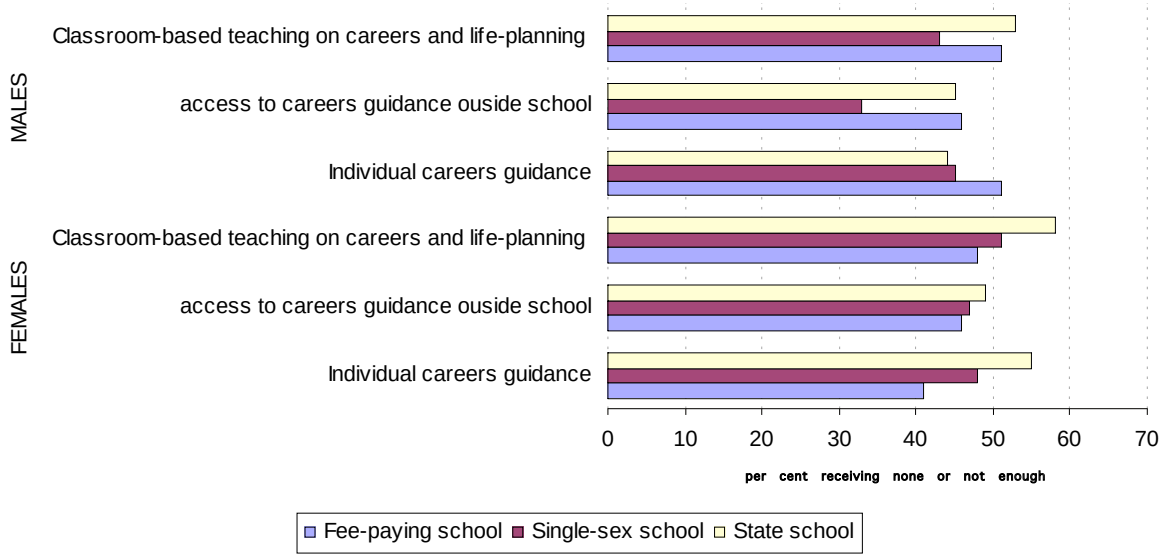
Figure 6.4: Proportions of accepted applicants who reported that they had not enough or no information about the implications of post-16 subject choices, comparing selected school students' responses by gender



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, selected groups to full survey, weighted`

Information about career options

Figure 6.5: Proportions of accepted applicants who reported that they had not enough or no career information provided by their schools or in their wider networks, comparing selected school students' responses by gender



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, selected groups to full survey, weighted`

School students at State schools of both sexes were most likely to report not enough or no classroom based teaching on careers and career planning, with females in all categories more likely to complain of shortfalls.

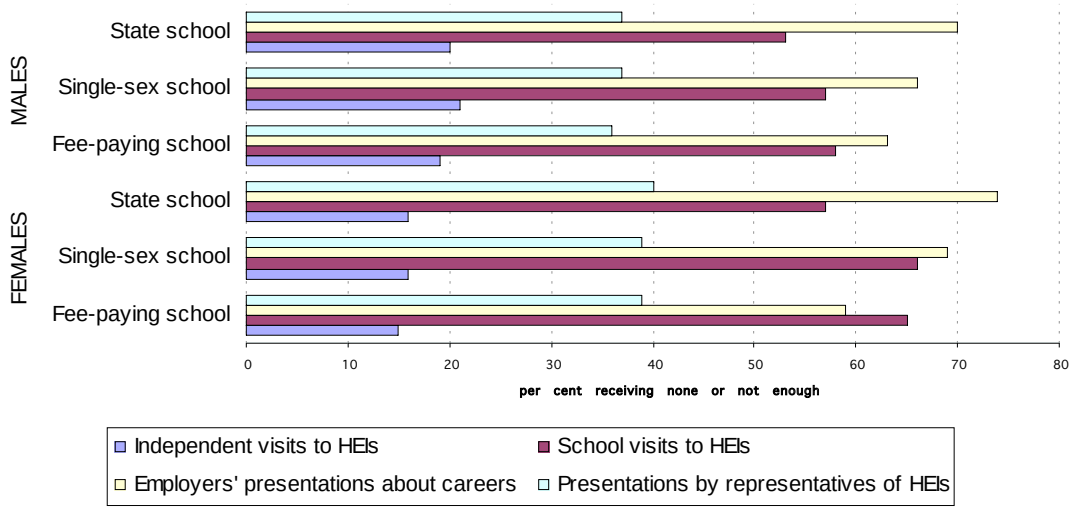
> *'I wasn't given sufficient information about my other options. At school it was assumed that you would either go to sixth form and then university or that you would do a modern apprenticeship- but that was pushed mainly at the boys.'* [Female, 18 and under, North East, White, State school, New university, Business and Admin Studies]

Of course, 'not enough' is a subjective evaluation, and males may be satisfied with less information or have clearer career orientations as they grow up, as part of their gender socialisation into a culture that still sees the male role as instrumental (main breadwinner) and female as expressive (home-maker). Nevertheless, given the lower probability of HE acceptance experienced by women discussed in Chapter 2, and the gender gap in graduate earnings and early career outcomes, it appears that female school-leavers get less career information and guidance than they need – and these findings support his assertion.

Figure 6.6 compares the proportions of applicants from the selected school types reporting not enough or no access to direct information at or about HEIs: independent and school-arranged visits to universities and colleges, presentations by representatives of HEIs and presentations by employers about careers. We saw in Figure 6.1 that the majority of UK applicants had had the opportunity to visit HEIs prior to choosing their courses, but that just under 60 per cent felt that they had had not enough, or had no, school-arranged visits to these. It appears that fee-paying and single sex school were least likely to arrange HEI visits, but their students were most likely to have made sufficient independent visits. Females less likely to feel that they had not adequate opportunity to make school or independent visits to HEIs, but more likely to report not enough or no opportunities through schools. Females were also more likely than their male peers to report not enough or no opportunities to attend presentations by representatives of HEIs, or by employers about career opportunities. In both these areas, State school pupils most often reported shortfalls, single sex school pupils were somewhat less likely to do so, and fee-paying school pupils least likely to do so. It is important

to recall that although over half the applicants had reported sufficient opportunities to attend HEI presentations, only 27 per cent had had the opportunity of presentations by employers about career opportunities.

Figure 6.6: Proportions of accepted applicants who reported that they had not enough or no career information provided by their schools or in their wider networks, comparing selected school students' responses by gender

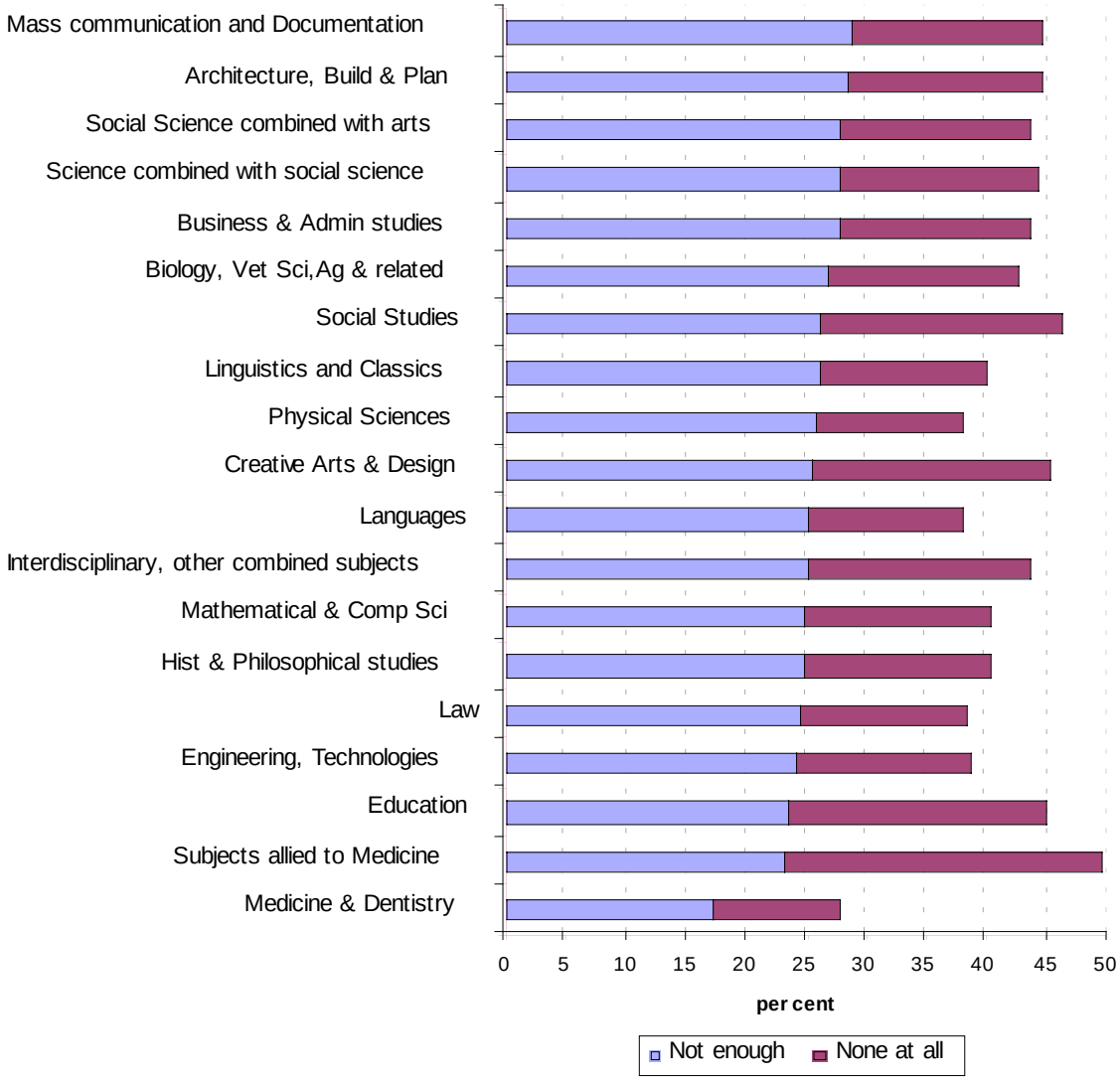


Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, selected groups to full survey, weighted`

The next section follows the analyses earlier about career planning clarity and the extent to which courses were perceived by applicants as vocational. The extent to which applicants perceived themselves as requiring advice and guidance is likely to have varied by the extent to which they had clear ideas about their career direction prior to embarking on the application process and indeed, a few years earlier, when, in the case of those at secondary schools, sixth form colleges and in further education, made their subject choices for subsequent study. Two of the most thought-provoking findings are the high proportion respondents who reported that they had had not enough or no career information about the implications of post-16 subject choices or about the relationship between courses and employment options. Given the significance of subject of study in restricting or facilitating career options that we have argued in the earlier chapters, it is interesting to look at the extent to which these declared information gaps are related to subject of accepted course.

Figures 6.7 and Figure 6.8 show the results and echo the subject analyses conducted with reference to clarity of career plans and aspirations and the vocational-though-to-non-vocational spectrum.

Figure 6.7: Proportions of accepted applicants who reported that they had not enough or no information about the career implications of post-16 subject choices, by subject studied



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted`

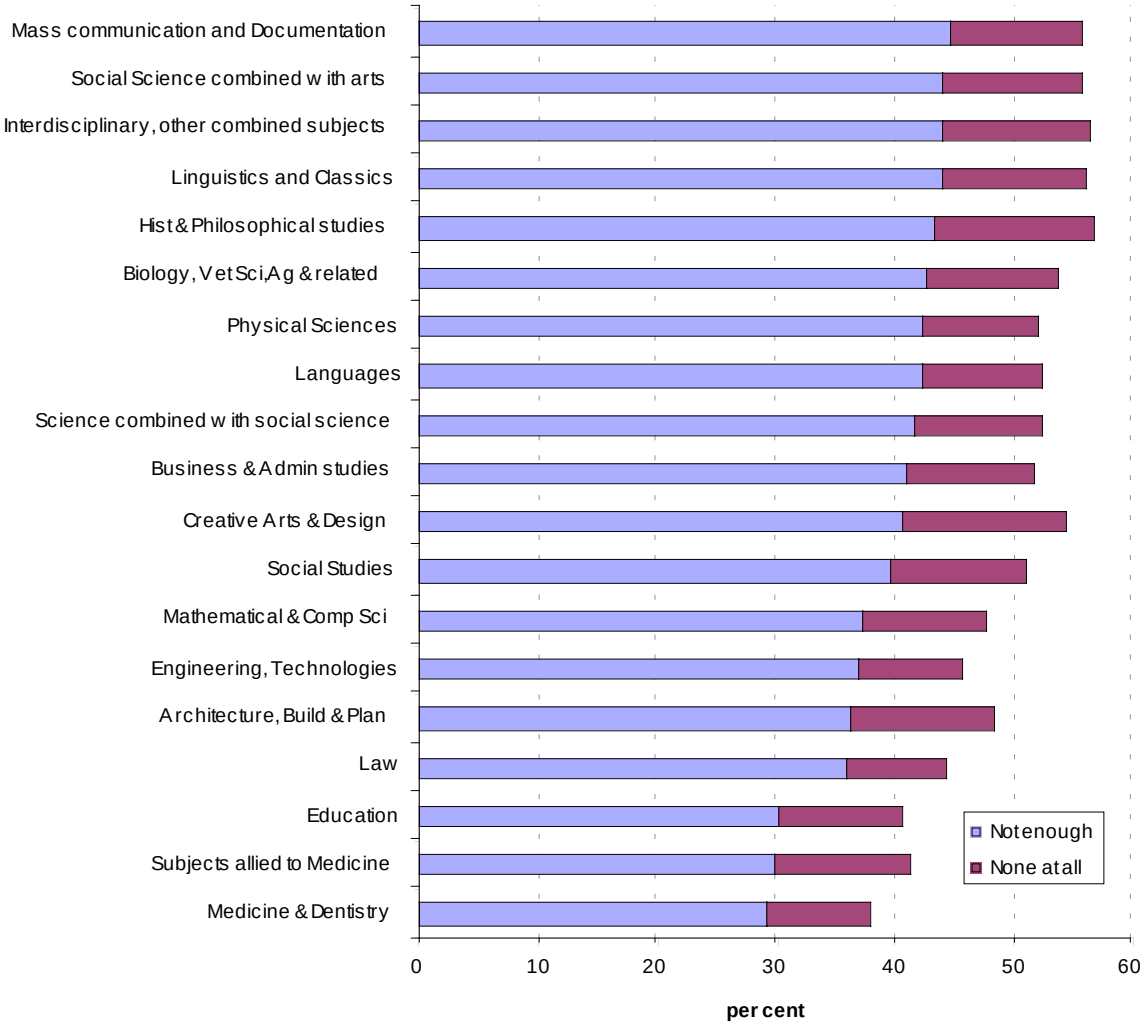
The subjects that attracted a higher than average proportion of mature applicants reflect their greater likelihood of reporting having had no information and advice about post-16 subjects, which ultimately is likely to have contributed to their failure to access HE as school leavers or to make choices that had subsequently proved to have been inappropriate for them, as the following quote illustrates:

> *'I was given the wrong advice when choosing my uni course at school, as a result 5 years later I am finally in a position to take the course I want to.'* [Female, 21-25, Scotland, White, SES Intermediate, Other old university, Science combined with Social Science]

Was this an issue disproportionately affecting particular categories of applicant? There is a socio-economic effect, as Figure 6.2 showed, but as with these questions generally, the type of school attended appears to have had a more decisive impact, as was discussed above. Apart from Architecture, building and planning, at the 'higher shortfall in information' end of

the scale, those last likely to report not enough information are at the 'clearly vocational' end: but there is little of significance here as far as UK accepted applicants are concerned.
We look now at reported shortfalls in information about the relationship between courses and employment options by subject of study and the range of responses here is somewhat clearer and more closely related to the vocational spectrum.

Figure 6.8: Proportions of accepted applicants who reported that they had not enough or no information about the relationship between courses and employment options, by subject of study



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted`

We see clearly in Figure 6.8 the relationship between relatively more and less vocational subjects of study, with those opting for subjects at the normally non-vocational end of the spectrum least likely to have had such information. However, the figure points up to a lacuna in the information being accessed by HE applicants generally, as the comments added to questionnaires attest. Respondents had the option of choosing 'what I needed' under this heading, and it might be supposed that students with a very clear idea of where they were heading, who had not considered other options, might have been expected top respond thus, so the decision to choose 'not enough' or 'none' indicates consciousness of a shortfall in careers information and guidance.

Younger students were concerned about graduate underemployment.

'*Students going into higher education need to be given more career guidance when going into their course of study. It is common to find that student who go into a course in higher education often come out working in low paid jobs as there is no guarantee that their course of study would provide a job aligned with their chosen course. As a result these graduates often find out that there are paying large sums of debt for a course that could not provide a job for them'*. [Female, 18 and under, Greater London, Black, Professional/Managerial background, Subjects allied to medicine, old university]

There were a disproportionate number of comments from those applying as mature students about the difficulties and lack of information they encountered, as the following examples show:

*'A lot of the information given is aimed at college/6th form leavers.....I am a mature student with limited access to careers guidance and found it difficult to find help and support'. [*Female, 26-30, East Midlands, White, SES Routine and Manual, 1992 University, Languages]

'As a mature student I found there was not as much information out there. Every thing is tailored to the school leaver. It is very difficult to find information and it is only because my tutor on the night class I attend was so good that I gained enough knowledge about the process'. [Female, 26-30, Yorks and Humber, White, SES Intermediate, 1992 University, Subjects allied to Medicine]

'As a mature student I feel somewhat anxious about mixing with younger people despite taking A levels as a mature student and be of a gregarious nature. I would find it useful if the was a dedicated site for helping mature student decide on a course and really understand what the environment will be like, possibly with forums and current/ex mature students being willing to offer specific advice or comment'. [Male, 41-50, South East, White, SES Managerial, Russell Group University, Subjects allied to Medicine]

'As a mature student who started with no qualifications and a family to support I feel I have not had much help in choosing appropriate courses for what I would like to do. I get the feeling I am overlooked due to my age. I'm hoping this will change on going to university although it is a very scary prospect for me'. [Female, 31-40, Scotland, Russell Group University, Biological, Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences]

However, although 'traditional' school-leaving applicants less often commented on lack of information, many did so, and the responses to the questions reported in Figure 6.1 and the data that follows are testimony to the fact that a very high proportion of students do embark on courses with very little awareness of the routes they are choosing and rejecting as they do so.

'I feel I did not get enough general advice in what would suit me. I feel I jumped into a course I no longer wish to pursue, but this is due to a lack of careers advice'
[Female, 18 and under, South East, White, Independent School, Russell Group, Languages. Taking a gap year]

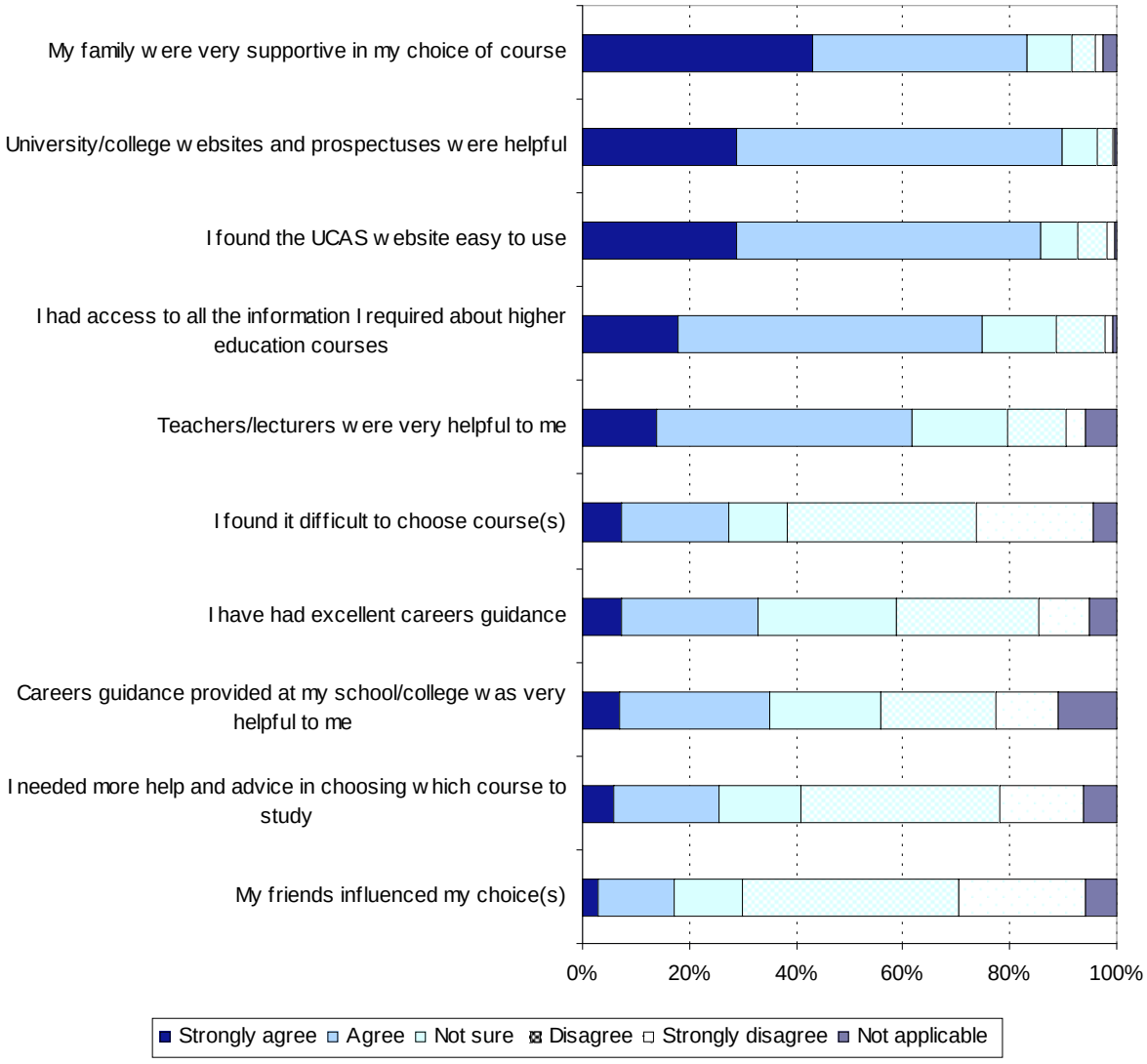
Several HE-returning applicants who had already embarked upon or completed courses in the past commented on the wastefulness of false starts and limited information.

'As a student who has already been to university once and has experienced the whole challenge, I feel that there should be an awful lot more advice on the relationship of your course and the job prospects, and also on the future you will have once university has finished. From my experience and also that of my friends university has not exactly been what was expected on the job front.'
[Female, 21-25, West Midlands, White, SES Routine and Manual, 1992 University, Social Studies]

The experience of applying for HE: support and obstacles encountered

Figure 6.9 shows the overall responses to statements about the experience of applying for higher education.

Figure 6.9: In deciding to apply for a higher education course, how far do you agree with the following statements?



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

Who needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study?

In deciding to apply for a HE course, a quarter agreed or strongly agreed that they needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study. We consider that the key item here, it terms of its potential to provide intelligence to inform policy-makers and careers practitioners in particular, is the extent of agreement with the statement' I needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study'. The profile of the applicant group who agreed or agreed strongly with this statement clearly experiences a gap between their needs and the information and guidance available to them and may have made less good – certainly less well-informed – choices than they would have liked. We know from previous research on graduate outcomes that those who drifted into HE without having made clearly-articulated choices are more likely to end up leaving with less positive experiences and less sense of direction that those who made positive choices, either for instrumental or intrinsic reasons.

Multivariate analysis was used to determine the separate influences on agreement with this statement. To achieve this, the first two categories were classified as 'agreement' and all remaining categories as disagreement (including the 'not sure' category). Table 6.1 summarises the results of the logistic regression analysis given in detail in Appendix Table A10.

Table 6.1: Factors associated with extent of agreement/disagreement with the statement 'I needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study'

Factors associated with agreement with statement that 'I needed more help'	Factors associated with disagreement with statement that 'I needed more help'
Older (25+ at time of application)	Young (18 and under at time of application)
Non-white ethnic groups	White ethnic group
First choice subject is: Social studies	First choice subjects are: Medicine, dentistry; education; history and philosophical studies
	Positive response to question about extent of careers guidance offered
	Positive response to question about extent of information made available
	Mother/father has a degree

Older applicants (25 years and over) were much more likely to state that they agreed with the statement that they needed more help in choosing their course of study when making their application. The age factor is strong, with mature applicants clearly stating their need for more assistance in making their choices. Almost as strong is the impact of ethnicity, particularly among applicants stating that they were of Asian ethnic origin. Conversely, certain groups of applicants were much less likely to agree with this statement. Unsurprisingly, those applying for vocational subjects as their first choice were much more inclined to disagree with or be unsure about this statement. White students were least likely to agree strongly that they needed more help and advice than those in minority ethnic groups, but also least likely to agree that they *had* had excellent careers guidance. At the other end of the scale, black students were most likely to have indicated that the advice they had received had been excellent – possibly because they were likely to be older at the time of application, seeking guidance rather than progressing to HE as 'the normal thing' and possibly because they were FE students, who tended to be more positive than those from other educational backgrounds about the availability of guidance during their application stage; and, of course, because they were more likely to say that they had a clear idea of where they hoped to work.

An important finding from the multivariate analysis is that those applicants who stated that they had been offered careers guidance, or who responded positively about the extent of information made available, were less likely to agree that they needed more help. This may appear axiomatic, but it indicates that careers guidance and the availability of related information do serve to meet needs for assistance in choosing courses of study. Finally, we note that those applicants whose parents (either father or mother) have a degree were less likely to state they needed help in choosing their course of study, probably reflecting the fact that they were obtaining help and guidance from this source. On the other hand, applicants who might benefit from closer consideration of options available to them may not recognise this. The findings about course choice discussed at length earlier may indicate that relatively privileged applicants are drifting into HE without seriously considering the longer-term implications of subject choices and occupational options the steps they are taking. The multivariate analysis summarised in Table 6.10 showed that those from a Professional or

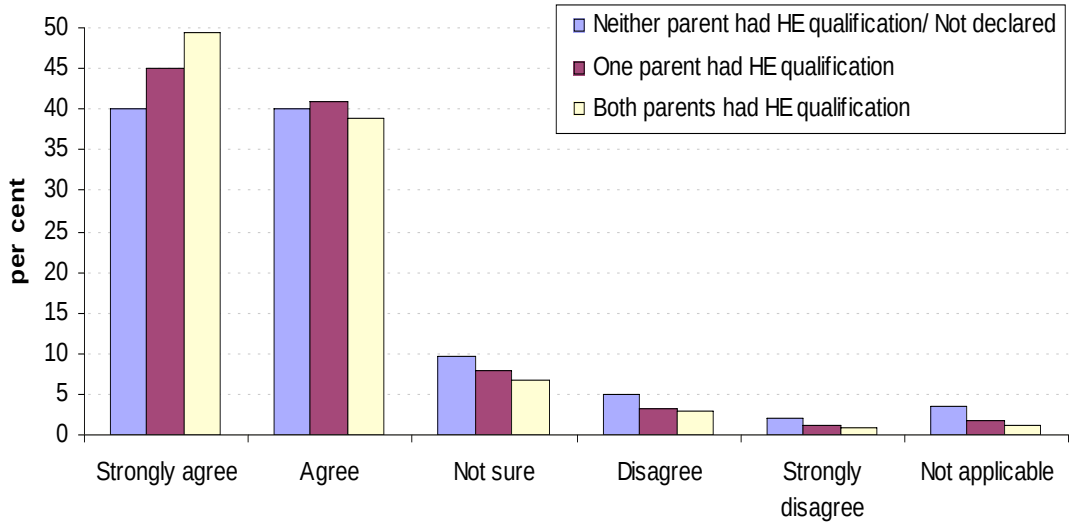
Managerial background were among the most likely to have a less clear idea end about the occupation they hope to enter when they complete their courses.

> *'Information on anything else other than doing a degree after A levels is not provided by schools – [my school implied] that university really is the only option and that it is fine to study something completely pointless and not worth studying so long as you go to university.'* [Female, 19-20, Eastern, White, SES Managerial, Independent Fee-paying School, Russell Group University, Historical and Philosophical Studies]

Who got support from their families and schools?

We now examine some of the other items, and the variance in the responses of different groups, separately. On most of these items, we find socio-economic background, ethnicity, prior educational experience and most importantly, whether respondents were first generation HE applicants were significantly related to the pattern of their responses. First of all, who was more likely to have reported having support from families in their choice of course? This issue has been discussed with reference to other areas of investigation, particularly Chapter 5, where the influences on course choices are scrutinised in detail. Ethnicity was important, but complicated buy the fact that for Black applicants, more likely to apply as relatively mature adults rather than school-leavers, the influence of family was less strong. In addition, was discussed, with reference to qualitative evidence provided by respondents, influence could be negative and restrictive rather than positive and encouraging.

Figure 6.10: My family were very supportive of my choice of course



Source: Futuretrack 2006: accepted UK-domiciled applicants, full survey, weighted.

There appears to be a shortfall in the careers advice applicants received from schools. Whilst 62 per cent agreed that that teachers and lecturers were very helpful to them, just 35 per cent felt the same way about the careers guidance provided. For those with graduate parents attending schools and colleges where the majority of students go on to HE, this may be less of a problem, but for those without these advantages, lack of access to career guidance prior to HE application leaves them vulnerable to making poorer choices – and the differences discussed in the previous section about different types of school and gender does illustrate well the different resources provided by established HEI-consumer schools. Again, going to a university-focussed school was not invariably an unalloyed advantage as the following illustration reveals:

> *'I felt that in my sixth form an unfair amount time and effort was given to those applying to Oxford or Cambridge over other students, (in terms of presentations, personal statement help, tutoring and mock interviews) and I felt this lowered*

morale and led to quite a few people who were borderline on the decision of going into HE giving up on the idea of university at all. I think a better attempt should be made to ensure that each student has the same amount of help and time spent on them regardless of their ideas and choices'. [Female, 18 and under, South East, White, SES Managerial, Other Old University, Creative Arts & Design]

Worries about their own ability to succeed

If we examine the three statements that relate to respondents themselves, an interesting picture emerges.

- Those who agreed with the statement 'I worry that, as a higher education student, I will find the level of work difficult' were most likely to be young students progressing from school to HE, but coming from backgrounds where HE participation was not the norm.
- Those over 21 were less than half as likely to agree as those who were 18 and under, illustrating how those returning to HE, even as 'young mature' students, are more likely to have a clear idea of what they are embarking on and why, and what their capabilities are.
- They were also significantly more likely to be female than male.
- The other big difference was between those whose both parents had HE qualifications were less likely to agree (43 per cent) than those who did not have an HE-qualified parent (49 per cent).
- Those from professional and managerial backgrounds were less likely to agree than those from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, but the difference between the extremes (50 per cent compared to 46 per cent), although significant, is less radical.

The pattern of response was similar for those who had difficulty choosing which course to apply for and those who felt that they needed more help and advice in choosing their course were, again, very significantly more likely to be young, school-leaver applicants but neither social class background, gender nor parental HE qualifications were particularly significant, although those opting for vocational areas of study were least likely to agree.

Summary

Most of the applicants reported positive experience of the application process overall, and they had access to adequate information and guidance in enabling them to make their choice.

- Over three quarters of applicants had made independent visits to universities or colleges.
- Over two thirds believed that they had had adequate information on courses available.
- Half or more stated that they:
    - had had adequate information about the relationship between courses and employment options;
    - had had access to publications, such as 'Good Universities' guides;
    - had had access to adequate information or guidance outside their school or college;
    - had visited a Careers Fair.
- Less than half:
    - considered they had had adequate information about alternatives to going on to higher education;
    - had had individual careers guidance;

- had had visits to HEIs arranged by schools and colleges;
- had had presentations from employers about career options.

Applications from socio-economic backgrounds, applicants who had studied at FE colleges prior to application, who were applying as 'non-traditional HE applicants' were more likely to report shortfalls in information about HE options and careers available to them.

However, type of school attended appeared to be a stronger determinant of access to information, with those from schools which selected pupils on the basis of ability, single-sex schools and fee-paying schools – those traditionally geared to support HE entry – were less likely to report having received inadequate information across the board.

Female respondents were more likely than males to report lack of information, with those from selective schools more likely to report deficiencies than their male peers.

Over 50 per cent of applicants agreed with the statement that their family had been supportive of their choice of course; that University websites and prospectuses had been helpful; and the UCAS website had been easy to use.

Applicants who had applied for subject areas at the non-vocational end of the spectrum were more likely to report that they had not had enough information about the relationship between the course and employment options.

Over 60 per cent reported that teachers and lectures had been helpful and only one in five their choice had been influenced by friends. A third reported that careers advice at schools and colleges had been helpful to them.

However, 31 per cent report that they had needed more help and advice in choosing their course and a further 15 per cent were not sure.

- Factors associated with desire for more help were being older (aged 25 or more when they applied), coming from minority ethnic groups, having opted to apply for Social Studies courses;
- Those most likely to disagree with the statement 'I needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study were aged 18 years or under at the time of the applications, white ethnic group who had opted for medicine, dentistry, education, history and philosophical studies, who were second generation HE applicants and who had given a positive response to questions about having had careers advice and information.

Those who were worried about their ability to succeed in HE were more likely to be young, non-traditional females, who were first generation HE applicants.

Further analyses of these variables have been undertaken and will be incorporated into the report prior to publication.

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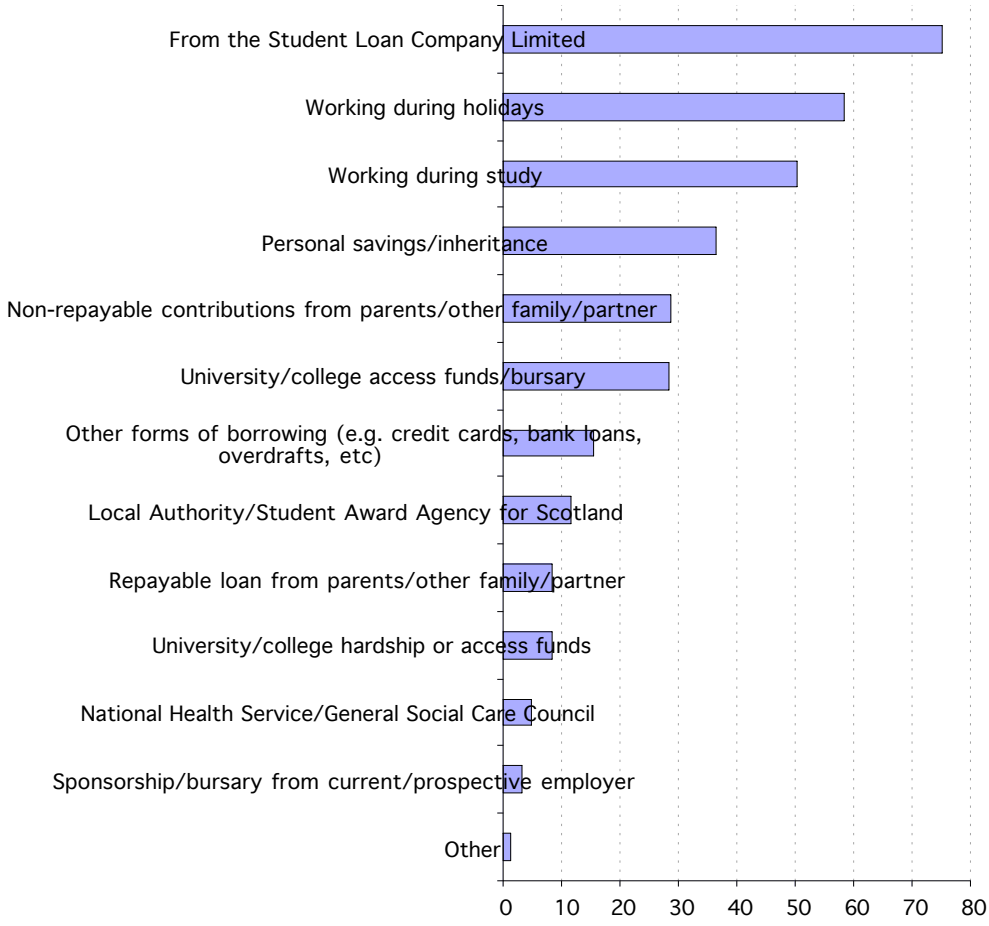
CHAPTER 7

Plans to fund higher education

Higher education funding has been increasingly seen as a politically-contentious issue as students and their families have been required to contribute to its cost and to recognise it as an investment in individual and social capital. The skills and knowledge endowed by HE study and the achievement of HE qualifications have continued to lead to better employment opportunities and higher average and lifetime earnings than among those who do not attain them, despite the expansion of higher education and some evidence of recent reduction in the graduate earnings premium (Elias and Purcell 2004, McIntosh 2004). However, this cohort is the first to be subject to the introduction of variable tuition fees, and it was clearly necessary to investigate respondents' plans for funding their higher education participation, their attitudes to HE funding and the debts that students are likely to accrue throughout the course of their studies. Figure 7.1 shows the responses to the question about funding intentions prior to embarking on courses. Respondents were asked about their plans for funding higher education and asked to indicate all those that applied.

Figure 7.1: How do you plan to fund your higher education?



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

Over three-quarters of respondents planned to take out loans from the Student Loans Company and the other most frequent option was working during holidays and, in the case of just over half, working during term alongside their studies. Less than a third anticipated obtaining non-repayable contributions from their families, although 37 per cent were able to draw on personal savings or inheritance. What is, of course, immediately apparent is that

even though three-quarters of applicants intend to take out student loans, most applicants anticipate funding their studies through a range of different methods.

Funding plans varied significantly and predictably by socio-economic background, as Table 7.1 shows, and also varied by age and ethnic background.

Table 7.1: Response to the question: How do you plan to fund your higher education? By broad socio-economic background

	Managerial and Professional Occupations	Intermediate Occupations	Routine and manual Occupations
From the Student Loan Company Limited	73.9	76.3	78.9
Personal savings/inheritance	42.0	38.2	32.1
Non-repayable contributions from parents/other family/partner	38.0	26.9	19.9
Repayable loan from parents/other family/partner	10.6	7.9	6.1
Local Authority/Student Award Agency for Scotland	10.4	12.0	12.3
National Health Service/General Social Care Council	3.9	5.0	4.9
Working during study	49.0	53.0	55.8
Working during holidays	61.6	60.6	58.9
University/college hardship or access funds	5.4	8.2	10.4
Other forms of borrowing (e.g. credit cards, bank loans, overdrafts, etc)	15.5	15.5	16.1
University/college access funds/bursary	20.1	31.1	37.5
Sponsorship/bursary from current/prospective employer	3.0	3.0	3.3
Other	1.1	1.3	1.3

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

At a more detailed level, the correlation between socio-economic background and funding plans was strong. In many ways the pattern is predictable; those from managerial and professional backgrounds were more likely to cite their own (or familial) resources as a means of funding. Alternatively those from a routine and manual occupations background were more likely to cite access funds or bursaries and working during study as a means of funding.

Although there are differences in the percentages citing student loans by socio-economic background, student loans are a major means of funding university study. Variation of student loan take up by socio-economic background is perhaps not as great as might have been expected.

The anticipation of paid work by socio-economic background is worth comment. Overall work during holidays is more commonly cited than work during study. Work during study is most commonly cited among those from a routine and manual occupations background, whereas work during holidays is most commonly cited by those from a managerial and professional occupations background. However when the two work variables are combined, some interesting patterns emerge. Firstly the proportions of applicants indicating that they do not intend to work either during study or during holidays are remarkably constant across all backgrounds; 32 per cent managerial and professional and 31per cent for each of intermediate and routine and manual backgrounds. To put it another way, nearly 70 per cent off all accepted UK-domiciled applicants considered that they would take some sort of paid work to help fund their higher education, and across all backgrounds over 40 per cent anticipated taking work during both holidays and during term time.

The difference in funding by work is shown up quite markedly in relation to the educational background of the applicant. Those from independent schools are the most likely to say that they do not intend to work at all to fund their higher education; nearly two-fifths of this group say that they do not intend to work to help pay for their studies. This group is also least likely

to indicate that they will work during term time and during holidays. 31 per cent of those from independent schools say that they intend to work in term time and in holiday time, whereas for all other educational backgrounds (expect where background is unknown) the figure is over 40 per cent.

Differences in how applicants anticipated funding their studies were also found with reference to the age and ethnicity of the applicant. White applicants were most likely to cite savings or personal inheritance (38 per cent) and also most likely to cite non-repayable contributions from family members (30 per cent). But white applicants were also more likely to give paid work as a means of funding; 53 per cent said that they would work during study and 62 per cent said they would work during holidays. Black applicants were most likely to cite hardship funds or access funds (36 per cent) as a means of paying for their studies.

Table 7.2: Response to the question: How do you plan to fund your higher education? by age of applicant

	18 and under	19-20	21-24	25 and over
From the Student Loan Company Limited	74.7	79.3	76.7	67.9
Personal savings/inheritance	40.8	36.4	28.8	24.3
Non-repayable contributions from parents/other family/partner	35.5	28.0	16.7	9.7
Repayable loan from parents/other family/partner	9.6	8.8	6.5	4.1
Local Authority/Student Award Agency for Scotland	10.8	10.5	13.8	15.7
National Health Service/General Social Care Council	2.8	3.1	7.1	16.1
Working during study	50.2	52.0	56.5	43.3
Working during holidays	62.0	59.7	57.2	40.9
University/college hardship or access funds	5.4	8.4	14.2	17.6
Other forms of borrowing (e.g. credit cards, bank loans, overdrafts, etc)	12.9	18.0	22.1	17.3
University/college access funds/bursary	26.1	28.2	31.6	36.7
Sponsorship/bursary from current/prospective employer	3.1	2.8	3.0	4.2
Other	1.1	1.2	1.9	2.7

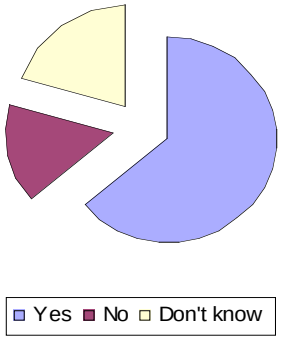
Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted

The funding intentions of applicants also varied quite markedly by age. Table 7.2 shows that it is the older applicants who were more likely to intend to fund their studies through awards, bursaries or hardship payments, though they were less likely to say they will take out student loans than other age groups. Maybe somewhat surprisingly it was the youngest group who were most likely to say that they would use personal savings or inheritance to fund their studies.

Expectation of significant debts

To explore the potential impact of expected debts on course choices and HE participation, respondents were asked whether they anticipated that they would accrue significant debts during their period of study. Fewer than one in six did *not* anticipate significant debt, 64 per cent did so and the remainder stated that they di not know (see Figure 7.2).

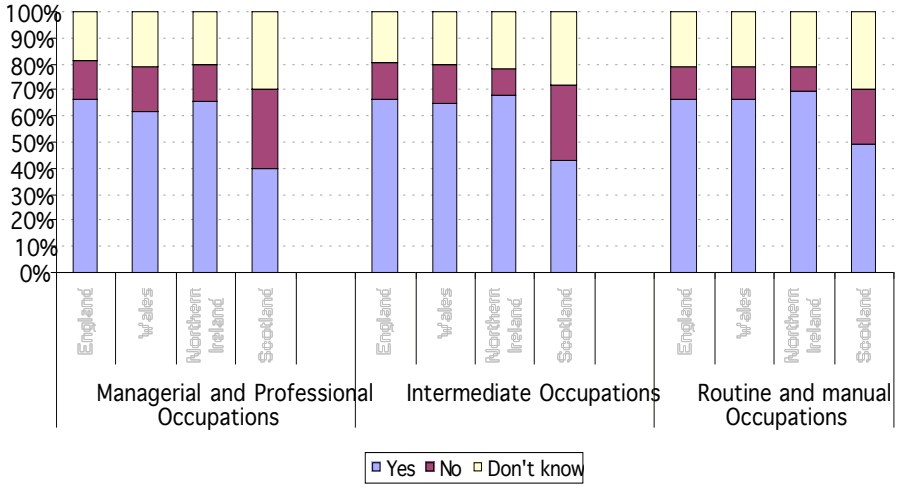
Figure 7.2: Do you expect to have significant debts at the end of your course?



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

One obvious variable by which responses to this question about debt differ is by country of domicile. Applicants from Scotland need to be considered in light of the different funding arrangements which operate there. Whereas over 60 per cent of applicants from each of England, Wales and Northern Ireland said that they did anticipate significant future debts, the figure in Scotland was just under 45 per cent.

Figure 7.3: Expectation of significant debts on completion of course by socio-economic background and UK country of domicile



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

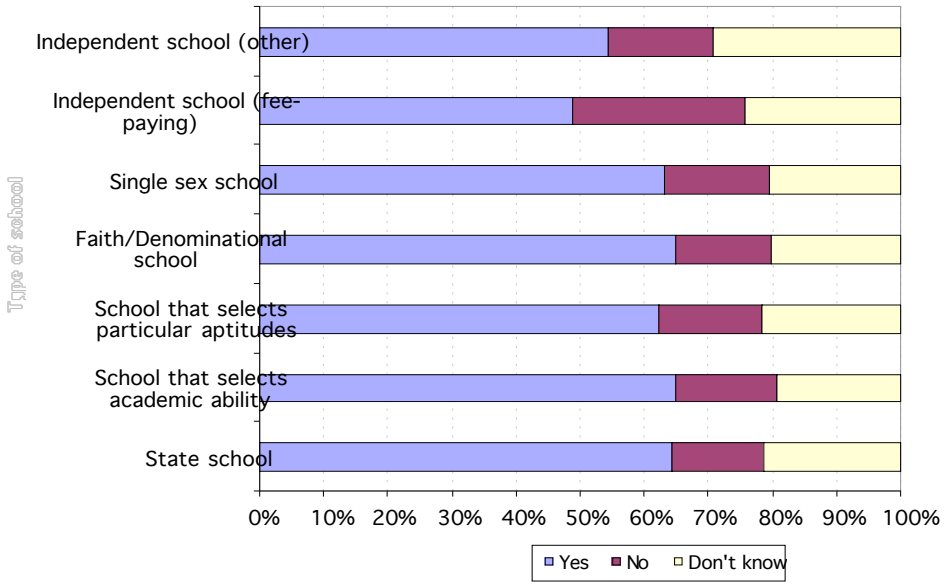
Figure 7.3 above shows the differences in anticipation of debt by UK country of domicile and by social economic background. As expected, the results for Scotland are significantly different from the rest of the UK in terms of the proportions, but the patterns by socio-economic background are relatively unimportant in their anticipation of future debt. Despite the relatively small differences, it is the perception of many of the students in the survey that the prospect of debt is deterring low-income students from entering higher education. The following two quotes from applicants of different socio-economic background illustrate this concern:

'I feel the top-up fees are unnecessary and unfair to those who wish to study in 2006. It makes the idea of learning and higher education off-putting and expensive in terms of wanting more in life and aiming higher. It sends out the message that 'Those of you who want to succeed need to be rich and expect a future of long-term debt' [Female, 19-20, Eastern, White, SES Routine & Manual, New university, Creative Arts and Design]

'Extremely worried about the tuition fees that are charged. I think it is making it a difficult choice for families on low income to support their children into higher education. Money should not be an option when it comes to higher education, everybody should have the opportunity to reach their potential. I feel that it is not solving the problem of too many applicants, it is discouraging those on a lower income. By the time I have finished higher education I will be in thousands of pounds of debt and will have to then consider finding a mortgage etc. Sometimes I do wonder if it will all be worth it'. [Female, 19-20, North West, White, SES Managerial, Russell Group university, Subjects allied to medicine]

Type of school, which can often be linked to socio-economic background, also had some impact on expectation of significant debt, with students who had attended an independent school being less likely than those who had attended other school types to anticipate significant debt upon graduation. This trend was particularly clear when looking at the expectation of debt by those who had attended a fee-paying independent school. They were 15 per cent less likely than students who had attended state schools to anticipate significant debt (49 per cent of those who had attended fee-paying independent schools anticipated significant debt upon graduation, compared to 64 per cent of those who had attended a fee-paying independent school)

Figure 7.4: Expectation of significant debts on completion of course by type of school

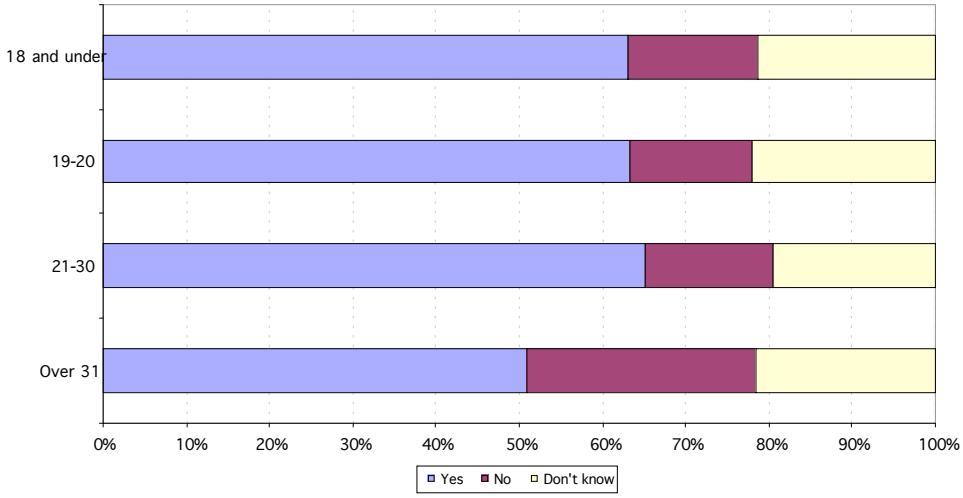


Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

Type and length of course is correlated with expectation of debt, with those about to start Foundation degree course least likely to anticipate significant debts and those on degree courses lasting more than four years most likely to do so. 'Traditional' students studying Historical and philosophical subjects, Linguistics and classics, and other subjects at the less vocational end of the spectrum, together with students studying Medicine and dentistry, were most likely to do so.

As is the case when looking how applicants plan to fund their courses, age also appears to affect expectation of significant debt on completing the course. Older students were less likely than other groups to anticipate significant debt, as Figure 7.5 below shows.

Figure 7.5: Expectation of significant debts on completion of course by age



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

This may reflect the savings and other assets older students may have acquired prior to embarking on higher education.

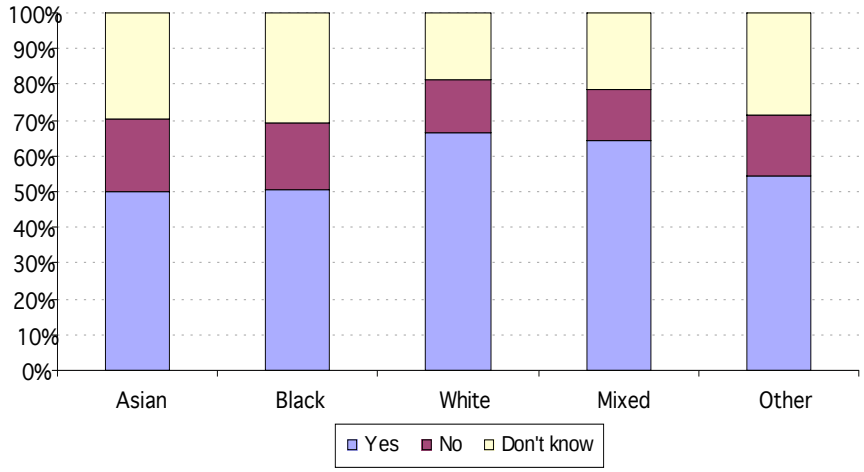
'I've sacrificed everything in order to do this course and wish the government could have helped financially but I had to sell my home in order to finance my way through university and will still wind up with debt but I believe it will be worth it in the end for many reasons.' [Female, 31-40, South East, White, Other HEI, Subjects allied to medicine]

Additionally, as was seen in Chapter 5, older students are more likely to be found on shorter or part time courses and to be sponsored by their employers. Despite this, many applicants in the older age groups expressed concern about their abilities to enter higher education and complete their courses because of their family responsibilities.

'The main concern is whether I will last the course without crumbling under debt as I have 2 children and a wife to provide for also' [Male, 31-40, South West, New university, SES Routine & Manual, Education]

Only half of Asian and Black applicants anticipated significant debts compared with two-thirds of White applicants. This is partly due to Asian and Black applicants being more likely to answer 'do not know' than White applicants.

Figure 7.6: Expectation of significant debts on completion of course by ethnic group



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

Additionally, some Muslim applicants noted that they were unable to take out interest-generating loans to fund their courses, which may have deterred students from entering higher education until they were able to do so without needing to take out loans, or from entering higher education altogether.

'The Student Loan, as it contravenes Islamic principles concerning interest, is forbidden to Muslims. This sector of those wishing to study at HE is not catered for and leaves many either doing what they have been forbidden by their religion (taking the loan and paying the interest), or seeking other ways of paying their way in HE. With whom this concern lies (the Muslim community/private sector or University/charities) I have no idea.' [Male, 26-30, Greater London, Black, Russell Group university, Social Studies]

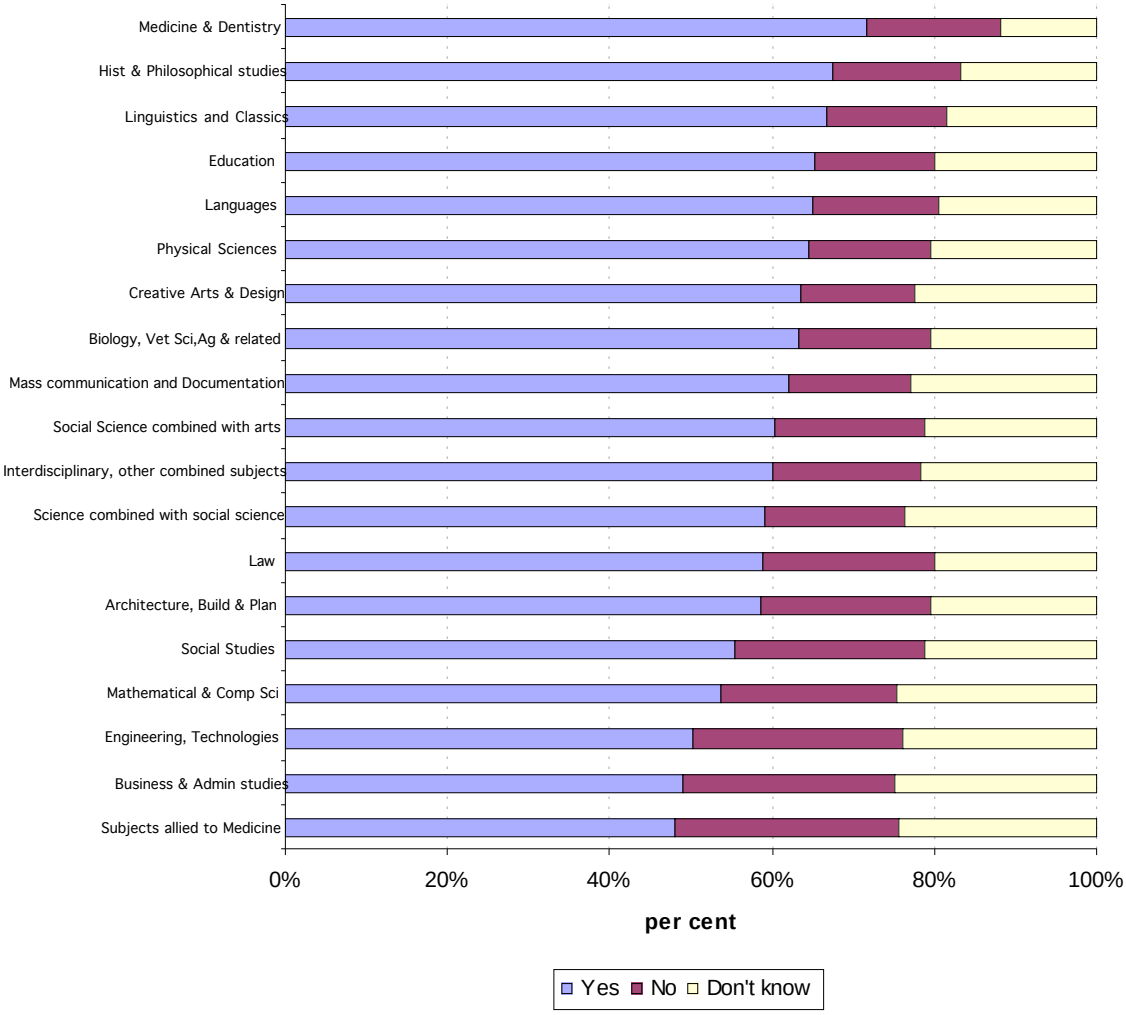
Interestingly, when narrowing the above sample down even further and looking at those who are expecting to take either three or four year degree courses, the patterns of expected debt by age, ethnicity, choice of course, type of schooling and socio-economic background remain largely unchanged.

Some applicants mentioned that the anticipation of significant debt had placed limits on their choices of higher education institution or the course they anticipated studying, as the following quote illustrates:

'I think for many people the tuition fees are extremely expensive, and it was what was putting me off going to University. I also think it is very unfair that some students receive so much help with paying their tuition fees. We are not receiving any help because of the income of my dad but that doesn't mean that we can afford it, I am having to pay for all my tuition fees and am having to live at home because I can't afford to move away and I do not want the debt of living away from home would bring.' [Female, 18 and under, South East, White, SES Intermediate, New university, Business & Admin studies]

When looking at the reasons why applicants chose their course of study and whether students selecting different reasons anticipated significant debt, several differences can be seen.

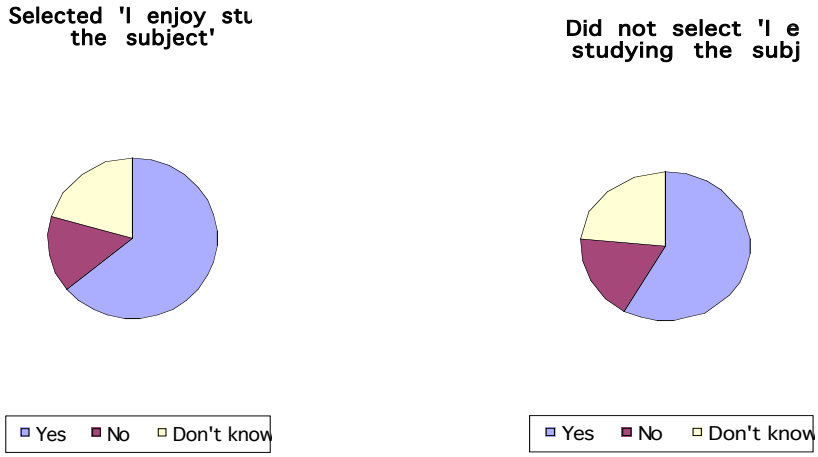
Figure 7.7 Expectation of significant debt, by subject of study



Source: Futuretrack 2006 (accepted applicants)

Given the different lengths of courses and the socio-economic and wider demographic profiles of accepted course members in different areas, it is not surprising that expectation of debt ranged from 72 per cent of those studying the longest programme of study, Medicine, to 47 per cent of those studying Subjects Allied to Medicine, with considerable variation, interestingly among the proportions who found it hard to predict whether or not they would have significant debt. Further exploration of these differences will be undertaken, particularly in conjunction with the experiences reported at the later stages of the survey.

Figure 7.8: Expectation of significant debt on completion of course by whether applicants selected 'enjoyment of subject/topic' as a reason for course selection



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

As Figure 7.8 shows, students who did not select 'I enjoy studying the subject(s)/topic(s) were less likely to anticipate significant debt than those who did select it (58 per cent of those who did not select enjoyment of the subject/or topic anticipated significant debt compared to 64 per cent of those who did select it). A similar difference can also be seen when looking at respondents who stated that they had chosen their course because they were interested in its content. 64 per cent of applicants who said they had chosen their course because they were interested in its content expected significant debt, compared to 59 per cent who did not select interest in course content as a reason for their course selection. Finally, students who gave as one of their reasons for choosing their course that they got good grades in subjects related to their course were also more likely to anticipate significant debts on completion of their course than those who didn't select this as one of their reasons (66 per cent of those selecting getting good grades in related subjects anticipated significant debt, compared to 61 per cent of those who did not select this reason for choosing their course). This suggests that some applicants may be prioritising minimising debt over studying subjects that they particularly enjoy or have shown an aptitude for. Interestingly, there was little difference between those who selected employment-related reasons ('I need to complete this course to enter a particular profession/occupation' and 'I think it will leads to good employment opportunities in general') for choosing their course and those who did not. This may reflect the opinion given in the two quotes below, that students feel they are taking on significant debt without much hope of improving their employment prospect:

'Although I am worried about the huge debts I will have after I have finished university, I have no other choice so I will worry about it afterwards. Coming from a lower-income household, I think the prices of uni are ridiculous and although student loans are available, I am very concerned that from 2006 onwards, students will have up to £30k debt. Newspapers are moaning about current students having £1200 debt, what about the support for us?! At 18, I do not want to be worrying about having a debt when I'm 21, then what about when I want to get a mortgage? I am constantly being told without a degree, no-one will get a job, so what else will employers look for once having a degree is an instant expectation?' [Female, 18 and under, Greater London, White, SES Managerial, Other old university, Business & Admin Studies]

I feel higher education is the way forward, however maybe not I mean I look at influences around me, family members, etc, who have succeeded very well without a higher education level and still maintain to do well now, being self employed or in secure jobs. Also we look

around us at what employers want from us and we see that experience is the main factor. And although 1 year course sandwich course is a good idea for this, it may not be enough. I mean if someone told me about the possibilities of going into an organisation whereby I can pursue a career in accounting and there they can train me up, then I may have not gone to university. But again due to little knowledge and lack of having this knowledge available for me, I guess that's why I stuck to university. But these top up fees are another major factor, is there any point of me going to university and having a shed-load of debt, or go do what I want to do now and make that money and not waste the 4 years of my life living the debt [Male, 19-20, West Midlands, Asian, SES Routine & Manual, New university, Business & Admin studies]

The possibility of finishing their course with significant debts was one of the most frequently expressed concerns when applicants were given the opportunity to comment about higher education, as the quotes below illustrate:

'I just find the financial situation daunting and I find myself panicking about the debts I will have, constantly.' [Female, 18 and under, East Midlands, Asian, SES Intermediate occupations, New university, Engineering & Technologies]

Whilst some applicants said that they were discouraged from entering higher education by the prospect of debts:

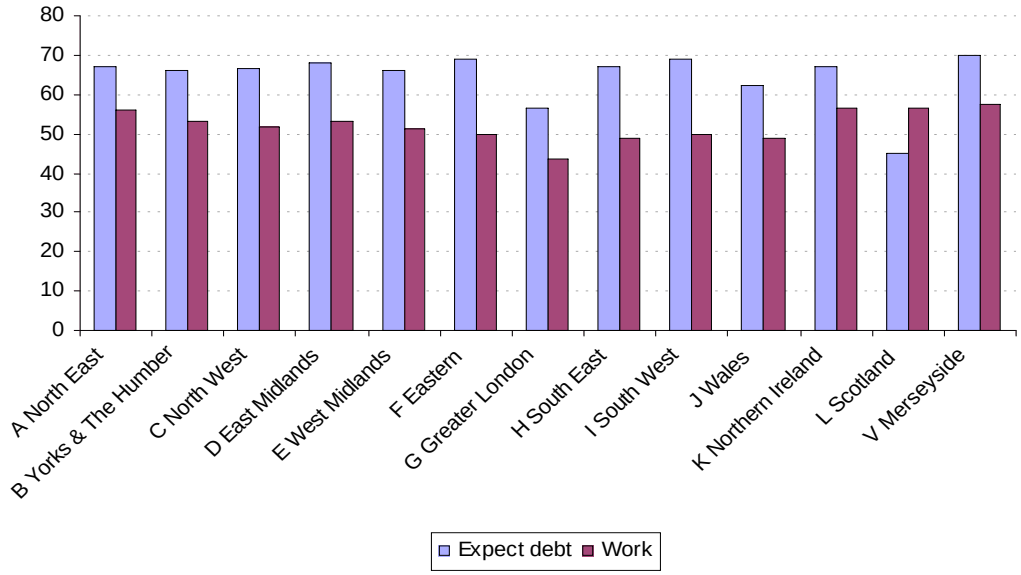
'Very expensive, thinking twice now because I'm scared of the amount of debt I'll leave myself in. Cost is putting me off from going- so going on to HE is a 50/50 choice for me right now' [Female, 18 and under, North West, Asian, SES Routine & Manual, New university, Social Studies]

'The level of debt that students are accumulating is ridiculous and a huge put off for me. Have seriously thought about not entering HE due to money issues. Too much is still expected from parents who do not have large incomes and I feel guilty for being a financial burden to my parents.' [Female, 21-25, South West, White, SES Intermediate, Other old university, Medicine & Dentistry]

Anticipation of undertaking paid work during course

Applicants were asked whether they anticipated undertaking paid work during their course, either in term time or in the holidays. One of the clearest variables influencing anticipation of engaging in paid work is country of domicile prior to embarking on higher education. When combining these finding with anticipation of significant debt on completion of their course, as can be seen in Figure 7.9 below, Scottish applicants emerge as a distinctive group. They are the least likely to anticipate significant debt on completing their course, but amongst the most likely to say that they plan to fund their studies by work during term time. The responses of these Scottish domiciled respondents' need to be interpreted in light of the different funding regime in Scotland, but this does not completely explain the large proportion of Scottish respondents who anticipate working during term time.

Figure 7.9: Anticipation of paid work during term and of significant debt, by domicile



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

It is important to note that these responses derive from responses to the question 'How do you plan to fund your higher education?' and choice of the option 'Work during study' as opposed to 'Work during holidays'. It is probable that the Wave 2 investigation will reveal higher incidence of term-time working when a direct question asking whether respondents have done paid work during term is asked.

Attitudes towards funding and debt

As part of the survey, applicants were presented with a range of statements and asked them to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement. Some of the statements were related to the issues of funding and debt. The findings from these questions can be seen in Chapter 8.

Summary

Debt is a key issue for many respondents. The anticipation of significant debt can affect their likelihood of entering higher education, the types and locations of the institutions they choose to enter, and the courses that they choose to study.

- Student loans are the most popular means of funding HE study
- Most applicants cited multiple methods of funding, most commonly between 3 and 5 methods were chosen
- Nearly 70 per cent of applicants anticipated doing some paid work to help fund their studies
- Ways in which applicants anticipate funding their courses does vary by age, ethnic group and socio-economic background
- Over 60 per cent of applicants anticipate significant debts by the end of their studies
- Applicants from Scotland are much less likely to anticipate significant debts

- There is some variation in anticipation of debt by socio-economic background, though socio-economic background doesn't appear to be as significant in England as it is in other countries of the UK

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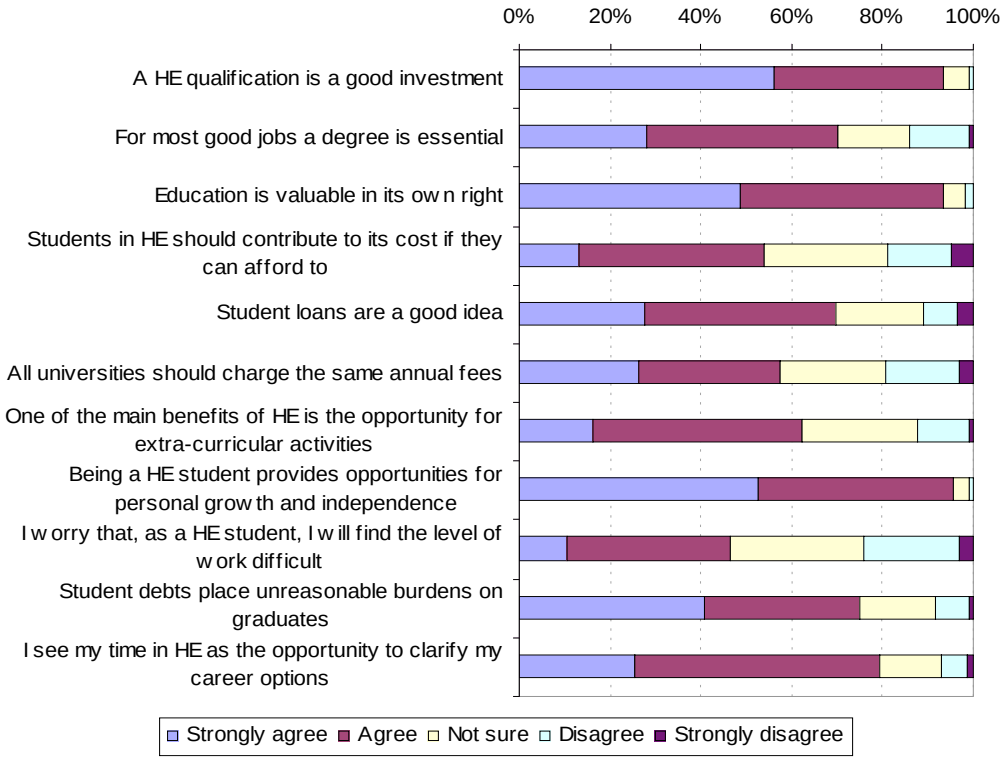
CHAPTER 8

Attitudes, values and views about HE policy and the value of HE

This section looks at respondents' attitudes towards higher education policy and the value of higher education. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with various statements about higher education policy and practice. Stratifying factors, including personal characteristics and anticipated experiences of higher education are examined to highlight differences across the applicant cohort. Unless otherwise stated, responses are for UK domiciled students only.

Figure 8.1: Attitudes, values and views about HE policy and value



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

The value of higher education

Applicants reported highly positive views about the value of higher education. Almost all agreed with the statement 'a higher education qualification is a good investment', more than half of the UK respondents agreeing strongly (56 per cent), and the response to 'education is valuable in its own right, not just as preparation for employment' was equally positive, with and just under half agreeing strongly (49 per cent). In line with that, the other very positively reviewed options were 'being a higher education student provides opportunities for personal growth and independence', with over half agreeing strongly (53 per cent) , and despite the relative clarity of career orientations identified in earlier chapters, just under 80 per cent saw their time in HE as an opportunity to clarify career options.

Questions about funding higher education revealed interesting ambivalence in attitudes. Whilst 54 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'students in higher education should contribute to its costs if they can afford to', a significant minority (19 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed and a large proportion were unsure. Additionally, 75 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that 'student debts place unreasonable burdens on graduates'.

Unsurprisingly on such measures as ‘a HE qualification is a good investment’ and ‘for most good jobs a degree is essential’ the vast majority of respondents chose either strongly agree or agree, and there was little difference between the countries of the UK. However, for the items about student funding, some differences became apparent. Applicants from Scotland were the most likely to disagree (17.7 per cent) or strongly disagree (6.4 per cent) with the statement that ‘Students in HE should contribute to its costs if they can afford to’, whereas applicants from England were the most likely to agree (13.1 per cent) or strongly agree (41.6 per cent). Similarly Scottish applicants were least likely to agree with the statements ‘student loans are a good idea’ and ‘all universities should charge the same annual fees, regardless of location or course.’

Differences in response to HE attitude items according to applicant attributes

Across the statements, factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic background and type of school attended influenced responses. Additionally, the type of university applicants planned to attend and their expectations of indebtedness were also found to play a role in their attitudes towards the various statements. The sections that follow discuss the attitudinal responses in three groups; those referring to HE as an investment, in relation to its employment benefits and costs; those considering the intrinsic values of education and the process of HE participation.

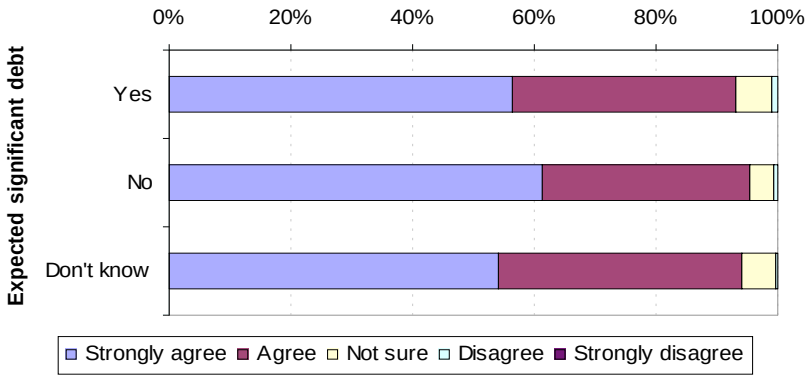
The costs and benefits of higher education participation

A higher education qualification is a good investment

There was little difference according to gender, age, socio-economic background or type of school attended, with the majority of respondents agreeing that higher education is a good investment. Black respondents (96 per cent) were the most likely to agree or strongly agree that ‘a higher education qualification is a good investment’. Bangladeshi respondents were slightly less likely than other groups to consider a higher education qualification a good investment, but the difference between the ethnic groups with the highest level of agreement, Black Africans (97 per cent) and Black Other (96 per cent) and the Bangladeshi group (91 per cent) was small in the context of the overwhelming agreement with the question seen across all groups and the small size of some of the ethnic group cohorts.

Whether the respondent expected to have significant debt upon graduation was seen to have some impact on whether they considered higher education a good investment, particularly on propensity to agree strongly with the statement. As was discussed in Chapter 7, 64 per cent of accepted applicants expected to have significant debt on graduation, whilst 16 per cent do not, and 21 per cent stated that they did not know. It would be expected that if an applicant expected to incur significant debt, they would be more likely to consider a higher education qualification a good investment. However, compared to applicants who expected not to have significant debts, applicants who expected to have significant debts on graduation were less likely to strongly agree that a higher education qualification was a good investment (61 per cent compared to 56 per cent), and were also slightly less likely to agree generally with the statement (96 per cent compared to 93 per cent)

Figure 8.2: 'A higher education qualification is a good investment' by expectations of significant debt



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

The type of higher education institution applicants expected to attend also had a small impact on levels of agreement with the statement, with respondents expecting to attend Russell Group universities most likely to agree strongly that a higher education qualification was a good investment (62 per cent), with those expecting to attend new (1992) universities and other higher education institutions less likely to strongly agree (54 per cent and 50 per cent respectively). When looking at all levels of agreement with the statement, there is less difference between applicants expecting to attend different types of higher education institution, with the highest level of agreement being seen amongst applicants planning to attend Russell Group universities (95 per cent) and the lowest level of agreement shown by applicants expecting to attend other higher education institutions (92 per cent).

Students in higher education should contribute to its cost if they can afford to

HE applicants who have proceeded to apply and been accepted appear to be more likely than not to, to accept that individuals who can afford to should contribute to their HE costs. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Surprisingly, there was no significant variation by socio-economic background, with those from Routine and Manual Operative backgrounds marginally more likely than those from Professional/Managerial backgrounds to agree strongly with both this statement and the statement about student loans being a good idea. Of course, some of the former may be thinking that *those who can afford to* should pay while *people like me* should not, thus addressing the issue from a different perspective: something that we can explore in later stages in relation to funding arrangements and debts accrued.

There was variation among types of respondents. Male applicants (56 per cent) were more likely to agree with the statement than females (52 per cent) and older applicants (57 per cent) were more likely to agree than younger ones (52 per cent). Among the different ethnic groups, Black respondents were most likely to agree with the statement (59 per cent) and White respondents were the least likely (53 per cent). Within the ethnic groups, the Black African (60 per cent) and Other Asian (62 per cent) groups were the most likely to agree with the statement. Almost a third of Chinese respondents were not sure whether they agreed with the statement or not, and overall, a high proportion of respondents were ambivalent in their responses to the question.

Those who did not anticipate significant debts upon graduation (58 per cent) were more likely to agree that students should contribute to the cost of higher education if they can afford to than those who anticipate significant debts (54 per cent). Students applying to study education (49 per cent) were less likely to agree than student studying other subjects, possibly because of their personal career goals, involving work with generally-agreed high social value within a profession with a reputation, no longer entirely justified, of being a

relatively low-paid area of graduate employment. Although it might be expected that applicants from independent schools would be more likely to agree with the statement since they are accustomed to paying for their education, they were not significantly more likely to agree with the statement than those from some of the other types of school. They were, however, somewhat more likely to agree with the statement than students from both comprehensive and religious schools (56 per cent compared to 52 per cent for comprehensive and religious schools). Applicants coming from schools which selected pupils on the basis of a particular aptitude were most likely to agree with the statement (59 per cent).

All universities should charge the same annual fees, regardless of location or course

Responses to the statement that 'all universities should charge the same annual fees, regardless of location or course' were somewhat equivocal. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of respondents were not sure whether they agreed with the statement or not.

- Generally, more traditional higher education applicants (who are more likely to have opted for longer courses) were less likely to agree with the statement.
- Men were less likely to agree than women (54 per cent compared to 60 per cent).
- Students coming from independent fee paying schools were less likely to agree than those from other schools, with only 48 per cent agreeing, compared to 57 per cent of students coming from comprehensive schools;
- Students whose parents were in higher SES occupations were less likely to agree than those in lower SES occupation (55 per cent of those whose parents were in managerial and professional occupations agreed with the statement, compared to 58 per cent of those in intermediate occupations and 59 per cent of those in routine and manual occupations);
- Students planning to attend Russell Group universities were the least likely to agree with the statement (52 per cent of those expecting to attend a Russell Group university and 55 per cent of applicants expecting to attend an other old university agreed, while the figure was 61 per cent for those expecting to attend a new university);
- Those expecting significant debt were less likely to agree than those who didn't expect significant debt (54 per cent compared to 59 per cent);
- Amongst the ethnic groups, agreement with the statement was at less than 60 per cent for the white (including white and another ethnicity) groups and the Chinese respondents, but above 60 per cent for the Asian (excluding the Chinese) and Black groups, with the highest level of agreement being seen amongst Pakistani respondents (65 per cent) and the lowest level amongst the White-Asian and Chinese groups (53 per cent).

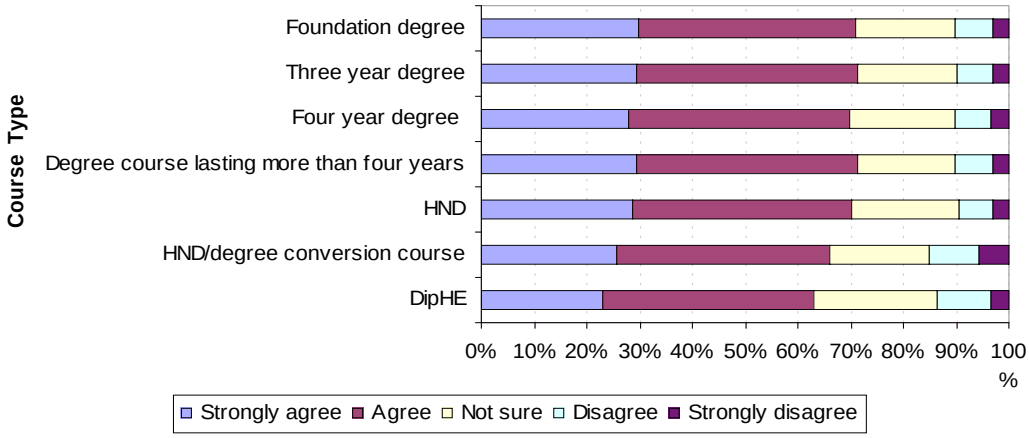
  'I feel the top-up fees are unnecessary and unfair to those who wish to study in 2006. It makes the idea of learning and higher education off-putting and expensive in terms of wanting more in life and aiming higher. It sends out the message that 'Those of you who want to succeed need to be rich and expect a future of long-term debt' [Female, 19-20, Eastern, White, Routine & Manual background, Creative Arts and Design, New University]

  'All students should be entitled to the same amount of loan and pay the same for the course and living costs no matter what background they come from. It should not depend on the students' parents' income because most students live away from home and it is not fair to think that some students can simply rely on their parents to fund them through, even if their parents are quite wealthy. Parents should not be expected to fund their children when they go to university, unless they are still living at home. That way it is fair for everyone and all students are on the same level'. [Female, 18 and under, Yorks and the Humber, White, SES Higher, Other Old University, Architecture, Building and Planning].

Student loans are a good idea

Although there was some variation across socio-economic group, type of school attended and gender, much of this variation can be attributed to the reasonably large numbers who were unsure about their response to the statement. As the evidence presented in Chapter 7 showed, type and length of course were correlated with expectation of significant debt upon graduation, with those about to start Foundation degree courses least likely to anticipate significant debt, and those on degree courses lasting more than four years most likely to do so, type of course had no significant impact on whether applicants thought student loans were a good idea. As Figure 8.3 shows, students planning to study for HND or HND/degree course conversions or DipHEs were slightly less likely to agree or strongly agree that student loans were a good idea, but many of the respondents planning to complete these kinds of courses also have other characteristics that make them less likely to agree with the statement, so it is not clear that the type of course they are planning to enter that is the most relevant factor. This was also true of the other questions asking for respondents attitudes towards financial issues.

Figure 8.3: 'Student loans are a good idea' by type of course



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

Applicants in the oldest age group (25 and over) were much more likely than applicants in the other age groups to disagree or strongly disagree that student loans are a good idea. Only 60 per cent of applicants in the oldest age group agreed with the statement, whilst in the other age groups agreement was around 70 per cent. This is likely to reflect some older applicants' knowledge of the system of funding higher education prior to student loans, when grants were more common, whilst younger students may be comparing the situation to there being no external funding for their higher education, and regarded student loans as 'part of the deal'. The following three quotes, selected from many made on questionnaires submitted, give examples from the range of responses and, as was discussed in Chapter 6, the gaps in information about funding that appear to exist :

> *'Coming from a working class background and being giving the opportunity to gain a place at uni, I am very determined to succeed and earn my degree. The loan system is quite ridiculous, as I am in receipt of income support I am being pushed into having a loan even if I do not wish to have one as the assumption is that I would have taken it up, but it is a loan and as such I will have to pay it back in the long term, so overall firstly I am being bullied into having a loan as the money will be deducted anyway from my benefits and then will have to work to pay it back. As a single parent of three disabled children this is the biggest pressure and worry that I face'.* [Female, 31-40, Wales, White, Other Old University, Biological, Vetnary and Agricultural Sciences]

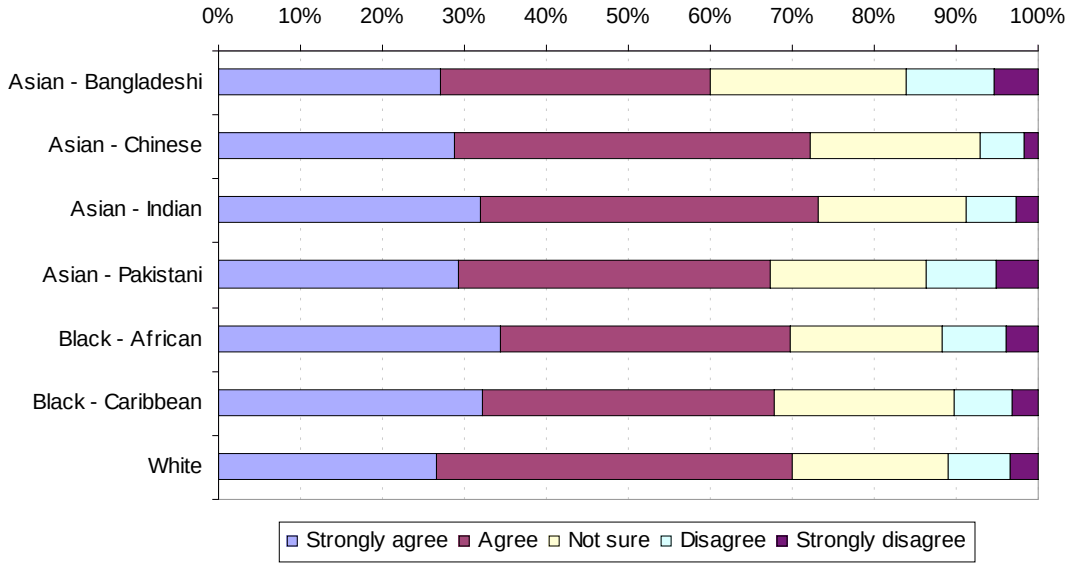
'Being from a low income family I expect a lot of debt after my studies. However, the fact that I am able to enter the higher education system means that I don't feel I am at a disadvantage'.
Female, Law, Wales

'Although I am a high-achieving student, tuition fees/student debt discouraged me from studying in higher education purely for the fact that I am from a working class background and so feel I am going to struggle financially'.'
Female, Social sciences combined with arts, Yorks & Humberside
'I don't understand why students get so worried about their loans and student debts when the interest rates are so good and there is no pressure to pay it back if you are not working. It need to be made more clear how accessible university is'.
[Female, 18 and under, Yorks & Humber, White, Routine & Manual background, Creative Arts & Design, other HEI]

Respondents who expected to have significant debt on graduation were nevertheless generally more likely to agree that student loans were a good idea (73 per cent compared to 62 per cent for those who did not expect significant debts and 69 per cent for those who were unsure) possibly because they were more likely to anticipate finding them necessary and useful.

There was some variation in level of agreement across the different ethnic groups, although as in the case of some of the other stratifying variables, much of this can be attributed to the high levels of uncertainty respondents exhibited towards the statement. The conflict with Islamic culture has already been noted in Chapter 7, so it is surprising that this is not more apparent in Figure 8.4, which does show that the Asian Bangladeshi and Pakistani group were among those most likely to disagree with the statement and least likely to agree (60 per cent).

Figure 8.4: 'Student loans are a good idea' by ethnic group



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

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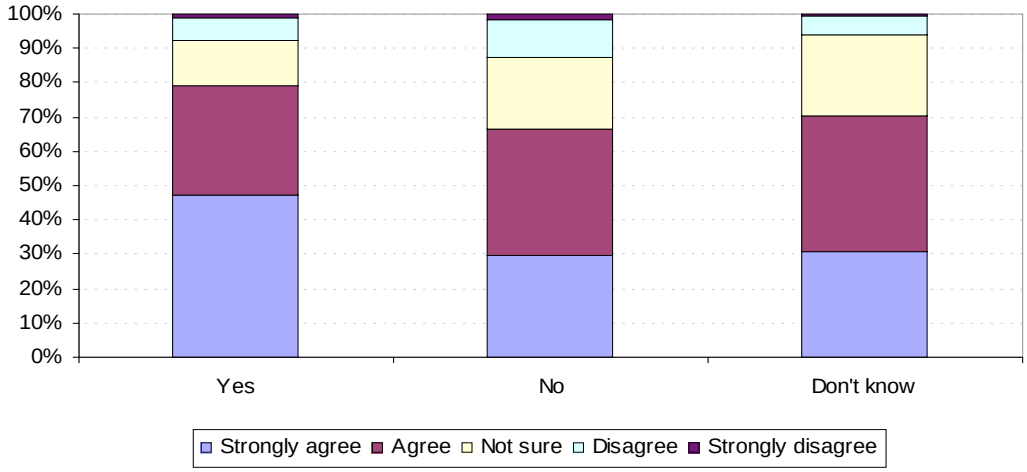
Student debts place unreasonable demands on graduates

Unsurprisingly, respondents who expected to have significant debt upon graduation were much more likely to agree (79 per cent) that student debts place unreasonable demands on graduates than those respondents who did not expect to have significant debt (66 per cent). The difference is most apparent when looking at the proportions of respondents who strongly agree with the statement. While the 30 per cent of those not expecting significant debts and 31 per cent of those who are not sure whether to expect significant debt, strongly agreed with the statement, for those who *did* anticipate significant debt, the figure is 47 per cent. Students coming from independent fee paying schools were less likely to agree with the statement than those from comprehensive schools (76 per cent compared to 70 per cent), possibly because they are less likely to experience significant debt personally.

Figure 8.5: 'Student debts place unreasonable demands on graduates' by whether respondents expect to accrue significant debt

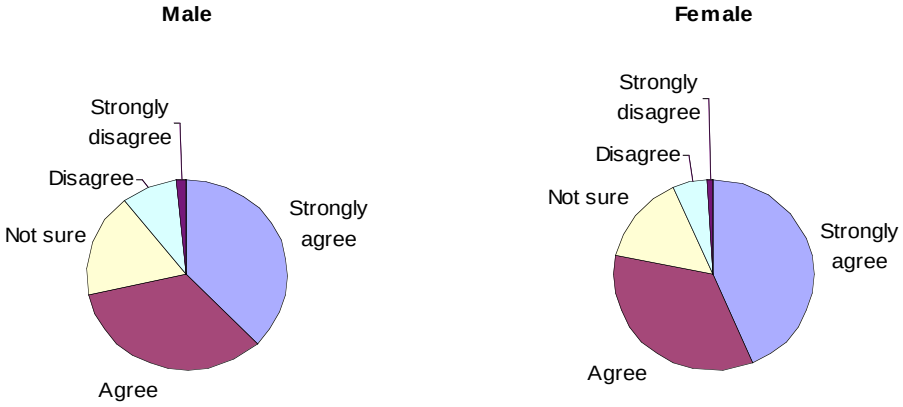


Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

Surprisingly, although expectations of debt and type of school appear to have an impact on whether respondents considered student debts an unreasonable burden, parental SES occupation did not appear to have a significant effect.

As figure 8.6 shows, women were more likely to strongly agree that student debts placed unreasonable demands on graduates. Women, as a group, tend to be lower paid than men, and to have lower earnings across their lifetime and a similar level of debt will therefore represent a greater proportion of their expected income, and is therefore a greater burden, than is the case for men. This may be reflected in their career planning and expectations of employment which will be observed as the study proceeds.

Figure 8.6: 'Student debts place unreasonable demands on graduates' by gender



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

Generally, students who are studying subjects where it can be expected that future earnings will be lower, or which are less vocational in nature, are more likely to feel that student debt is a burden on graduates. Students studying arts and humanities generally show a higher level of agreement than those studying science subjects. Similarly, applicants who stated that they have no idea what they want to do when they finish their course tended to agree more strongly with the statement than other respondents, with almost half of this cohort (48 per cent) strongly agreeing, compared to an average of 41 per cent across all groups.

The picture from the ethnic group variables was less clear. When looking at the aggregated groups, it appears that there is little difference between the groups, but within the broader categories, there are significant differences between the subgroups, particularly in the Asian category. This is likely to reflect certain cultural differences in attitudes towards debt generally, as well as in relation to education. The groups which had the largest proportion of respondents agreeing with the statement were the Bangladeshi and Indian groups (79 per cent and 76 per cent), whereas the Chinese and other Asian groups had a much lower figure (70 per cent and 69 per cent).

> *'I am going to university because I believe it is the best way for me to fulfil my potential and advance in my desired career. The cost of going to university though is appalling. For someone like me with a working-class background I will probably have to work long hours during term time to fund the cost of living and other essentials. This time could otherwise be spent studying and giving the course I am going so heavily into debt for, my full attention and dedication. I fear that for me this will be impossible, and I may struggle. I certainly would not struggle if I did not have to find employment alongside my time-absorbing course'.* [Male, 18 and under, North East, White, SES Intermediate, Other Old University, Creative Arts and Design]

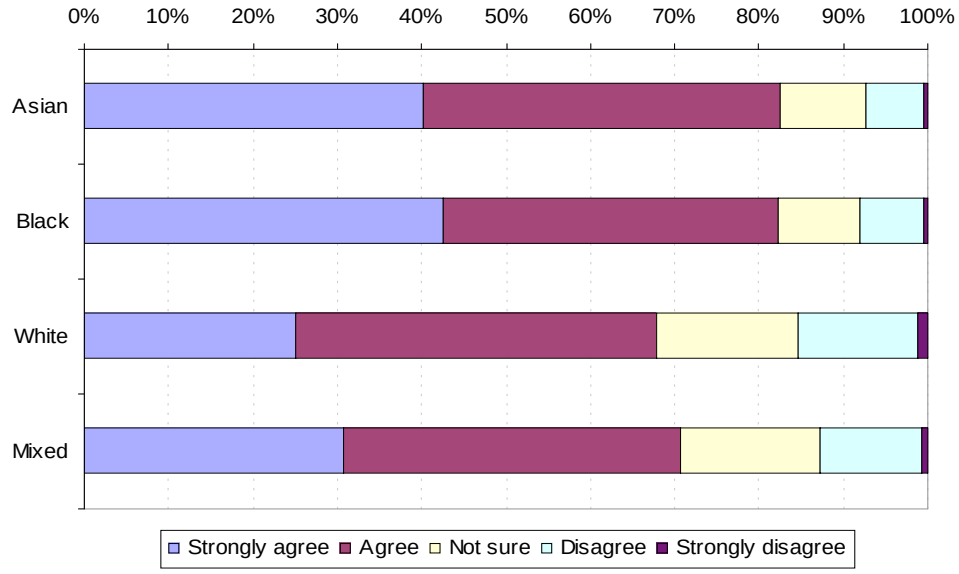
For most good jobs, a degree is essential

There was little difference according to gender and socio-economic group. There were significant variations amongst different ethnic groups, and age and type of school and higher education institution attended were also found to have an impact on applicant's likelihood of agreeing with the statement that 'for most good jobs, a degree is essential'.

The clearest variance can be seen across the different ethnic groups. White applicants were significantly less likely to agree that for most good jobs, a degree is essential. Only 25 per cent of white respondents strongly agreed with the statement, and 70 per cent agreed. In the

Asian and Black groups, the levels of agreement were significantly higher, as Figure 8.7 shows.

Figure 8.7: 'For most good jobs, a degree is essential' by ethnic group



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted. Excluding responses where ethnic group is unknown.

Within the different ethnic groups, there was also some variation. In the Asian group, Pakistani respondents had almost a 10 per cent higher level of agreement with the statement than the Asian group with the lowest level of agreement, the Bangladeshis (87 per cent compared to 77 per cent) with the Bangladeshi group being significantly lower than all the other Asian groups. Similarly, the Black African group (86 per cent) was more likely to regard a degree as being essential for getting a good job than Black Caribbean respondents were (74 per cent).

The youngest age group (18 and under) was most likely to agree with that for most good jobs, a degree is essential (72 per cent) and the level of agreement declines with age, with the oldest age group (25 and over) the least likely to agree (65 per cent) with the statement. Students from fee-paying independent schools were the most likely to agree with the statement (78 per cent), whilst those from comprehensive schools were the least likely to agree (71 per cent). The average level of agreement across those expecting to attend an old or new university was around 72 per cent compared to 64 per cent of students at other HEIs. This may reflect the types of courses provided by these institutions, as institutions in this group include arts and drama colleges which prepare students for professions where having a degree is not necessarily a precursor of a successful career, or where talent or performance ultimately count for more than qualifications, or because they had enrolled for diplomas rather than degrees with occupational objectives related to that.

The experience of higher education participation

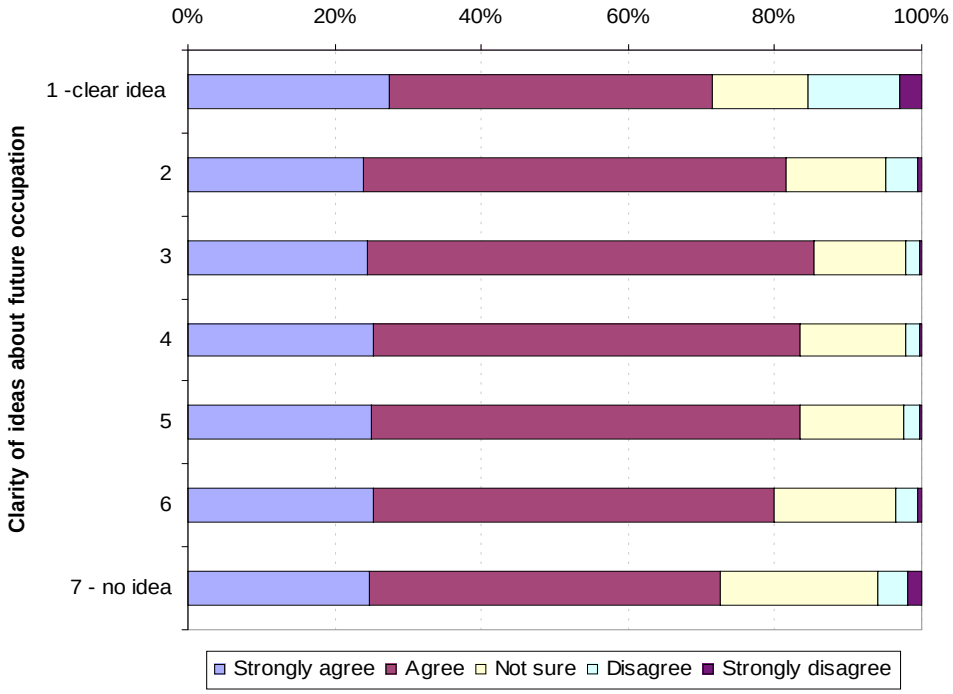
I see my time in higher education as the opportunity to clarify my career options

Students proposing to study medicine were, as would be expected, less likely than students studying other subjects to agree with that their time in higher education is an opportunity to clarify their career options, since they have chosen to study a subject leading clearly to a particular career. In this group, 26 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, although 57 per cent of respondents did agree or strongly agree, possibly those with the aim of clarifying which branch of medicine they wish to enter. Students aiming to

study other subjects with relatively clear career paths, for example, law and education, did not show a similar level of disagreement with the statement, although they were still more likely than average to disagree. Applicants who stated that they had a clear idea of what occupation they wanted to enter upon completion of their course were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, probably because they already feel they know what they want to do in relation to their career and therefore do not need to clarify their options.

There was some ambiguity in the question, as people may have disagreed because they already knew what career they wanted to pursue, but they could also have disagreed because they did not feel that higher education would provide them with the opportunity to clarify their career options. This may account for the distribution of responses shown in Figure 8.8. Rather than the students who have the least clarity in relation to their future careers being the group who see higher education as an opportunity to clarify their career goals, it is instead the students in the intermediate categories (3-5) who are most likely to agree, while the students who have most and least ideas (categories 1 and 7) about their future careers are the ones who are least likely to agree with the statement.

Figure 8.8: 'I see my time in higher education as the opportunity to clarify my career options' by clarity of ideas about future occupation



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

Personal characteristics appear to have less impact on attitudes towards the statement. There was little significant difference seen across variables such as age, gender, type of school attended and parental occupation. Amongst the ethnic groups, Black applicants were significantly more likely to agree that their time in higher education was the opportunity to clarify their career options. While the figure was around 79 per cent for all ethnic groups were ethnicity is known, for Black applicants, it rises to 86 per cent. Whilst the Black applicants were less likely to disagree than the other applicants, they were also less likely to be unsure.

Education is valuable in its own right, not just as preparation for employment

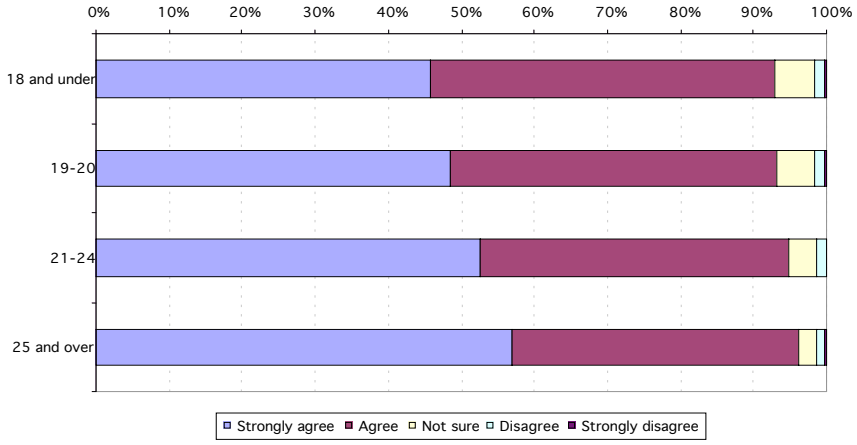
There was general agreement across all respondents that education is valuable in its own right. Across many of the stratifying factors, variations appeared when looking at how strongly applicants agreed with the statement, although proportions of responses falling into

either of the categories indicating agreement with the statement were similar. Students from fee-paying independent schools (53 per cent) were more likely to strongly agree than those coming from comprehensive schools (45 per cent). However, when the strongly agree and agree categories of response are combined, their level of agreement is within 1 per cent of each other (94 per cent compared to 93 per cent). Similarly, female applicants (50 per cent) were slightly more likely to strongly agree with the statement than male applicants (47 per cent) but their overall levels of agreement were similar (94 per cent and 93 per cent respectively). Students expecting to attend Russell Group universities (56 per cent) were considerably more strongly agreed with the statement than applicants expecting to attend new universities (45 per cent) and other higher education institutions (44 per cent), and, as expected, students studying less clearly vocational subjects, such as linguistics and classics (62 per cent), languages (62 per cent), and historical and philosophical studies (61 per cent) were more likely to strongly agree than average.

Amongst the different ethnic groups, Black applicants were most positive about the statement, with 60 per cent strongly agreeing, whilst White applicants were the least likely to strongly agree (47 per cent). Breaking down the ethnic groups further, the Chinese and White groups were much less likely to strongly agree with the statement than the other ethnic groups. Only 46 per cent of the Chinese group and 47 per cent of the White group strongly agreed, whilst all the other groups had figures over 50 per cent, and in the Black African group it was 62 per cent.

There is clear variance across the different age groups. As age increases, so does propensity to agree strongly with the statement.

Figure 8.9: 'Education is valuable in its own right, not just as preparation for employment' by age



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

The extent to which respondents are influenced by their own situation and their own reasons for pursuing higher education is not clear but respondents in the older age groups are likely to have progressively more experience of employment and have made a very positive decision to enter HE, rather than simply drifting in as the next stage of life. Additionally, there was evidence that some mature students were planning to pursue courses simply for their own enjoyment because they had already retired.

> '*Having spent many years travelling and working as a nurse, I became interested in the study of cultures and decided to learn more by taking a degree*'. [Female, 51 and over, South East, White, Old university, Social Studies]

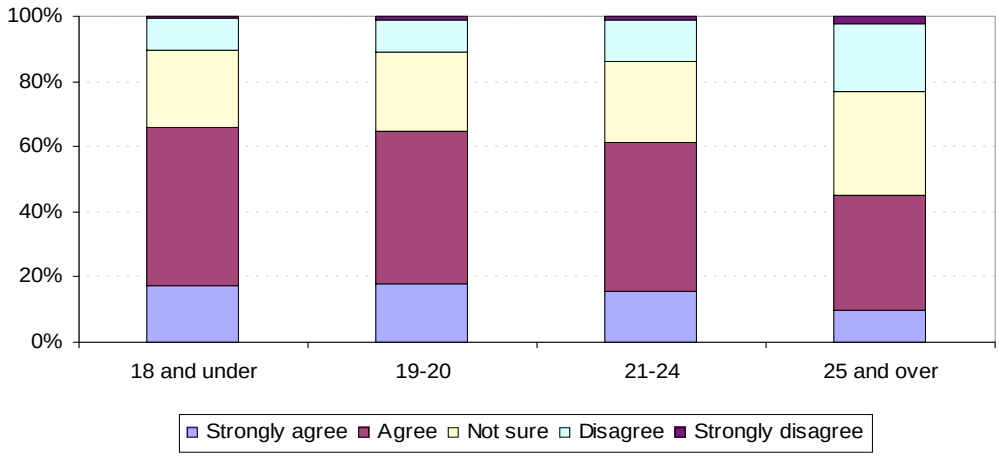
'I want to do something interesting and challenging following my retirement from full-time employment as a Judge'. [Female, 51 and over, North West, White, Old university, Historical & Philosophical Studies]
'I retired at aged 61, and have been attending the Centre for Lifelong learning at [my local university]*. The subjects studied have been Jazz and Archaeology. The latter course really struck a chord with me as I found it exiting and very interesting. In addition I studied Economics at* [the same university] *some 45 years ago, and I hated it!! Subsequently I left after two years*. [Male, 51 and over, North East, White, Russell Group University, Historical and Philosophical Studies]

One of the main benefits of higher education is the opportunity for extracurricular activities

A large proportion of respondents stated they were unsure whether one of the main benefits of higher education is the opportunity for extracurricular activities: perhaps not surprising in advance of experience of it, for most of them. This uncertainty is prevalent across all the stratifying factors. To some extent, this uncertainty may also arise from the question itself, and respondents' definitions of what constitutes a main benefit or an extracurricular activity. As was discussed in Chapter 4, when asked about their reasons for choosing a particular HEI, provision of sports facilities was the most frequently mentioned extracurricular activity that had an impact on their decision-making, with the opportunity to pursue religious activities, music and other areas of interest also mentioned.

Whilst there was some differentiation across the different ethnic groups and those at old universities are more likely to agree with the statement than those at new universities, the clearest factor relating to responses to the statement was age. Respondents in the oldest age bracket, those over 25, were much less likely than those in the other age groups to consider extracurricular opportunities important. This is likely to reflect the more instrumental approach to HE participation already commented on and also, in many cases, anticipation of less opportunity or desire to engage in these activities. Older applicants are more likely to have jobs, family commitments and existing social networks which they choose to prioritise or which limit their capacity to take advantage of facilities for extracurricular activities.

Figure 8.10: 'One of the main benefits of higher education is the opportunity for extracurricular activities' by age group



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

Students aiming to study education and subjects allied to medicine were the least likely to agree, reflecting their age profile and perhaps, the practical demands they anticipated that their courses would make. Many of the courses that fall into these categories have a clear vocational focus and respondents may have considered preparation for employment overwhelming the main benefit, to the exclusion of other benefits. Some subjects in this group are also work-based, which may leave little time for respondents to engage in extra-curricular

activities centred upon their higher education institution, and, as has been shown, they are more likely to be studied by respondents who have other characteristics that have already been identified as making them less likely to agree with the statement that one of the main benefits of higher education is the opportunity for extracurricular activities.

Being a higher education student provides opportunities for personal growth and independence.

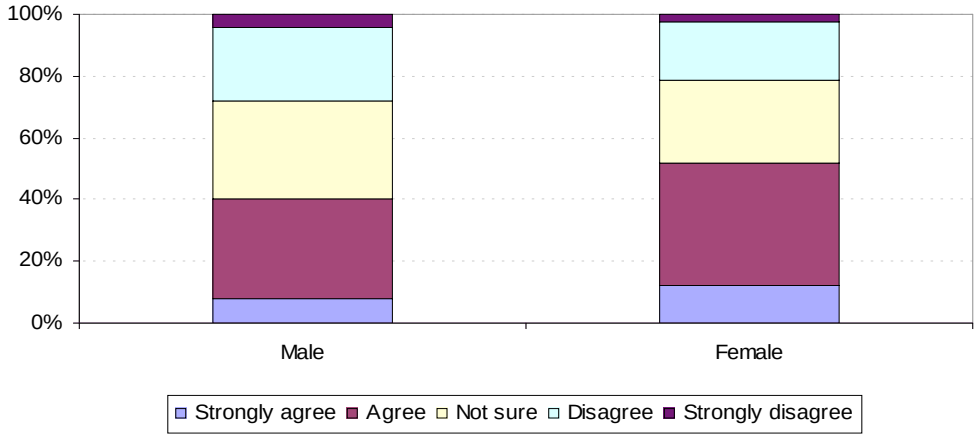
There was a high degree of agreement with this statement across all respondents, and no clear pattern emerged when looking at those who disagreed with the statement.

I worry, as a higher education student, I will find the level of work difficult

There was a reasonably high level of concern expressed by respondents about the level of work required of them once they embarked upon higher education. Almost half the respondents (47 per cent) expressed some degree of worry, but a further 29 per cent stated that they were not sure whether they agreed with the statement – all of which is a clear reflection of the fact that, for most, they were taking a significant and radical step into previously uncharted territory.

More traditional higher education applicants were less likely to worry about finding the work difficult than other applicants. The groups most likely to disagree with the statement were applicants coming from independent fee paying schools (27 per cent), those with parents in managerial and professional occupations (25 per cent), and those expecting to attend a Russell Group university (28 per cent) – among whom thee is a significant overlap. These more traditional applicants are likely to have greater exposure to higher education prior to embarking upon their course, and to be more familiar about the level of work that will be expected from them. Those not expecting significant debt upon graduation expressed particularly low levels of concern about the level of work expected of them (32 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement). Female applicants were much more likely to worry than male applicants. Of the female applicants, 52 per cent expressed concern, while only 40 per cent of male applicants were similarly worried.

Figure 8.11: 'I worry, as a higher education student, I will find the level of work difficult' by gender



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, UK respondents only, weighted.

Although the traditional applicants were the least worried, when looking at the responses across the age groups, it was seen that the youngest applicants were the most likely to be concerned about the level of work expected of them in higher education. In the two youngest age groups, 18 and under and 19-20, from which higher education applicants are traditionally drawn, 49 per cent and 47 per cent respectively agreed that they were worried, whereas in the 21-24 age group, this fell to 40 per cent, with 41 per cent of the 25 and over age group

similarly concerned. Similarly, when looking at the ethnic groups, although the white group showed relatively low levels of worry, the ethnic group with smallest proportion agreeing with the statement was the Black African group, in which just 38 per cent stated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, and 32 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Ethnically Chinese respondents showed particularly high levels of worry about the difficulty of the work in higher education. When the data is broken down by ethnic group, most of the ethnic groups have less than 50 per cent of respondents stating that they are worried, but amongst Chinese respondents, this figure is 57 per cent, and just 16 per cent disagree with the statement, compared to an average of around 24 per cent across all ethnic groups.

Students aiming to study some subjects were more likely to be worried about the difficulty of the work than others. The traditional professional subjects were found at either end of the scale. 54 per cent of students aiming to study education agreed that they were worried about the level of work expected of them, as were 51 per cent of those aiming to study law. Students aiming to study medicine (41 per cent) were one of the two groups least likely to agree that they were worried, the other group being students aiming to study creative arts and design (40 per cent).

Summary

This chapter has shown that the applicants generally held positive views about higher education, regarding is as valuable, both in terms of personal growth and career prospects. Higher education was seen to provide students with opportunities to become independent as well as to clarify career ambitions. The burden of debt was a concern for a large proportion of respondents, but the general principle that students (if they can afford to) should contribute to the costs of their higher education - and the majority accepted that student loans, though thought by many to place an unwarranted burden on students after completing their courses, were a good idea.

Attitudes about higher education policy and the value of higher education have been shown to be related to certain personal characteristics.

- Across many of the attitudinal questions, the most traditional higher education applicants, i.e. those who were young, male, had attended a fee paying independent school, and who had parents in higher SES occupations, were found to be the most positive, that is the most likely to see themselves as being successful and the least likely to question the value of higher education or be concerned about graduate debt. Applicants whose parents had experience of higher education, those who did not expect significant debt, and students expecting to attend a Russell Group or other old university were also more likely to hold positive attitudes and to have fewer worries.

- Respondents who had a clear view about their future career and the qualifications required to enter that occupation or career path also stood out as a group that tended to hold strong, positive views about the value of higher education.

- In all of the questions, there were significant minorities whose responses disagreed with the norm, and these applicants will be interesting to follow up as they progress through higher education.

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CHAPTER 9

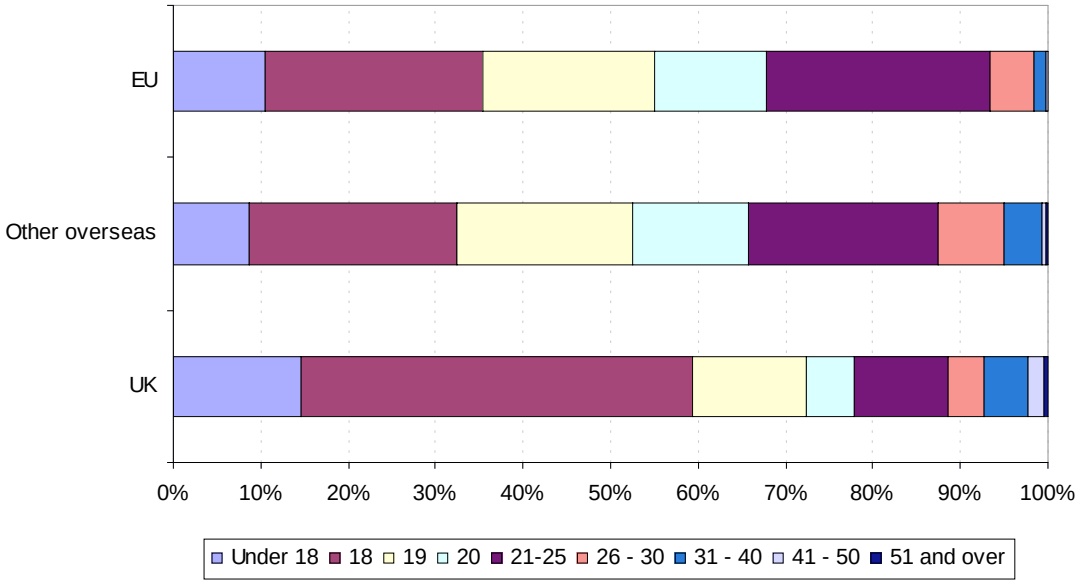
A comparison of the profiles and responses of UK, EU and other overseas applicants for UK HE courses

This chapter focuses on the EU and other overseas domiciled applicants, to examine who the EU and other overseas domiciled applicants are and why they applied to UK higher education institutions and compare their profiles to UK domiciled applicants. Area of domicile refers to where the applicant was registered as living at the time of their application.

First we look at some of the differences in attributes among EU, other overseas and UK applicants.

Characteristics of EU and other overseas domiciled applicants

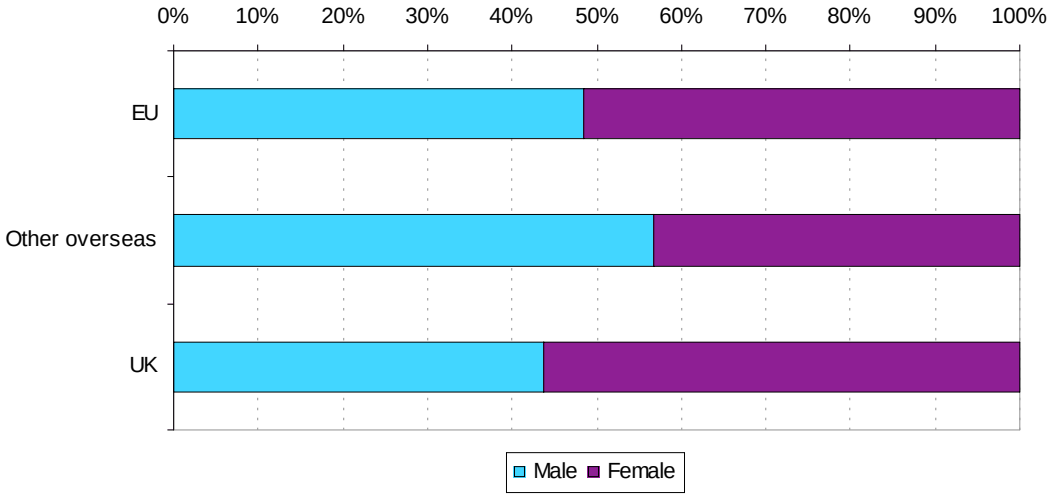
Figure 9.1: Comparison of UK, EU and other overseas applicants by age



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

As the above figure shows, non-UK domiciled applicants tend to be older, on average, than their UK domiciled peers. Almost 60 per cent of UK domiciled applicants were 18 or under when applying, while the figures for EU and other overseas domiciled applicants are 35 per cent and 32 per cent respectively. Some of this difference is likely to be attributable to different school-leaving ages in the applicants' countries of domicile.

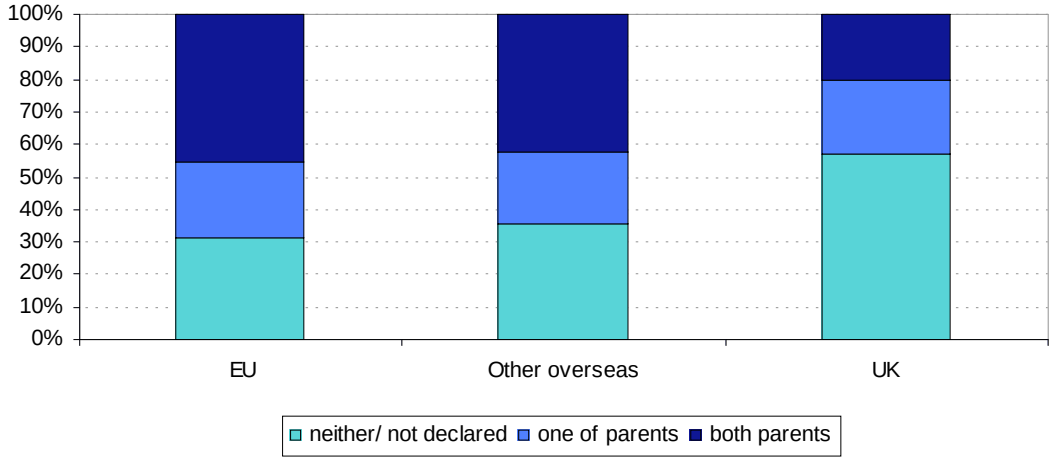
Figure 9.2: Comparison of UK, EU and other overseas applicants by gender



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Figure 9.2 shows that other overseas and EU applicants were slightly more likely to be male than those from the EU and the UK.

Figure 9.3: Comparison of UK, EU and other overseas applicants by parental experience of HE



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

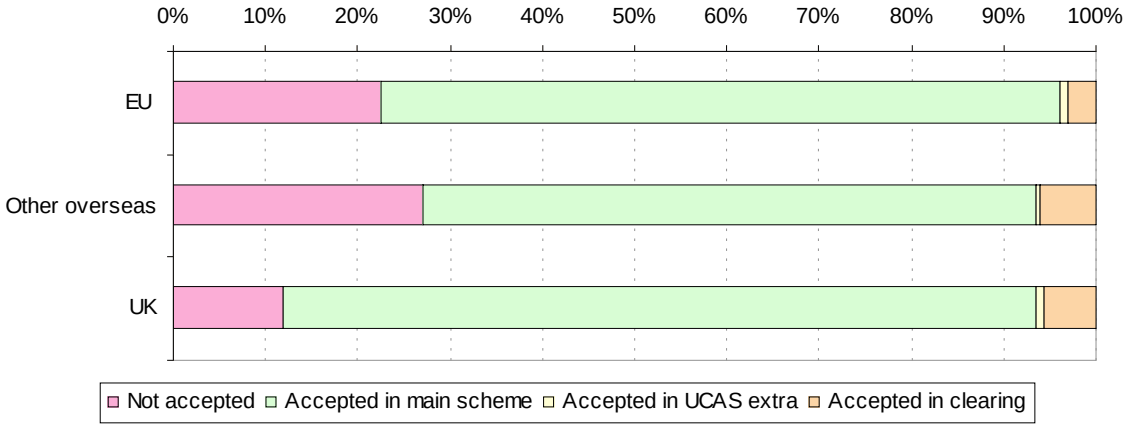
We do not have social background data for EU and other degree applicants but all the evidence we do have suggests that EU applicants, in particular, are likely to come from relatively advantaged backgrounds. Non-UK domiciled applicants were significantly more likely to have one or both parents with experience of higher education. More than 60 per cent of both the EU-domiciled and other overseas-domiciled applicants had at least one parent with experience of higher education, compared to less than 50 per cent of UK domiciled applicants. This pattern is repeated when looking at whether any members of the applicant's immediate family have a higher education qualification. More than half of the EU and other overseas applicant's mothers have a higher education qualification (58 per cent and 53 per cent respectively) compared to only a third of the UK domiciled applicants. The figures are slightly higher for fathers with higher education qualifications (62 per cent, 63 per cent and 34 per cent). Additionally, more than half of the EU and other overseas-domiciled applicants

have a sibling with a higher education qualification (51 per cent and 59 per cent respectively) while only 43 per cent of UK domiciled applicants have a sibling with a similar qualification. Consequently, the EU and other overseas domiciled applicants are likely to have a greater familiarity with higher education, although in some cases this familiarity will be with a different country's higher education system. This familiarity is likely to lead applicants to view higher education more favourably and give them greater knowledge of the different options that are available to them. As will be seen later, it appears to give these applicants a feeling that higher education is something that is expected of them, it is the normal thing for them to do. EU domiciled applicants were slightly less likely than other groups to feel that their family was supportive of their choice of course (75 per cent compared to 83 per cent for both the other overseas and UK cohorts).

Outcomes of higher education applications

The data denoting whether or not applicants had accepted places was provided by UCAS once the annual applications process had been completed. As will be discussed in Chapter 11, the majority of non-accepted applicants had not been offered a place, but non-accepted category also includes applicants who, for whatever reason, chose not to accept places that they had been offered – either because they preferred to defer entry to achieve a different offer, or because they had decided to take another route. In comparison to UK-domiciled candidates, applicants from EU and other overseas countries were significantly more likely to be non-accepted respondents, as was discussed in Chapter 2, with other overseas domiciled applicants are more than twice as likely to not be in the 'not accepted' category as UK domiciled applicants.

Figure 9.4: Outcome of applications, comparing UK, EU and other overseas applicants



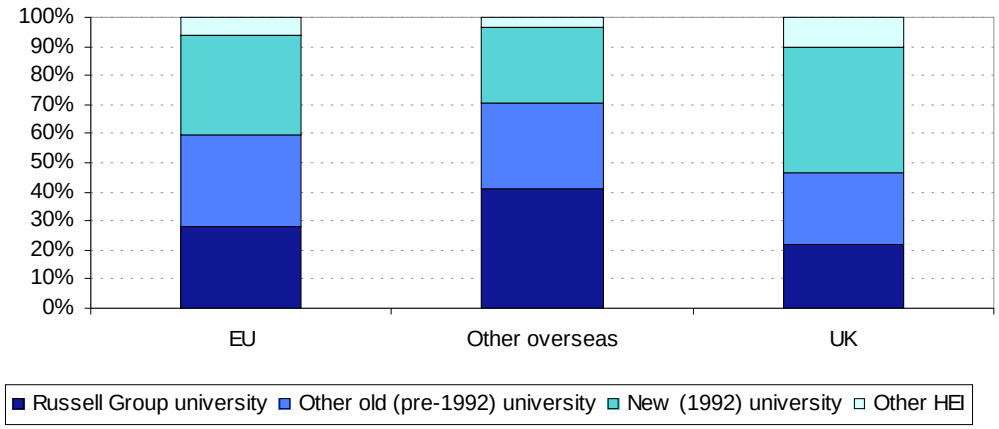
Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Data on whether applicants had accepted places at their preferred institution shows that EU and UK domiciled applicants were more likely to have done so than these from other overseas locations, although UK applicants were most likely to have accepted places at the institution they had said they hoped to study at when completing the questionnaire (61 per cent and 69 per cent respectively). In contrast, only half of other overseas domiciled applicants had accepted places via the UCAS normal scheme to the institution of their choice, whilst a further 17 per cent were accepted via the normal scheme to another higher education institution (compared to 12 per cent and 13 per cent for the EU and UK domiciled applicants). This may reflect the types of higher education institutions overseas applicants apply to, and the pattern of their applications, as well as their familiarity with the application process in the UK. As will be seen later, they are more likely to apply to Russell Group and other old universities, with additional applications being made to overseas higher education institutions, either in their country of domicile or elsewhere. In cases where applications had been made to other countries' HEIs, we have no way of knowing whether these were preferred or lower order options – but it is likely that a very strong international candidate applying to Ivy League

universities in the USA and other world-class universities around the world, as well as leading UK HEIs, may decide to opt for Harvard rather than Cambridge when faced with alternative possibilities. For example, to give just two cases, one other overseas student who had not accepted (or not been accepted for) a place had applied to study Economics at Cambridge, Bristol, the London School of Economics and University College, London as well as to Cornell, Brown and Harvard Universities in the USA. Another who *had* accepted a place to study Engineering had applied to Cambridge, Manchester, Exeter, Birmingham and Bristol, and to the Universidad Pontificia di Comillas, Ingenieria ICIA in Madrid. Further analyses of these data is required, and it may be that this is an area for further qualitative investigation, to explore the reasons that EU and overseas applicants both choose or ultimately decide against places at UK HEIs. The second stage survey will provide some insight into which student have and have not gone on to study elsewhere, either in their countries of origin or at HEIs in the global marketplace for higher education. A high proportion of overseas qualifications cannot be translated into the UCAS tariff and are consequently classified as non-standard qualifications, so it is difficult to evaluate the quality of candidates who failed to accept places, but such evidence as we have from the survey responses suggests that they cover a very wide spectrum, ranging from applicants with very poor English language skills who appear to be very poorly informed about UK HE, to those competing for places at the leading world universities.

Higher education choices by domicile

Figure 9.5: Type of higher education institution applied for, comparing UK, EU and other overseas applicants



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

However, Figure 9.5 shows that EU and other overseas domiciled applicants were more likely to be heading for Russell Group and other old (pre-1992) universities than the UK domiciled applicants. This difference is particularly marked in the case of the other overseas applicants, of whom 71 per cent were planning to attend a Russell Group or other old university, compared to only 47 per cent of UK applicants. To some extent, this may reflect the other options open to overseas applicants in their countries of domicile, and their perceptions of different types of UK University in relation to these options. Not surprisingly, as will be seen later, both EU and other overseas domiciled applicants are slightly more likely than UK applicants to be influenced in their choice of higher education institution by prestige-related factors such as rankings and reputation. EU and other overseas domiciled applicants were less more likely to be embarking on a Foundation degree of HND/DipHE course than their UK counterparts, mostly applying for traditional undergraduate programmes, but the profiles are largely similar.

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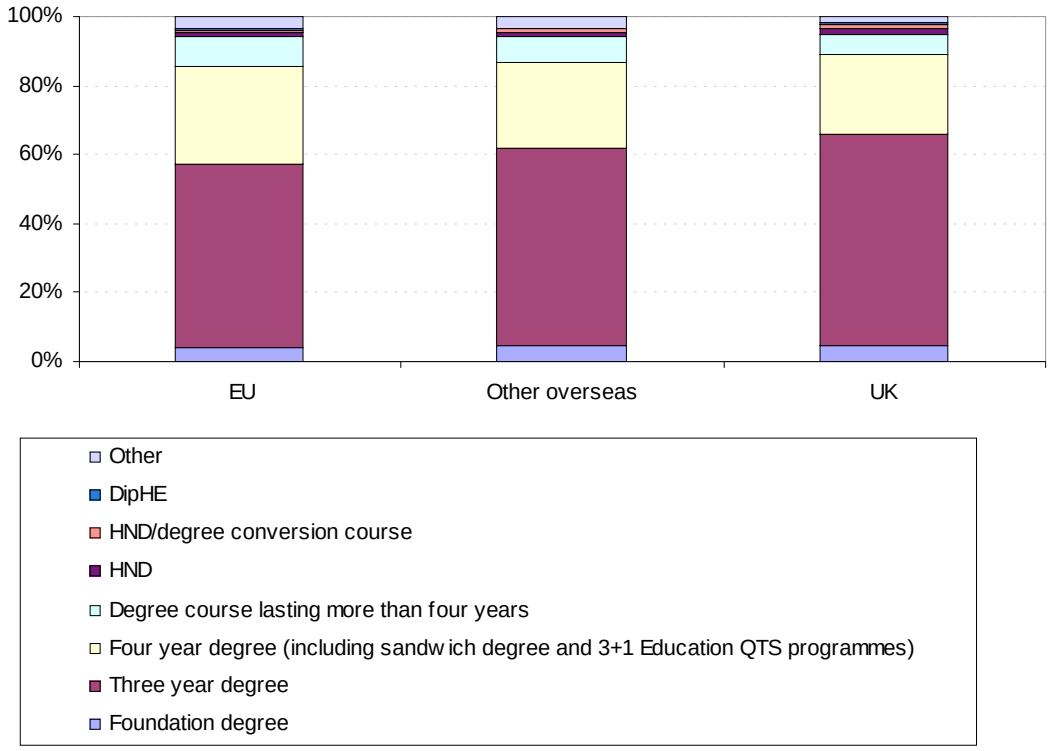
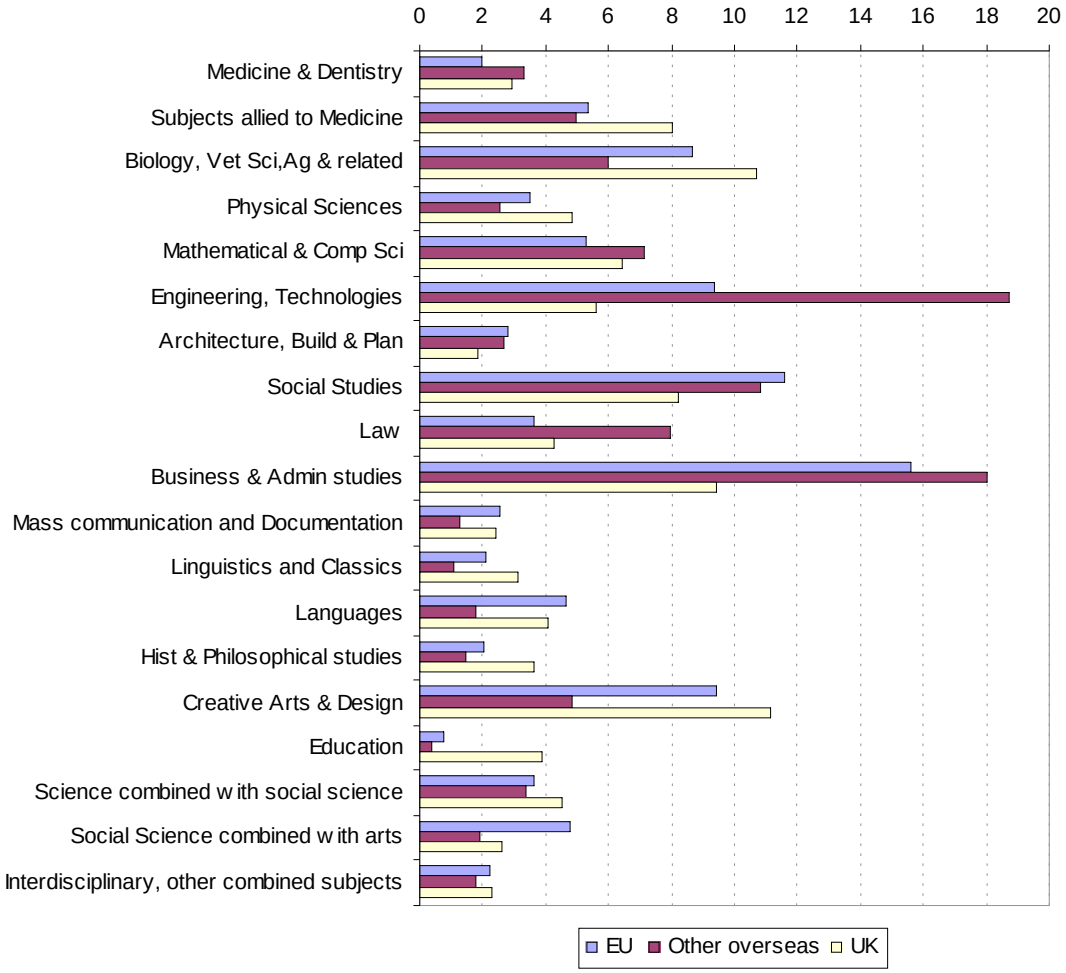
Figure 9.6: Type and length of higher education course by domicile



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Figure 9.6 shows the type of courses that applicants were embarking upon, broken down by length of course. This shows that although similar proportions of EU, other overseas and UK applicants were embarking upon degree courses, applicants from the EU and other overseas countries were slightly more likely than UK domiciled applicants to be hoping to be enrolled on courses that were expected to last longer than three years. We saw in Figure 2.6 that EU and other overseas applicants do not apply randomly for UK undergraduate places across the full range of subject areas but are clustered in particular disciplines and fields of study. As Figure 9.7 below shows, the other overseas applicants, in particular, were more likely to be pursuing subjects where degrees lasting more than three years are common.

Figure 9.7: Subject of study by domicile



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Figure 9.7 shows that the non-UK domiciled applicants have a quite different profile to the UK domiciled applicants in terms of the subjects they have been accepted to study in a UK higher education institution. This difference is particularly clear in the case of the other overseas applicants. The other overseas domiciled applicants are much more likely than other groups to have been about the embark on engineering and related technologies, with 19 per cent of applicants for subjects in this category compared to only 6 per cent of UK domiciled applicants and 9 per cent of EU domiciled applicants. The other overseas domiciled applicants are also much more likely than UK domiciled applicants to be accepted on business and administration studies and law. These subjects have a fairly clear path to particular careers upon graduation. However, the other overseas applicants were not more likely than other groups to be pursuing other subjects which have a similar career orientation, for example education, veterinary and agricultural science or medicine. The other overseas domiciled applicants were less likely to have applied for subjects which have the least clear career orientation, for example, history and philosophical studies and linguistics and classics. The EU domiciled applicants were also more likely than UK applicants to be aiming to pursue studies in engineering and related technologies and business and administration, although this preference of less marked than in the case of the other overseas applicants. Generally, the profile of the EU domiciled applicants falls somewhere between the profile of the other overseas applicants and the profile of the UK applicants.

The above table indicates where applicants were accepted to study by country of domicile. Naturally the figures in part reflect the uneven balance in HE places across the different UK

regions. However, what we can see is that large proportions of applicants who come from overseas have chosen to study in institutions which are located in London and the South East.

Table 9.1 indicates where applicants were accepted to study by country of domicile. Naturally the figures in part reflect the uneven balance in HE places across the different UK regions. However, what we can see is that large proportions of applicants who come from overseas have chosen to study in institutions which are located in London and the South East.

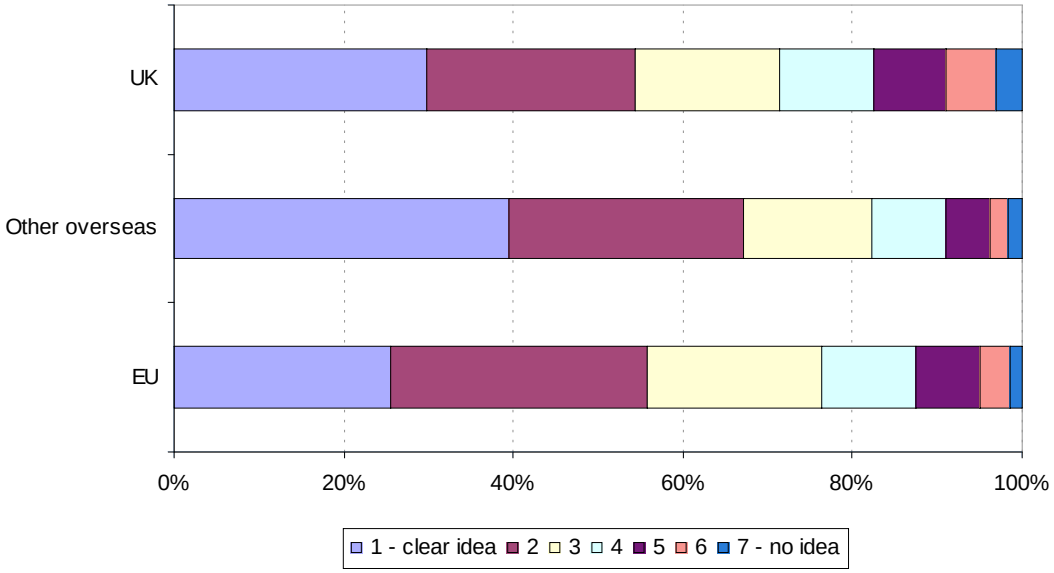
Table 9:1: Distribution of applicants among UK regions, comparing UK, EU and other applicants

Proposed region of study in UK	Domicile prior to application		
	UK	EU	Other overseas
	%	%	%
North East	5.0	2.8	3.3
Yorks & The Humber	10.8	6.2	8.6
North West	8.9	5.3	7.8
East Midlands	8.0	5.3	8.0
West Midlands	7.9	6.7	7.8
Eastern	5.4	4.9	4.8
Greater London	14.3	24.3	26.8
South East	12.3	14.3	12.2
South West	8.6	6.9	6.6
Wales	5.7	3.7	3.1
Northern Ireland	1.7	1.4	0.3
Scotland	8.3	16.3	8.7
Merseyside	3.0	1.9	1.9
All (100%)	88691	5457	6233

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted respondents to full survey, weighted.

The above table indicates where applicants were accepted to study. The UK distribution gives some indication of the distribution of HEI places among regions. Given that EU applicants represent 5.4 per cent of all applicants and other overseas constitute 6.2 per cent, w can see the areas where the latter two categories are over-represented in terms of their overall numbers. As might be expected, they are particularly likely to be studying in Greater London and the South East and particularly EU applicants also have chosen to study in Scotland, with other overseas also more concentrated in Yorkshire and Humberside and the Midlands.

Figure 9.8: Clarity of career plans, comparing UK, EU and other overseas applicants



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

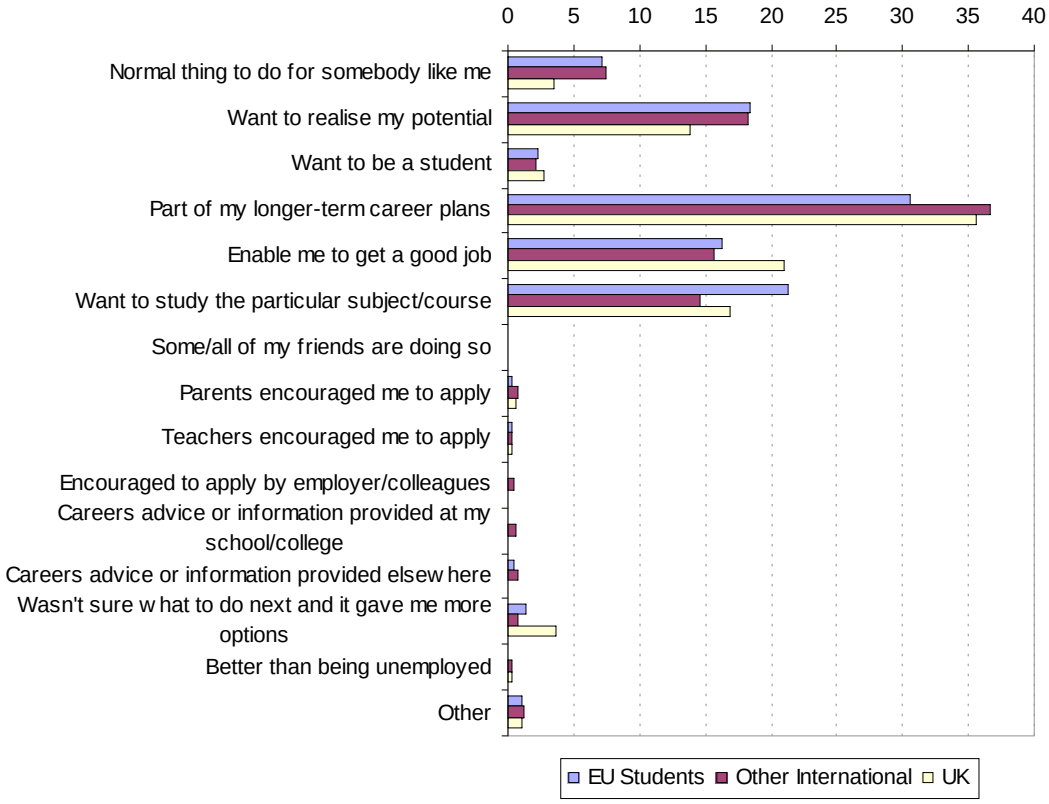
Figure 9.7 showed that the other overseas applicants were more likely to study subjects where applicants were likely to have a clear career orientation, and Figure 9.8 shows that the other overseas domiciled applicants had a clearer idea of what career they wished to pursue upon graduation than either the EU or UK domiciled applicants. While only 26 per cent of EU domiciled applicants and 30 per cent of UK domiciled applicants rated themselves as having a clear idea of the career they wished to pursue on graduation, the figure was 40 per cent for the other overseas domiciled applicants. Both the EU and other overseas domiciled applicants were less likely to say they had no idea compared to the UK domiciled applicants, but the profile of EU applicants was largely similar o that UK one.

Influences on choices of higher education institution and course

Applicants were asked about what had influenced both their choice of higher education institution and the course they wished to pursue. Additionally, they were asked what had influenced them to apply for a higher education course in the first place.

Looking firstly at the reasons applicants chose to apply to enter higher education, applicants were given a list of 14 reasons why they might have chosen to do so, and were asked to say which applied to them, and then to identify the main reason. Figure 9.9 shows the main reason, broken down by area of domicile.

Figure 9.9: Main reason for HE application by domicile



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Both EU and other overseas applicants were more likely to see it as round progression than UK study, reinforcing the impression that they were likely to come from a 'traditional' HE applicant background. Applicants in the EU and other overseas groups are slightly more likely to have as their main reason a specific long-term career path of which completing their course is part, whereas UK applicants are slightly more likely to see their courses as leading to the more general category of "a good job". Several applicants mentioned appeared to have identified particular skills gaps in their own country and were planning to study in the UK with a view to gaining the skills that would allow them to fill this specific gap and enhance their chances of employment:

> *'In Iran, Information Technology and Courses like that are new and very popular these days and there are many companies out there that need a good System analyst and IT manager'* [Female, 21-25, Iran, Post 1992 University]

> *'My country is some how lacking in the domain of engineering (Technology). So I believe after my studies I will come back to help in developments in my country in one way or the other'* [Male, 26-30, Other international, Other old university]

Some applicants mentioned that the career they planned to pursue would be of direct benefit to their home country:

> '*It is my passion and desire to stop crime in my home country and this is what really brought me to study my course of study'* [Male, 31-40, Other international, Other old university, Law]

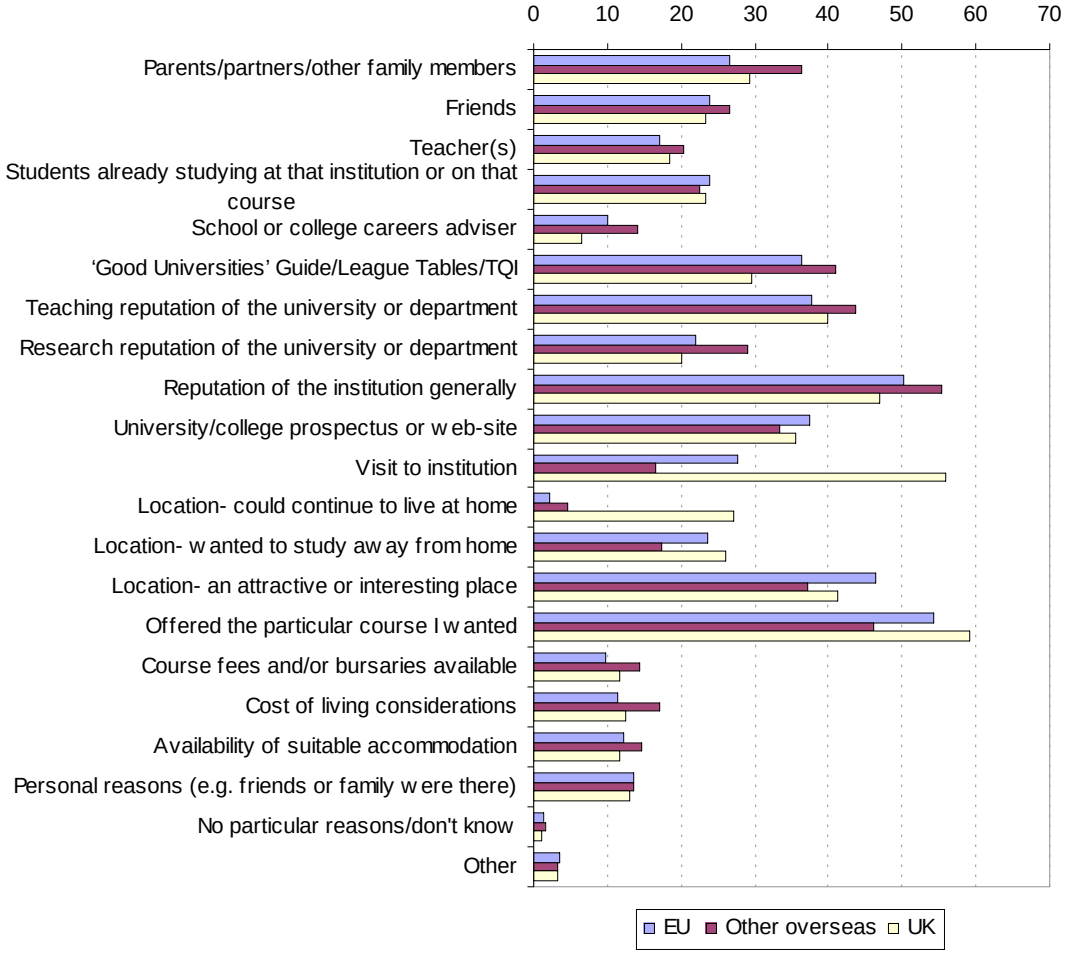
> *'I just hope that I don't get lost along the way. I mean right now my head is so very full of ideals and plans of change for my country. But then again almost every individual at this age is obsessed with change. And I wish my time in HE would take*

me closer to my goal that is to revolutionize the education sector in Pakistan' [Male, 21-25, Pakistan, Russell Group university, Social Studies]

When asked whether they had enough information about the relationship between courses and employment options, EU and other overseas domiciled applicants were more likely then UK applicants to say that they felt they had the information that they needed, which may to some extent explain their greater clarity in relation to long-term career goals. Numbers are small, but the overseas applicants were also less likely than the UK applicants to state that they were undertaking a higher education qualification because they weren't sure what else to do – not surprising since most were taking an even bigger step than most applicants in applying to study in a different country in addition to the *rit de passage* of transition to HE. A greater proportion of EU and other overseas domiciled applicants stated that they had received adequate advice about alternatives to higher education.

Applicants were asked why they had chosen their preferred higher education institution. Figure 9.10 shows the extent to which reasons were cited by applicants comparing area of domicile.

Figure 9.10: All reasons for choosing a particular higher education institution, comparing UK, EU and other overseas applicants



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

As expected, applicants domiciled overseas were much less likely to give visits to the institution as one of their reasons for selecting that institution. When applicants were asked a series of questions about whether they had the information they needed from various sources to make decisions about higher education, EU and other overseas applicants were much

more likely to indicate that they had inadequate information from visiting institutions either with their school or independently. Less than a third of EU and other overseas applicants felt they had enough information from institutional visits with their schools, compared to 41 per cent of UK applicants, and less than half EU and overseas applicants (48 per cent and 40 per cent respectively) felt they had enough information from independent visits, compared to 75 per cent of UK applicants. This is likely to be largely because of the distance overseas applicants must travel to visit UK institutions. 31 per cent of EU domiciled applicants and 37 per cent of other overseas domiciled applicants had no information from independent visits to institutions, while this figure was only 10 per cent for UK domiciled applicants. EU and other overseas were slightly more reliant than UK applicants on guides and league tables, but were no more likely than UK domiciled applicants to have based their selection on the university or college prospectus or web page.

Advice from family, friends, teachers and careers advisors was important for the other overseas applicants, but the picture is less clear for the EU domiciled applicants. Reputation and location were important considerations across all groups with reputation particularly important for EU applicants, as was the desire to undertake a particular course. Several respondents mentioned that they were planning to study subjects that were not available in their home country:

> *'There is no education as Garden Designer in Denmark'* [Female, 21-25, Denmark, Other HEI, Foundation course]

Table 9.2: Access to information about the relationship between courses and employment options, comparing UK, EU and other overseas applicant responses

Response	Domicile prior to application		
	EU	Other overseas	UK
	%	%	%
Too much	3.6	8.9	1.8
What I needed	50.1	55.1	48.0
Not enough	33.2	28.6	39.0
None at all	13.1	7.5	11.2

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

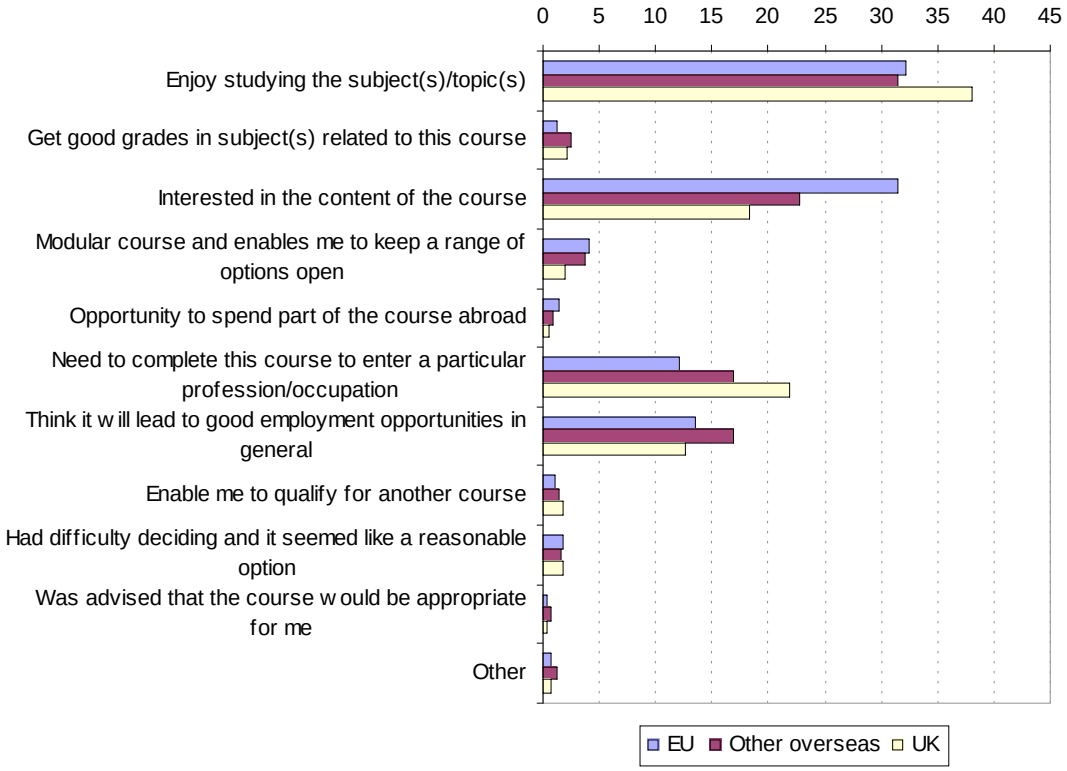
Table 9.3: How much information about alternatives to going on to higher education by domicile (cumulative percent)

Response	Domicile prior to application		
	EU	Other overseas	UK
	%	%	%
Too much	5.1	9.1	3.7
What I needed	49.9	50.6	43.8
Not enough	24.1	25.0	33.6
None at all	20.9	15.3	18.9

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

When applicants were asked why they chose their courses, all reasons and main reasons were distributed largely similarly in the three groups, but there were interesting differences.

Figure 9.11: Main reasons for choosing a particular course by domicile



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Figure 9.11 shows that despite the career orientation of the courses that overseas applicants tended to choose, and their desire to pursue higher education as part of a long term career goal, they were less likely than the UK domiciled applicants to say that they needed to complete the course to be able to enter a particular profession or occupation. Enjoyment and interest in the course were the two main reasons given most often for pursuing a particular course. The EU domiciled applicants, in particular, emphasised their interest in the content of the course as a reason to choose to study a particular subject. EU and other overseas applicants were slightly more likely to say that they did not have all the information that they needed about higher education courses.

Table 9.4: 'I had access to all the information I required about higher education courses' – comparing UK, EU and other overseas applicant responses

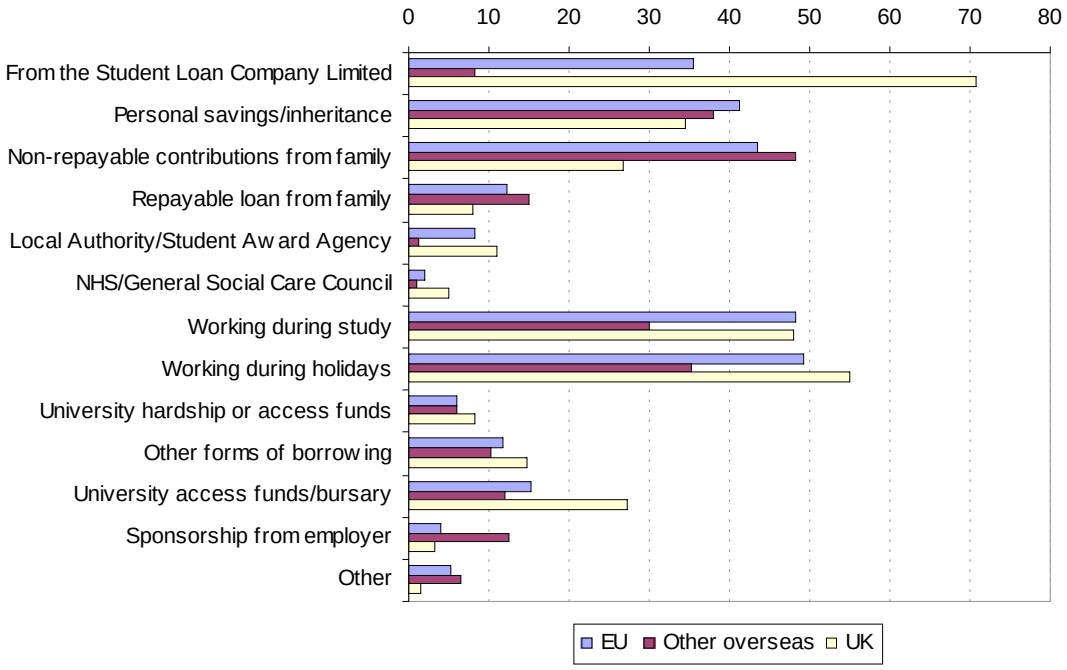
Response	Domicile prior to application		
	EU	Other overseas	UK
	%	%	%
Strongly agree	14.2	19.7	17.4
Agree	53.5	54.0	56.5
Not sure	20.4	17.5	14.0
Disagree	9.7	7.1	9.6
Strongly disagree	1.4	1.0	1.8
Not applicable	0.8	0.6	0.6

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Higher Education Funding

When asked how they planned to fund their higher education course, the picture provided by non-UK applicants, not surprisingly, differs from that of indigenous respondents. Figure 9.11 showed that the availability of bursaries and cost of living played a relatively small role when applicants were deciding on which higher education institution to attend. Figure 9.12 shows the different method applicants anticipated using to fund their studies. In some cases, differences between UK and overseas domiciled applicants can be attributed to the different forms of financing available to them as a result of their citizenship or residence. Again relatively socially-advantaged backgrounds are indicated.

Figure 9.12: How applicants planned to fund HE, comparing UK, EU and other overseas

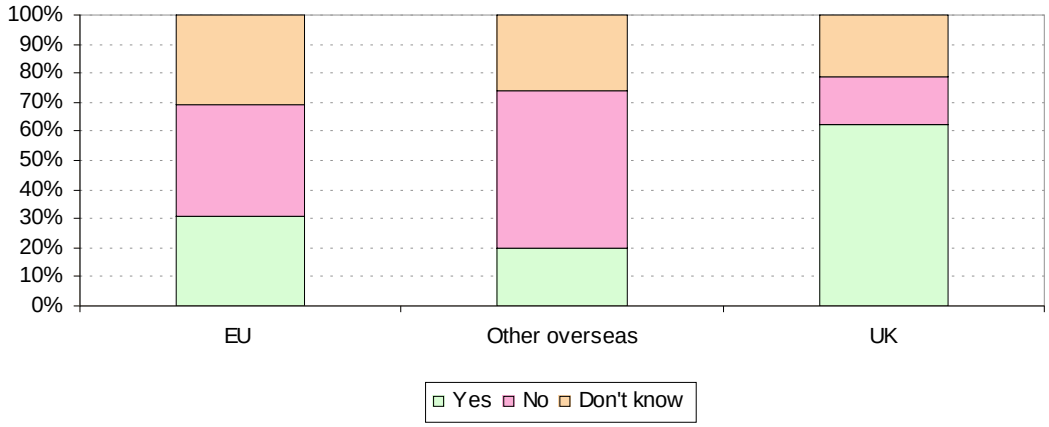


Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Overseas applicants were less likely than UK domiciled applicants to expect to get a loan from the Student Loan Company, and some of the respondents who selected this category are likely to be getting loans through student loan systems in their home country, for example, the Swedish Government Student Loan Fund (CSN) and the Norwegian State Education Loan Fund (Lånekassen) Compared to UK domiciled applicants, the overseas groups were more likely to expect to pay for their courses from savings or loans from their family. As has been seen earlier, these applicants are more likely than UK applicants to have family members, particularly parents, with a higher education qualification. As this can be correlated with better paid employment, it can be expected that they are more able to finance the studies of their children and to be willing to do so. Other overseas domiciled applicants were less likely than other groups to expect to work during study or during the holidays. This may reflect the ability of their parents to pay for their studies, as well as their perceptions of their ability to work in a foreign country. A significant group amongst the other overseas applicants had received sponsorship from their employer to pursue their studies, and another group had received scholarships from other sources, most often the government of their country of domicile. Applicants in the other-international category, particularly those from developing countries were critical of the high fees for international students and the lack of scholarships, bursaries and loans available to them compared to those available to EU students.

'*Students from poor, developing countries with promising future should be encouraged to do so in the UK. The Government or the universities can provide academic loans for these intelligent but unfortunate students who want to contribute to the development of their countries which I happen to be in the category of*' [Male, 21-25, Other international, Russell Group university, Engineering technologies]

Figure 9.13: Expectations of significant debts when completed studies, comparing UK, EU and other overseas applicants



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Both EU and other overseas domiciled applicants had significantly lower expectation than UK students of significant debt on completing their studies. As was mentioned above, these groups were less likely to expect to take out loans to fund their studies, and were more likely to report that family members would contribute to the costs of their studies. When asked whether student debts place an unreasonable burden on graduates, a large proportion of respondents in the EU and other overseas cohorts were not sure. In contrast, 75 per cent of UK domiciled applicants agreed or strongly agreed that student debt was a significant burden on graduates.

Table 9.5: Response to student debts place unreasonable burdens on graduates' by domicile

	EU	Other overseas	UK
	%	%	%
Strongly agree	20.9	20.9	41.0
Agree	33.2	35.7	34.2
Not sure	36.8	34.1	16.5
Disagree	8.0	7.7	7.3
Strongly disagree	1.2	1.7	1.1

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Attitudes towards the idea of significant debt may also reflect differing perceptions of what constitutes significant debt. Students whose parents have experience of higher education, or who are familiar with more expensive higher education systems in other countries may not consider the debt incurred for a UK higher education course significant compared to the gains they expect to see or compared to the amount they could expect to pay in their country of residence at the time of their application. The other overseas domiciled cohort, in particular, indicated that they thought that students should contribute to the cost of higher education if they could afford to, and both the EU and other overseas cohorts strongly favoured student loans (37 per cent and 32 per cent compared to 28 per cent of UK domiciled applicants).

Table 9.6: Response to starter students in higher education should contribute to its cost if they can afford to by domicile

Response	Domicile prior to application		
	EU	Other overseas	UK
	%	%	%
Strongly agree	15.2	24.5	13.0
Agree	42.9	49.2	40.8
Not sure	29.7	20.2	27.3
Disagree	9.5	5.0	14.1
Strongly disagree	2.8	1.1	4.7

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

When asked whether they considered a higher education qualification a good investment, EU and other overseas applicants were much more likely to agree than UK applicants.

Table 9.7: Response to 'A HE qualification is a good investment by domicile'

Response	Domicile prior to application		
	EU	Other overseas	UK
	%	%	%
Strongly agree	72.4	69.2	56.0
Agree	24.8	27.6	37.3
Not sure	2.5	2.7	5.9
Disagree	0.2	0.3	0.7
Strongly disagree	0.1	0.1	0.1

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

They were also much more likely than UK domiciled applicants to strongly agree that a higher education qualification is essential in getting a good job.

Table 9.8: Response to 'For most good jobs, a degree is essential'

Response	Domicile prior to application		
	EU	Other overseas	UK
	%	%	%
Strongly agree	57.1	61.9	48.6
Agree	36.7	32.1	45.0
Not sure	5.0	4.4	4.9
Disagree	1.1	1.3	1.4
Strongly disagree	0.1	0.3	0.2

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all respondents to full survey, weighted

Summary

In many respects, the profile of the EU and other overseas applicants is similar to the profile of the UK applicants, particularly in their attitudes towards higher education. They are particularly similar to what might be considered the traditional UK applicant, in terms of their familiarity with higher education in general and the types of universities and courses they apply for, with this being especially the case for the overseas applicants from outside the EU.

- EU and other overseas applicants are more likely than UK applicants as a whole to have family members who have experience of higher education, and are more likely to receive help from family members to pay for their studies.

- They have much less expectation of significant debt on completion of their studies than UK applicants, and are more likely than UK applicants to see higher education as extremely beneficial.

- Other overseas applicants in particular, show a greater propensity to pursue courses with a clear vocational orientation, particularly in the fields of engineering and business and administration. The other overseas applicants also show a greater awareness than other groups of the relationship between higher education and employment, and to have a clear idea of their career paths upon graduation.

- EU applicants appear less vocationally orientated than the other overseas applicants. Whilst they show some propensity towards studying vocational subjects like engineering and business and administration studies, they are also strongly represented amongst applicants planning to study subjects like social studies, languages and creative art and design, making their profile more similar to the UK domiciled applicants.

- Although there are some areas where they would have liked to receive more advice, the overseas applicants are generally as happy as UK domiciled applicants about the advice they have received and their experience of the application process.

- Although they rate their written and numeracy skills no more highly than UK domiciled applicants, they are confident, and less likely than UK applicants to worry that they will find the level of work as a higher education student too difficult.

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CHAPTER 10

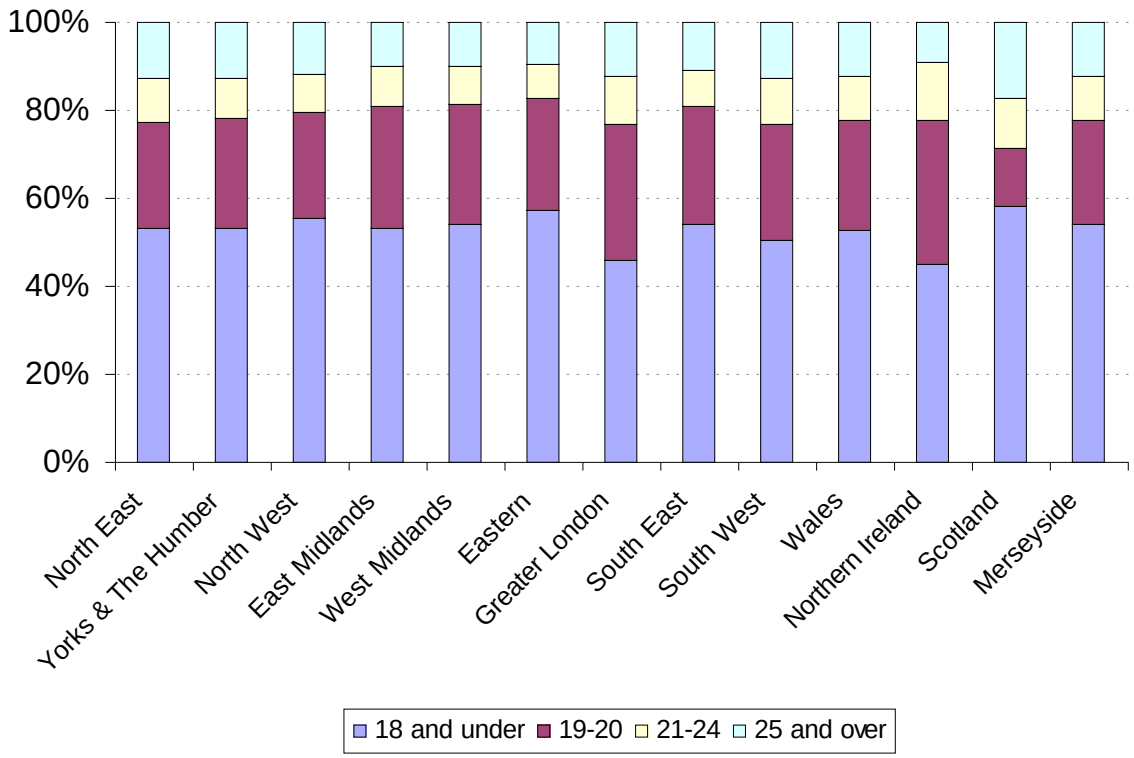
Regional differences and similarity among 2006 accepted UCAS applicants

This chapter explores how far there were differences in the profiles, experiences and preferences of applicants from different UK government regions, distinguishing the 13 main UK regions[23]. Unless specified, overseas applicants were also been excluded except in a few cases where stated, and the results refer to applicants who had accepted for places in higher education to begin in Autumn 2006.

By examining selected attributes by region, we investigate whether regional difference was an important variable in relation to students' choices, preferences, views and expectations of higher education.

Profile of various stratifying factors by region

Figure 10.1: Age profiles by region



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

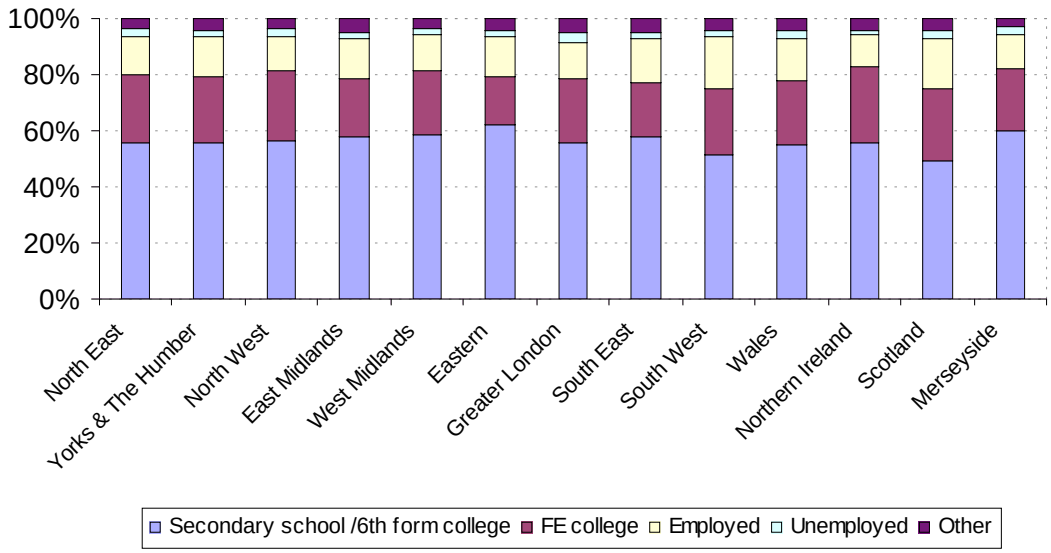
The above figure indicates, as we would expect, that for most regions the majority of applicants were aged eighteen and under. The two exceptions to this were Greater London and Northern Ireland, with higher proportions aged 19 or 20. The highest proportion of applicants aged 25 and over was found in Scotland where approximately one in six applicants were in the age group, with least in Northern Ireland, the Eastern region and the West Midlands. Along with the evidence in Figure 7.2 overleaf, the greater numbers of older applicants in Scotland may reflect Scotland's more established efforts to encourage a smooth transition between further education (FE) and HE, whereas the earlier age at which at which Scottish students traditionally transfer from secondary to higher education is also apparent. .

Figure 10.2 shows the applicants' situations at the time of their application. For all regions except Scotland over half the applicants were at secondary school when they applied, and

[23] Because of small numbers, the 'other UK' category was not included in these analyses.

over 60 per cent of those domiciled in the Eastern region or Merseyside had applied straight from school. Given the age profile shown in Figure 10.1, it is not surprising that the applicants from Scotland were the among the most likely to have been employed (18.1 per cent), and also more likely to have attended FE colleges (25.2 per cent). Across the regions there were small but noticeable proportions (between three and five per cent) of applicants who fall into the other category.

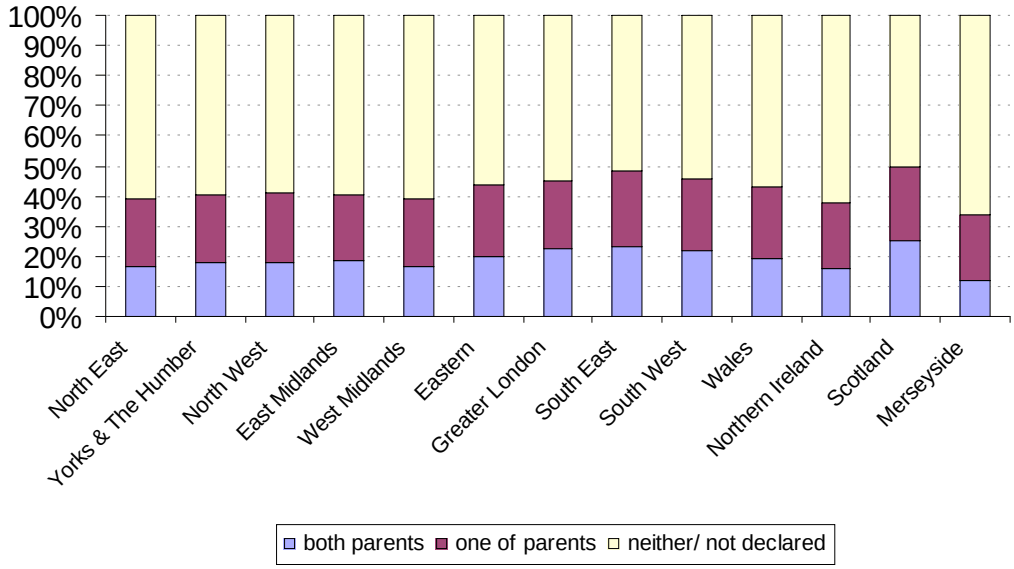
Figure 10.2: Situation when applying for HE



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

The question of whether the applicant's parent(s) has/have experience of higher education has been found to be significant, presumably reflecting both family expectations, norms and greater knowledge of HE options. Applicants from Scotland, where nearly half of all applicants indicated that either one or both parents had HE experience, were most likely to state that parents had higher education experience. Parental experience of HE was also found to be high in the South East and was lowest in Merseyside, where only one-third of applicants had a parent or parents with experience of HE. This clearly reflects class background as well as cultural values.

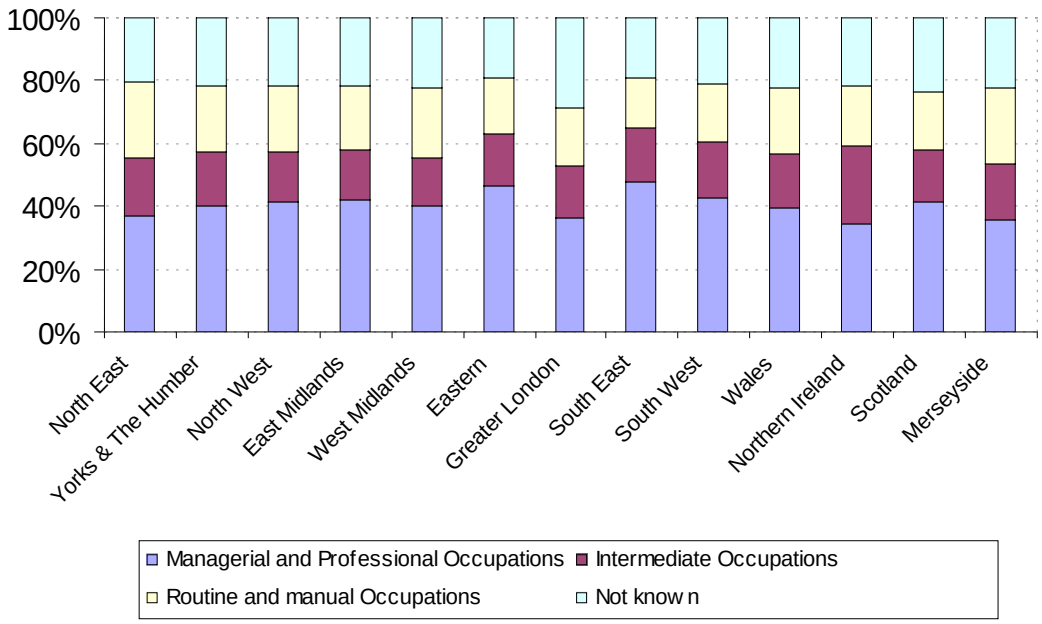
Figure 10.3: Parents experience of HE by region



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

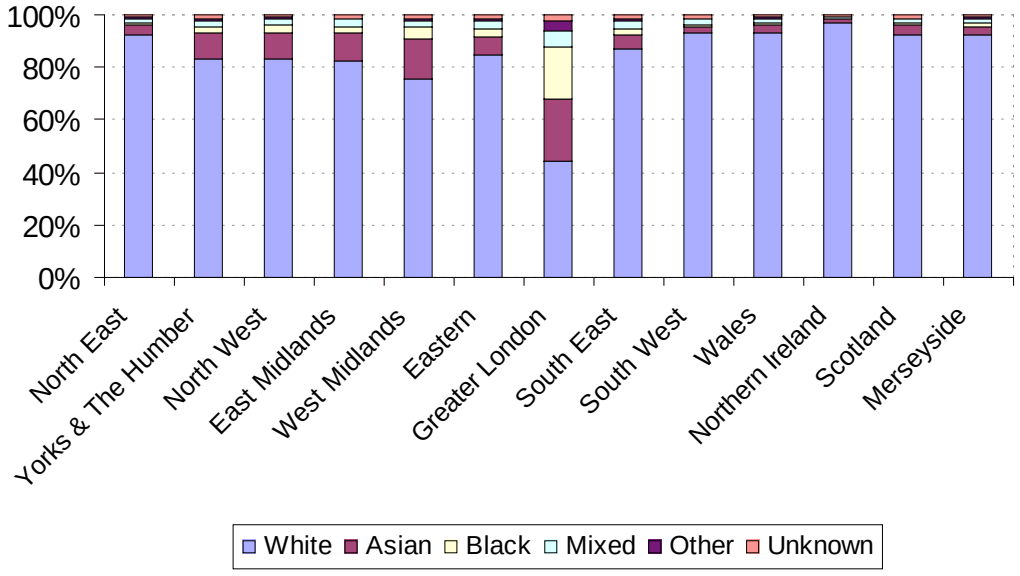
In fact, the socio-economic background of applicants as revealed by their own or their parental socio-economic background gives some credence to the picture implied by the preceding figure. Applicants from a managerial and professional background were most common in the South East (48.0 per cent) and least common in Merseyside (35.6 per cent). Routine and manual backgrounds were most common among applicants from Merseyside and also the North East (respectively 24.6 per cent and 24.5 per cent), but the distribution among categories of Scottish applicants reflects the overall average – although it is notable that next to those from Greater London, they were most likely to have failed to provide the socio-economic data. Figure 10.5 shows that they were also among the least likely to come from a minority ethnic background, in common with those from Wales and the northern regions of England, although less than those from Northern Ireland.

Figure 10.4: Regional variation by socio-economic background



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Figure 10.5: Regional variation by broad ethnic group



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

It is well-established that the distribution of the UK minority ethnic population is largely concentrated in London and particular large urban regions. Figure 10.5 shows that the ethnic background of HE applicants does vary quite considerably by region. For some regions the overwhelming majority (over 90 per cent) of applicants were white (North East, South West, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Merseyside). The most ethnically diverse region is Greater London, where only 44.2 per cent of the applicants were white, 23.9 per cent Asian and 19.9 per cent black. The West Midlands is also a more ethnically diverse region with 75.4 per cent white applicants and 15.5 per cent Asian applicants.

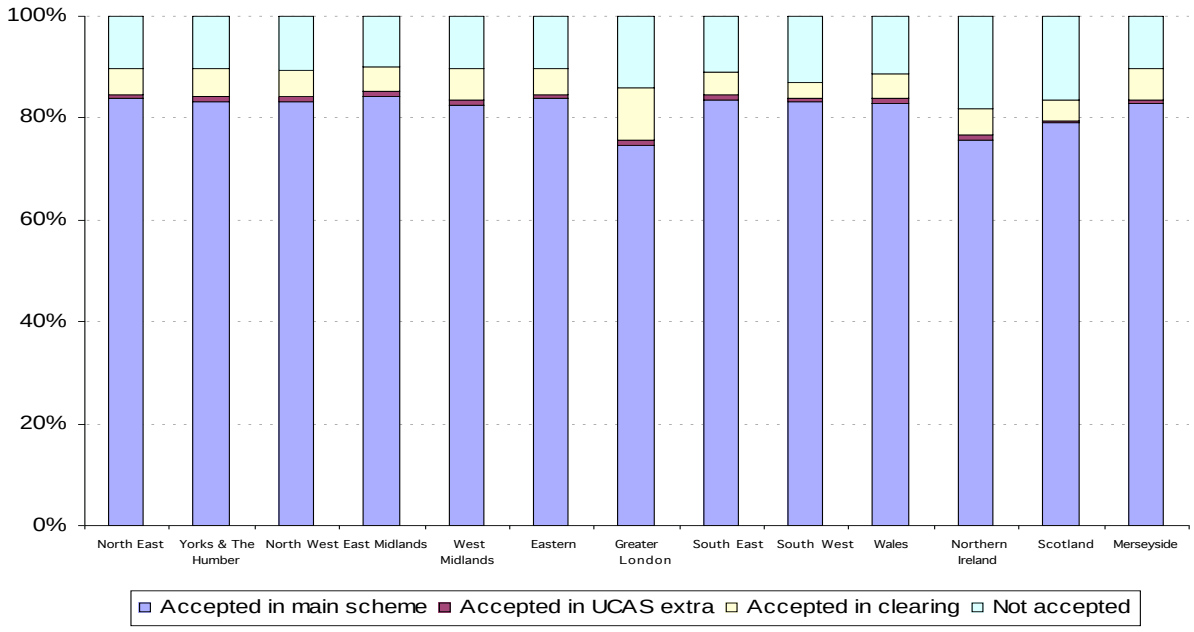
The above profiles may go some way to explaining regional differences in the choice that the applicants made with reference to their location of study.

Outcomes of HE application by region

One of the more tangible measures we had was the success rate in application. It was important to monitor whether applicants from certain regions were more or less likely to be accepted into HE and the regression analysis discussed in Chapter 2 indicated this is indeed the case.

Figure 10.6 illustrates the bivariate analysis. The results show a positive picture. For all the English regions, with the exception of Greater London, over 80 per cent of applicants were accepted for places through the main UCAS scheme. In the case of Greater London though, this region did have the highest proportion getting places through clearing (10.2 per cent). The areas which had the highest proportions that were not accepted for places were Northern Ireland (18.2 per cent), Scotland (16.4 per cent) and Greater London (14.2 per cent).

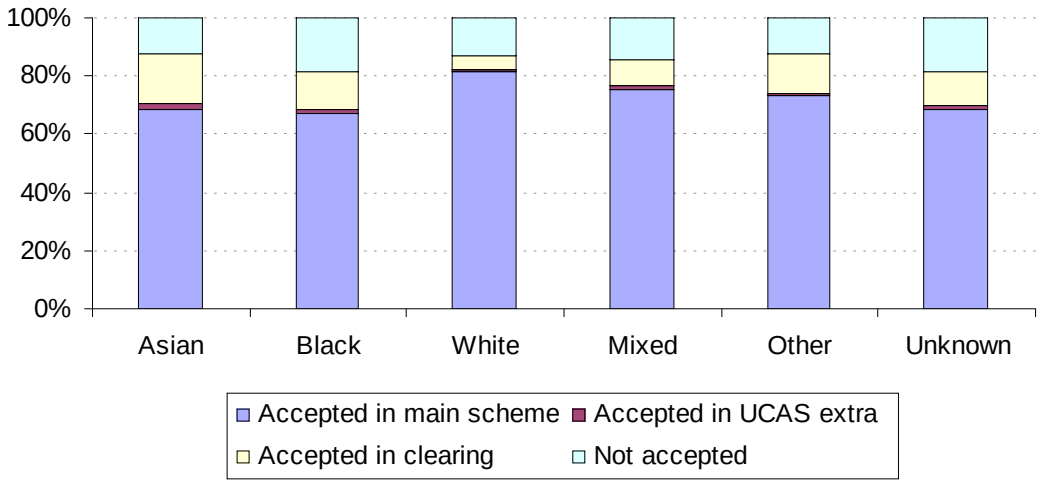
Figure 10.6: Outcome of application process by region



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

The Greater London region is itself worthy focussing on examining the outcomes of this region by broad ethnic group we can see that there was some variation in outcomes. White applicants were the most likely to be accepted for a place through the main UCAS scheme (81.7 per cent of white, compared to 68.6 per cent of Asian applicants and 67.2 per cent of black applicants). Black applicants were also the most likely to not be accepted through any route; 18.4 per cent did not have accepted places.

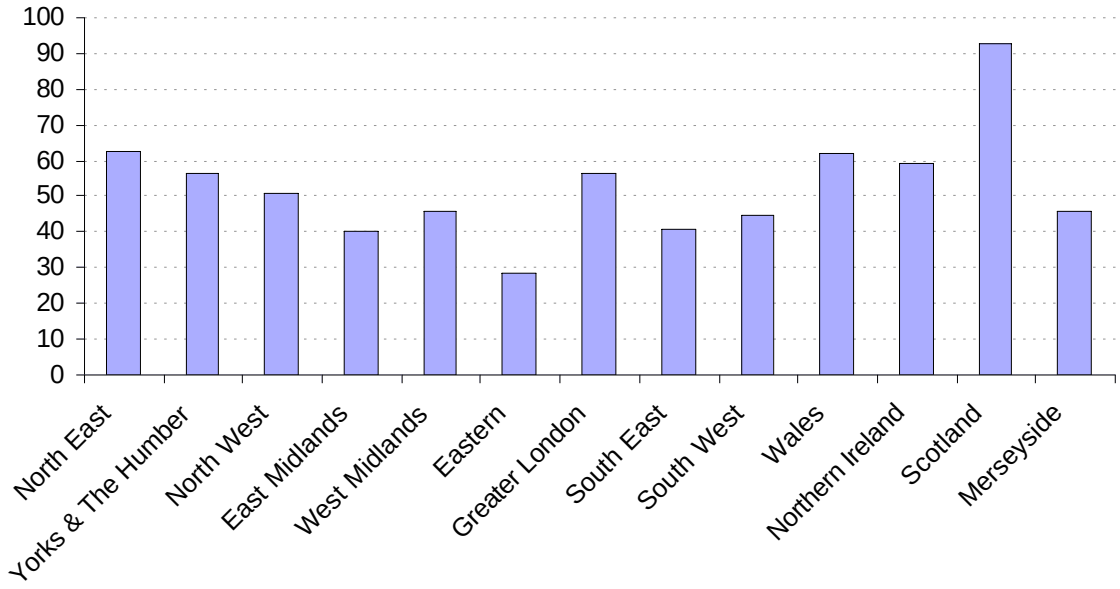
Figure 10.7: Outcome of application process for Greater London applicants by ethnic group



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all Greater London respondents to full survey, weighted.

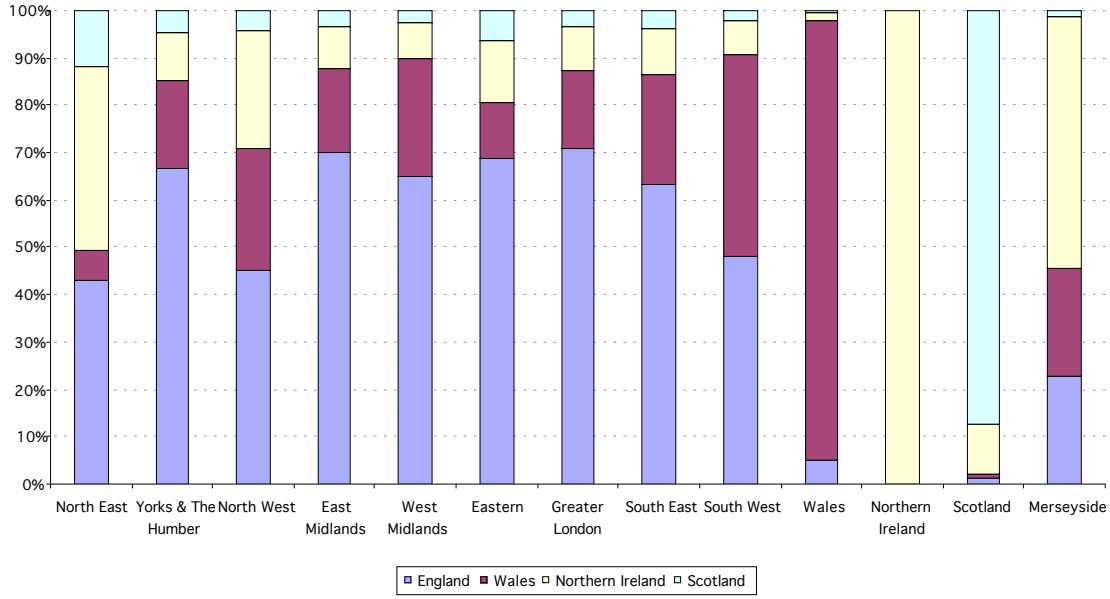
Figure 10.8 shows the different proportions of applicants who chose to study in their region of domicile. This gives an artificially diverse picture, since the size of regions and the significance of political and social boundaries varies considerably. Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish applicants may have been applying to study further from home than those crossing boundaries between English regions, as will be discussed further below. Figure 10.9 shows how those Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish applicants who had crossed national boundaries to study had tended to apply regionally – to closer rather than more distant parts of England. Welsh applicants to South West, the North West and the West Midlands HEIs, Scots to the North East, Northern Irish to Merseyside, the North West, Scotland and the North East

Figure 10.8: Proportion choosing to study in their own region of domicile



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Figure 10.9 UK region of accepted HE place by region of nation of domicile prior to application



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

The clear message from Figures 10.8 and 10.9 that over 90 per cent of successful applicants from Scotland had applied for and had accepted to study in Scottish higher education institutions. Given the different funding arrangements among the UK countries, the patterns revealed are not surprising. High proportions of both Welsh (61.9 per cent) and Northern Irish (59.1 per cent) applicants also choose to study in their own country. What was perhaps slightly surprising was the high proportion of students from the North East (62.3 per cent) who continue to study there. Clearly we expect the Scottish case to be different from the rest of the UK because of the funding arrangements and perhaps we expect a higher percentage of Northern Irish applicants to continue to study there to cut down on travelling, but the different profiles for the rest of the UK reflect the preferences and/or constraints of the applicants and may be assumed to indicate the availability of different types of HE in the different regions. This requires further investigation as the project proceeds.

Table 10.1 shows the different extents to which the regional student populations included were made up of accepted applicants from the regions themselves and from other areas.

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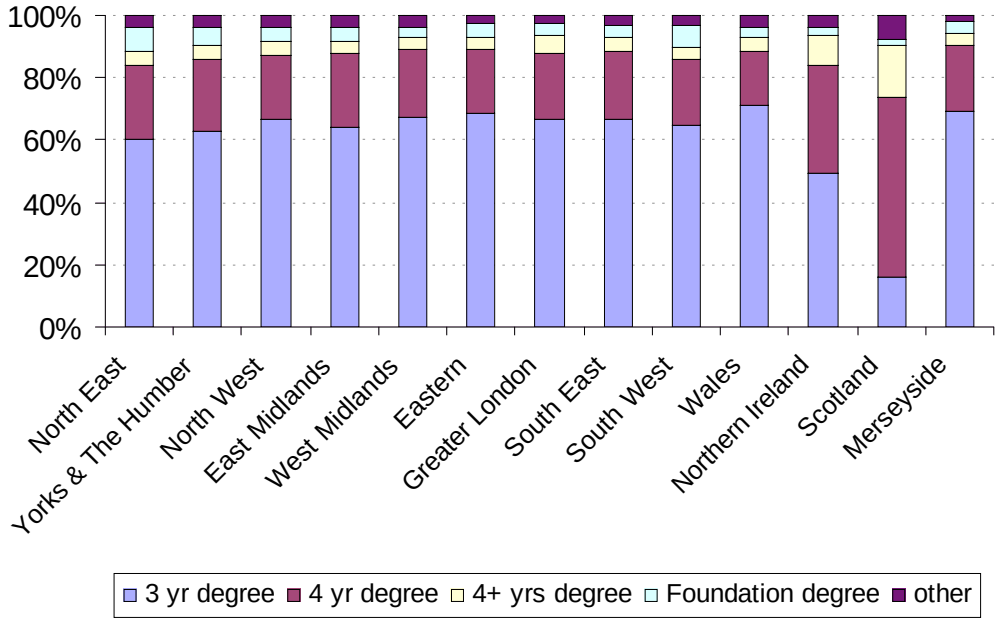
Table 10.1: Region of accepted HEI, by region of domicile, UK students only

Region of domicile	North East	Yorks & `Humber	North West	East Midlands	West Midlands	Eastern	Greater London	South East	South West	Wales	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Merseyside
North East	**47.52**	4.83	2.51	1.49	0.73	1.01	0.62	0.46	0.63	0.69	0.08	1.70	2.90
Yorks & Humber	11.90	**39.58**	8.45	8.29	3.10	2.85	1.47	1.45	1.22	1.60	0.05	1.73	6.43
North West	7.25	12.61	**49.07**	3.99	4.98	2.20	1.92	1.48	1.90	3.64	0.11	2.10	21.70
East Midlands	5.13	11.33	5.02	**34.15**	7.79	4.60	1.99	2.93	3.09	2.58	0.11	0.87	4.18
West Midlands	3.05	6.24	7.30	11.65	**49.96**	3.04	2.48	3.51	6.30	8.57	0.16	0.93	6.02
Eastern	5.32	6.88	3.64	13.01	7.07	**48.40**	8.90	10.89	6.68	3.53	0.08	1.76	3.12
Greater London	3.86	5.20	4.06	9.30	7.47	19.90	**60.57**	17.28	7.97	3.05	0.26	1.85	2.89
South East	5.77	6.13	5.15	11.20	9.43	11.75	15.12	**47.20**	21.35	9.40	0.43	2.26	4.12
South West	3.20	2.64	2.99	4.11	6.01	3.60	4.37	11.43	**45.18**	15.36	0.13	1.26	3.10
Wales	0.71	1.47	2.89	1.33	1.99	0.90	1.22	1.91	4.52	**49.80**	0.11	0.39	4.64
Northern Ireland	2.85	0.49	1.77	0.42	0.40	0.64	0.42	0.50	0.46	0.59	**98.05**	3.85	6.82
Scotland	2.18	0.57	0.74	0.40	0.30	0.74	0.39	0.52	0.37	0.31	0.29	**81.04**	0.47
Merseyside	1.18	2.04	6.37	0.62	0.72	0.34	0.50	0.42	0.31	0.89	0.05	0.22	**33.55**
N (weighted)= 100 per cent	17809	38248	31421	28243	28005	19090	50897	43786	30548	20090.	6112	29287	10549

Figure 10.10 shows the types of degree opted for by the applicants from the different regions. It comes as no surprise, given the different organisation of HE in Scotland to observe that four year degrees were most popular among Scottish applicants. 57.1 per cent of applicants from Scotland had opted for four year degrees, but Scottish applicants were also the most likely to have enrolled on a course which lasting more than four years (17.2 per cent). Foundation degree courses were most popular in the North East (8.2 per cent) and also the South West (7.5 per cent). For all the regions, with the exception of Scotland, three year degrees were by far the most popular type of course accounting for, in most regions, well over two thirds of courses, as Figure 10.10 reveals.

Figure 10.10: Type of course by region



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Staying at home or studying away from home

There has been considerable debate about the extent to which the reforms of higher education funding may have affected decisions is in regard to where students might want to undertake their HE courses. Recent research by Davies et al (2008) on behalf of the Sutton Trust, suggests that 56 per cent of students are considering attending a 'local university' compared with only 18 per cent in 1998/99, and that three-quarters of this group (42 per cent of the total sample) were planning on living at home with their parent(s)/guardian(s).

Davies et al identified two main variables which were highly correlated with the decision to study locally. Firstly GCSE grades – those with higher GCSE scores were more likely to study further away from home than those with poorer GCSE grades. Secondly, the independent school effect – those from independent schools were much less likely to study locally. The report also noted the differences by socio-economic background (those from more advantaged backgrounds less likely to study locally) but the differences by this variable were not as marked as by GCSE scores and school type.

Similar research has been done by the UCAS research team and this too uncovered the same sorts of relationships between studying locally and school type and socio-economic background, although (they did not compare by GCSE score or similar (UCAS 2008).

What can Futuretrack say on this issue?

Unlike Davies *et al* (*op cit.*) and the UCAS team, we do not have post code data cannot establish whether an individual was intending to study at a local university, but we can explore regional data; the region which the applicant was resident in at the time of the application and the region in which the HE where the applicant has been accepted is located. This same measure imperfect provides indication of distance travelled. We also have the questions regarding the choice of HEI which can be used to provide further evidence on the issue. Amongst other factors, applicants were asked to indicate whether their choice of HEI was influenced by concern to stay at home or to study away from home.

Age

As was described in Chapter 3, age was a significant factor in determining whether the applicant wanted to study at home or to study further away are as might be expected there was also a clear association with the socio-economic background. Situation of the applicants prior to application, type of school attended and of those progressing directly from secondary education, tariff points and prior qualifications generally. Ethnic group membership was a strong predictor of likelihood of choosing to study locally, particularly for women.

These findings reinforce those of Davies *et al* (*op. cit*), but the crucial question is to try to answer why that is the case. We will be able to supply more answers when we have completed follow up qualitative research, but at this stage, what do the survey data indicate?

Firstly, the perceptions of debt amongst the home dwellers and the away dwellers is different. Those who ticked the 'stay at home' option were less likely to say the expected significant debts on completion of their course. 52.0 per cent expected significant debts compared with 68.0 per cent who did not indicate that their decision was motivated by a desire to stay at home. On the other hand those who said that they wanted to study away from home were more likely to anticipate significant levels of debt 73.0 per cent compared with 60.4 per cent.

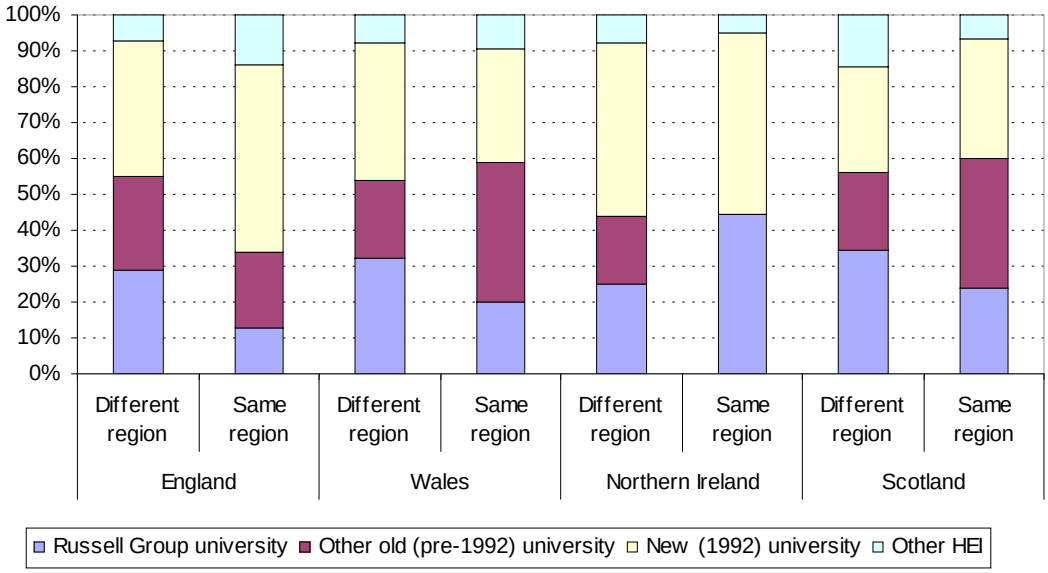
It is difficult to draw strong conclusions from these associations, but it does suggest that those whose choices are in part informed by a desire to live at home are more debt averse than those who want to live away from home during study and we already know that the choice to stay at home is also related to other structural factors.

The choice to stay at home or go away is also related to intended funding of study. Those who say that they want to live away from home (47.5 per cent) were more likely than those who want to live at home (29.1 per cent) to have said that personal savings or inheritance would be used to help to fund their studies. Similarly this group was also more likely to have access to non-repayable contributions from family members; 40.6 per cent cited this option compared with 18.9 per cent who wanted to live at home during study. Despite this, the study away from home group is also more likely to cite the two working options (during term time and during holidays) than the stay at home group. 61.0 per cent said that they intended to work during study compared with 52.7 per cent, and 74.0 per cent said that they intended to work during the holidays compared with 51.5 per cent.

There is some concern that the effect of the funding regime for HE (though not in Scotland) is to restrict access to HE for those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, so that those from such backgrounds have lower chances of accessing the *elite* universities. Figure 10.11 indicates though that those who were staying in their own region of domicile were less likely than those who move away to study at a Russell group university. The starkest difference is in England; 29.1 per cent of those who move away will be studying at a Russell group university, compared with 12.5 per cent of those who stay in their own region. Northern Ireland is the only one of the four countries of the UK where students who stay in the region are more likely to study at a Russell

group university, but this is a special case both geographically and in terms of balance of HE places in the province.

Figure 10.11: Type of HEI by country of domicile and by staying at home or going away



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled accepted respondents to full survey, weighted

Although the indicators we have used are slightly different, the findings from our study are broadly in line with what was discovered by Davies et al and by UCAS; namely that those who study locally tend to come from the state sector, tend to have lower tariff scores, and tend to be from non-professional backgrounds. We also suggest that students who choose to stay in their own region are more likely to be concerned about issues of cost than those who choose to go away.

Our projected in depth interviews with applicants are likely to give provide further insights into these issues than can be provided by large scale survey data.

The regions were approximately evenly split as to whether applicants were more or less likely to indicate that their choice of HEI was influenced by the fact that it allowed for study while staying at home, or provided the opportunity to study and live away from home. Such regional differences as exist are almost certainly related to the socio-economic and cultural differences discussed at the outset of this chapter, as well as perceptions of debt or cost of housing.

Figure 10.12 shows that there were virtually no significant differences in propensity to be influenced by desire to study away from home, apart from a somewhat lower likelihood of Scottish applicants to do so, but there was greater variation in the influence of being able to study at home, with those from the regions with greatest incidence of ‘stayers’ being the relatively economically-deprived ones, with lower than average living costs, and those two most likely to have ‘educational migrants’ were Greater London and the , by far the most expensive in terms of accommodation and travel.

Figure 10.12: Cited importance of location in terms of opportunity to stay at home or to study away from home, by region of domicile prior to application

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

As far as reasons for applying for an HE place were concerned, there was little difference in main reasons among UK countries or regions within UK, apart from a slightly greater likelihood that accepted applicants in living were somewhat more likely to have given employment-related responses than others: 27 per cent of them stating that their main consideration had been 'to enable me to get a good job' compared with 22 per cent of the UK-domiciled accepted applicants as a whole. These 'employment-focused' difference shows somewhat in terms of all influences cited, but the Northern Irish respondents stand out significantly as having been more likely to cite advice and encouragement – from parents, teachers and most significantly, in terms of likelihood of having been influenced by careers advice at school.

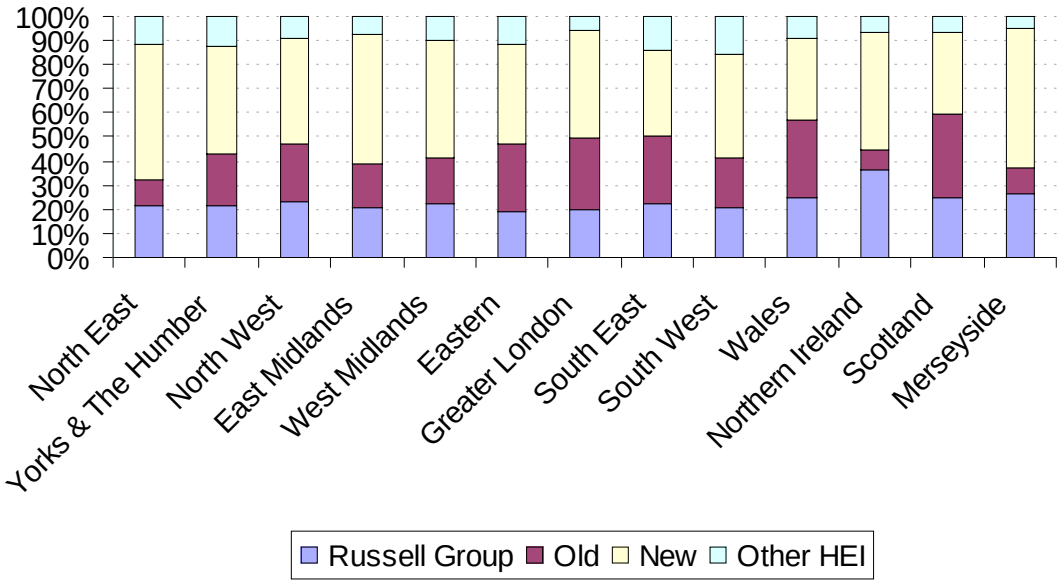
Table 10.2: Reasons for applying for HE by UK country of domicile prior to application

Reasons	England	Wales	Northern Ireland	Scotland
Normal thing to do	34.1	29.0	34.8	31.4
Want to realise my potential	59.6	59.4	59.1	61.1
Want to be a student	43.5	45.2	47.6	44.2
Part of longer-term career plans	76.6	74.4	77.1	76.7
Enable to get a good job	79.0	79.3	81.9	79.9
Want to study particular subject/course	71.4	71.0	68.9	71.9
Friends are doing so	14.8	14.3	18.0	13.5
Parents encouraged to apply	31.3	27.9	31.5	29.9
Teachers encouraged to apply	27.8	24.3	31.0	24.0
Employer/colleagues encouraged to apply	3.6	3.4	4.6	3.4
Influenced by careers advice at school	13.8	14.1	23.9	14.3
Influenced by careers advice from elsewhere	7.4	7.5	10.1	8.0
Not sure what to do next	18.6	18.4	17.0	16.6
Better than being unemployed	11.6	10.6	13.0	9.6
Other	2.4	2.5	1.6	2.8

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted

Figure 10.13 shows the profile of accepted outcome places according to the applicants' regions of domicile. Applicants from the South-East and Greater London were most likely to have places at pre-1992 universities, with approximately half of these region's applicants heading for such universities. Post-1992 universities were most likely to be accessed among applicants from Merseyside (57.8 per cent) and the North-East (56.1 per cent). Wales was similar in profile to Scotland with over 57 per cent of applicants with accepted places heading for pre-1992 universities and Northern Ireland's profile shows the largest proportion heading for Russell group universities at nearly 37 per cent, with less than 8 per cent destined for other HEIs and nearly half of all Northern Ireland applicants going to post-1992 universities. This profile reflects the balance of institutional types in these countries the greater propensities of Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh students to remain in their counties of origin.

Figure 10.13: Choice of university by region



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Influences on choice of HE institution

When it comes to influences on choice of HE institution, applicants were presented with the twenty different possible influences and asked to indicate which of them had an effect on their choice of institution, as has been discussed extensively in Chapter 3 and elsewhere. Table 10.3 compares responses by UK national region of domicile. Northern Ireland stands out as distinctive, in terms of the relative importance of informal and reputation-related variables – particularly the greater importance of friends and family and lesser concern; shared to an extent, with Scottish applicants, with reputation and institutional detail. The responses here draw attention to the fact that, of course, UK regions are not of similar dimensions or significance, so tat NI students, although more likely than others apart from Scots to study in their region of domicile, were not significantly more likely to aspire to live at home as students to the same extent as the Scottish students. The latter may be related to the greater likelihood of embarking on HE at an earlier age in Scotland, as well as the regional distribution of HEIs within Scotland. Cost considerations, particularly with reference to Scottish respondents, reflect the lack of fees in Scotland and greater likelihood of living at home – and the greater concern with bursaries among Welsh students presumably reflects the more complex 'weighing up' they were likely to do in evaluating options between Welsh and non-Welsh HEIs, in terms of the courses they wish to enrol on and the financial incentive to remain in Wales.

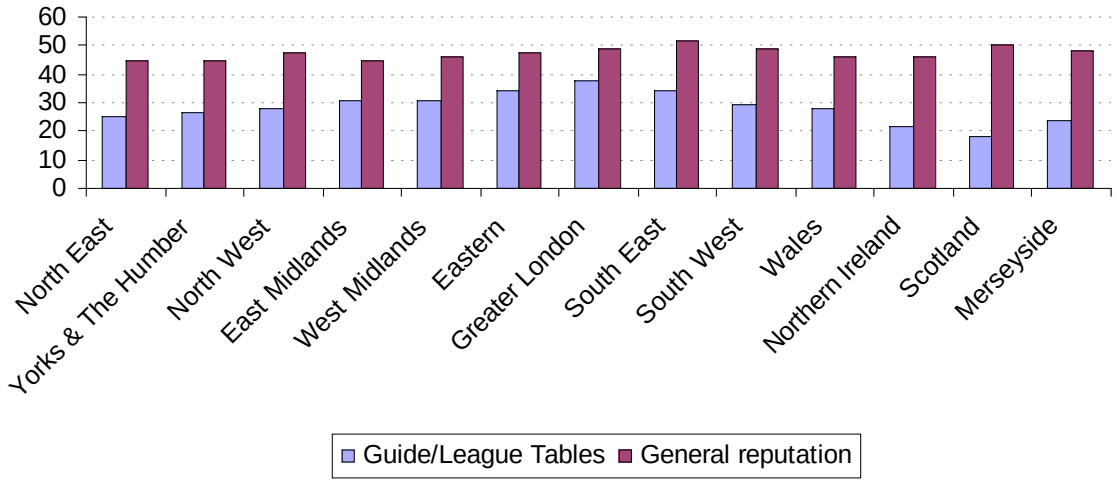
Table 10.3: Influences on choice of HE institution

Influences	Government region of domicile (grouped)			
	England	Wales	Northern Ireland	Scotland
Information from social networks				
Family	29.2	30.2	34.1	30.9
Friends	23.1	23.9	32.9	25.4
Teachers	18.7	16.9	18.5	17.0
School careers adviser	6.3	6.2	10.2	8.1
Reputation and institutional information				
'Good universities' Guide etc.	31.7	27.6	21.8	18.5
Teaching reputation	40.9	41.4	33.2	41.6
Research reputation	21.1	21.3	14.5	18.1
Reputation generally	47.7	46.3	46.3	50.5
University prospectus/website	36.9	34.4	31.8	31.7
Visit to institution	58.5	58.9	41.2	50.0
Offered particular course	59.7	58.4	60.2	60.2
Location issues				
Could continue to live at home	25.3	25.8	28.9	37.1
Wanted to study away from home	27.6	26.8	28.5	18.9
Attractive place	43.4	47.8	32.5	34.3
Cost and accommodation				
Course fees/bursaries available	11.3	21.7	10.7	8.4
Cost of living considerations	12.5	18.3	13.9	10.6
Availability of suitable accommodation	12.3	14.0	11.9	8.4
Other				
Personal reasons	12.4	16.3	20.6	14.9
No particular reasons	1.2	0.7	1.6	1.1
Other	3.1	3.1	2.8	3.3

Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted

We have already noted the proportions influenced by a preference to either stay locally or study away from home. The figure below presents the frequencies of the responses to two of the measures related to the reputation/public perception of the institution, suggesting a more ‘consumerist’ approach to choice.

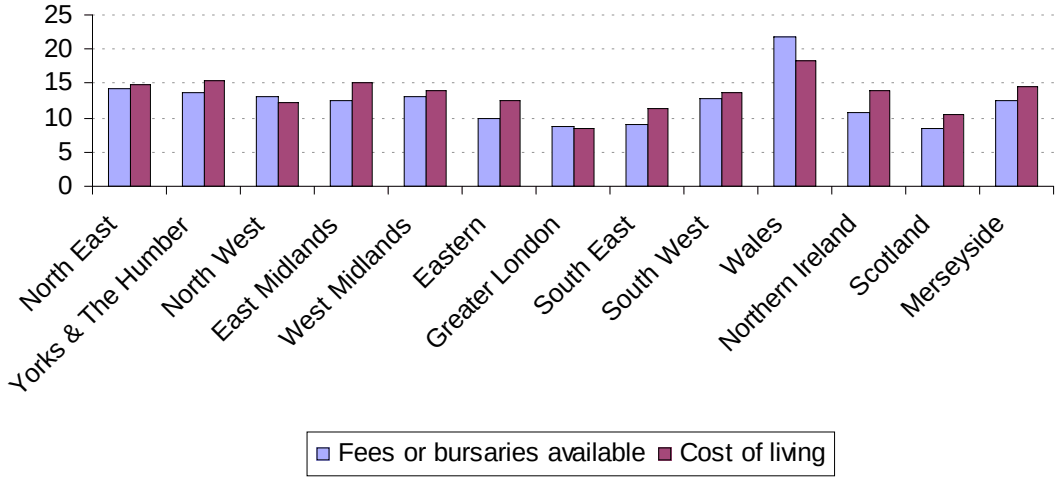
Figure 10.14: Elements of reputation as an influence on choice of HEI



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Across all the regions large proportions of applicants indicated that the general reputation of the university was a factor which had some influence on their choice of institution. The lowest scoring region on this measure was Yorkshire and Humberside (44.4 per cent) and the South East region was highest with 51.5 per cent. For all regions, teaching reputation and research reputation were both less likely to be cited than. Not surprisingly for undergraduate applicants, research reputation was less often a variable. Use of such mechanisms as the league tables/good university guide differed quite markedly by region as the above figure indicates. In the areas of Eastern, Greater London and the South East over one third of applicants cited use of the good university guide or league tables, whereas in Scotland the figure was less than one in five, again, a difference requiring further exploration in the interviews.

Figure 10.15: Cost-related factors as influences on choice of university



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Although the cost considerations appeared less significant than the reputation measures, their regional variation is interesting. It is not surprising that applicants from Scotland were not particularly influenced by issues of cost when making their choice of university, given that their

situation is not directly comparable with the other regions. Applicants from Wales were most influenced by considerations of cost with 21.7 per cent citing availability of course fees or bursaries as an influence and 18.3 per cent citing cost of living concerns as a reason for their choice. For applicants from the more expensive areas of the UK, such as Greater London and the South East, issues of costs were somewhat lower than for those from lower income regions.

Funding of courses and perceptions of debt

Applicants were asked to consider thirteen methods (including one option of 'other') of funding their HE studies and indicate which of these they would be using. Table 10.4 below shows the results of this question for each of the four countries of the UK. Table 10.5, which follows, shows the results for England broken down further into the ten different regions.

Table 10.4: Expected sources of funding HE participation by UK country of domicile

	UK Country of Domicile			
	England	Wales	N.I.	Scotland
From the Student Loan Company Limited	77.4	75.2	81.0	47.8
Personal savings/inheritance	36.5	39.5	35.7	36.7
Non-repayable contributions from parents/other family/partner	28.7	29.4	26.0	29.3
Repayable loan from parents/other family/partner	8.5	8.4	7.0	8.5
Local Authority/Student Award Agency for Scotland	8.5	11.0	5.1	50.6
National Health Service/General Social Care Council	5.1	5.1	5.2	1.9
Working during study	49.8	49.0	56.6	56.7
Working during holidays	58.0	59.1	59.6	63.4
University/college hardship or access funds	8.5	7.9	8.4	8.4
Other forms of borrowing	15.8	17.7	16.1	12.3
University/college access funds/bursary	29.1	28.0	32.3	19.4
Sponsorship/bursary from current/prospective employer	3.1	3.4	2.8	3.6
Other	1.4	1.6	0.6	1.3

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Both tables convey the range of sources from which applicants intended to fund their studies, but it does not tell us the relative weight of each contribution, and it was clear during the piloting and pre-testing phase of the study that many applicants were uncertain about how student loans and other aspects of financial management would work. The Stage 2 findings will reveal the sources actually used and provide detail of the respondents' experiences of financial management during their first year of study. However, from what we have here, we can see that, Scotland excepted, student loans were by far the most commonly cited method of funding HE. For applicants of all regions large numbers planned to work either during the holidays or during term time, or both, in order to help pay for their education. Interestingly it was the applicants from Scotland who most frequently anticipated working during their studies. Table 10.5 indicates the range of proportions of respondents anticipating the use of different sources, revealing small but predictable differences in terms of the social class differences of the populations suggested by earlier analyses.

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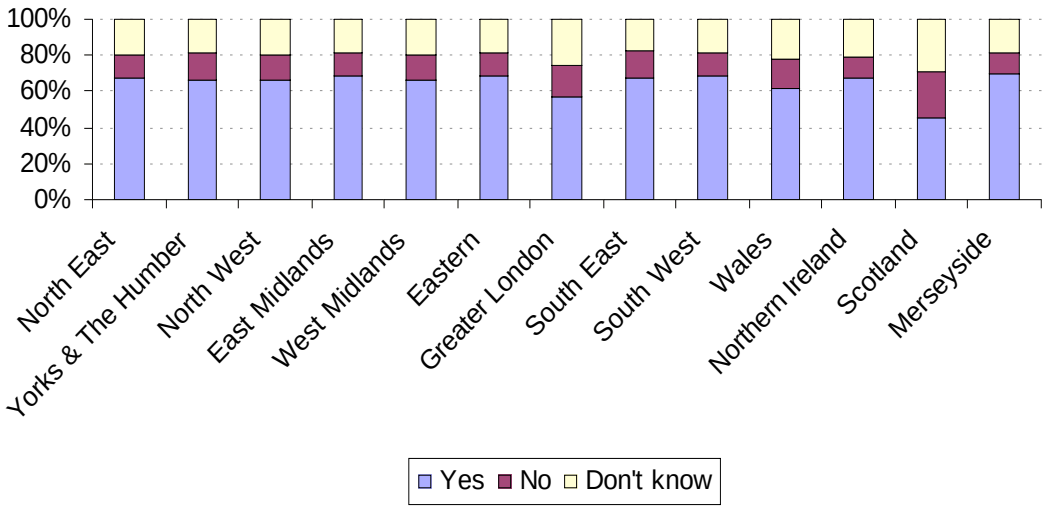
Table 10.5: Methods of funding HE by English Region of domicile

	Region of Domicile									
	North East	Yorks & The Humber	North West	East Midlands	West Midlands	Eastern	Greater London	South East	South West	Mersey-side
From the Student Loan Company Limited	80.3	79.1	79.7	80.7	79.3	78.2	74.0	76.1	74.6	81.5
Personal savings/inheritance	33.8	37.8	34.7	41.6	37.7	40.9	29.5	38.9	38.4	29.5
Non-repayable contributions from parents/other family/partner	28.1	28.7	29.7	29.9	27.8	32.2	25.4	31.4	27.2	23.4
Repayable loan from parents/other family/partner	6.8	7.2	7.9	8.2	8.1	10.1	7.7	10.4	9.1	5.9
Local Authority/Student Award Agency for Scotland	7.9	8.4	8.4	6.9	8.3	7.8	9.6	8.0	9.9	8.9
National Health Service/General Social Care Council	6.3	5.8	6.3	4.3	5.7	4.9	3.8	4.4	5.9	5.8
Working during study	56.1	53.1	51.6	53.4	51.4	49.7	43.4	48.7	49.7	57.5
Working during holidays	59.3	58.7	58.2	63.5	60.1	61.0	47.3	60.6	61.6	58.5
University/college hardship or access funds	9.4	9.0	8.3	8.0	9.0	7.3	9.6	7.1	9.3	9.3
Other borrowing	15.9	14.8	17.1	17.2	15.7	16.1	12.7	15.8	18.6	18.8
University/college access funds/bursary	35.5	31.2	31.0	31.7	33.3	25.9	28.0	23.7	28.8	35.9
Sponsorship/bursary from current/prospective employer	3.4	2.8	2.7	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.0	3.2	3.5	2.8
Other	1.3	1.4	1.7	1.1	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.4

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted England-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted.

Figure 10.16: Responses to the question 'Do you expect to have significant debts when you have completed your course?' by region

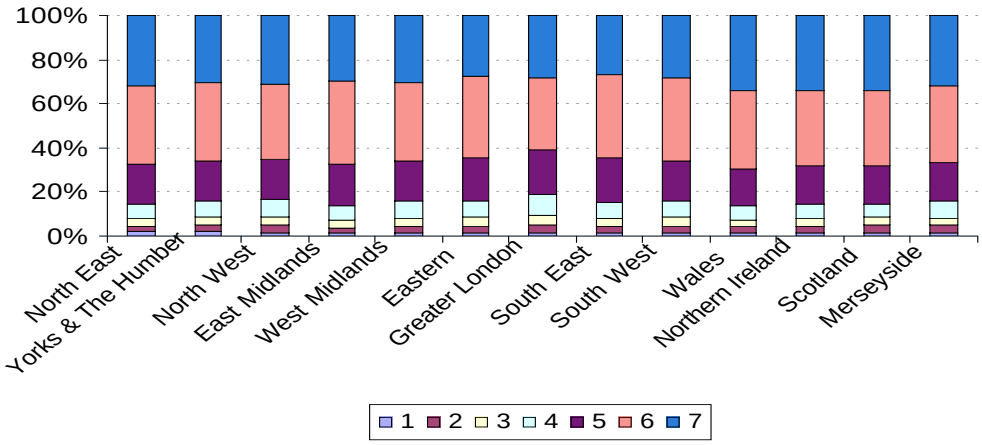


Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Figure 10.16 again shows applicants from Scotland differ from the rest of the UK, this time with their expectations of debt. 'Only' 44.8 per cent of applicants from Scotland expected significant debts on completion of their course, compared to those from Greater London, who had, at 54 per cent, the second lowest proportion of applicants expecting significant debts. For each of the other English regions typically around two-thirds of applicants expected significant post-HE debts. The reasons for the responses from Scotland are clear, but the Greater London responses require further exploration.

Reflections on the application process

Figure 10.17: Level of satisfaction with the UCAS application process by region



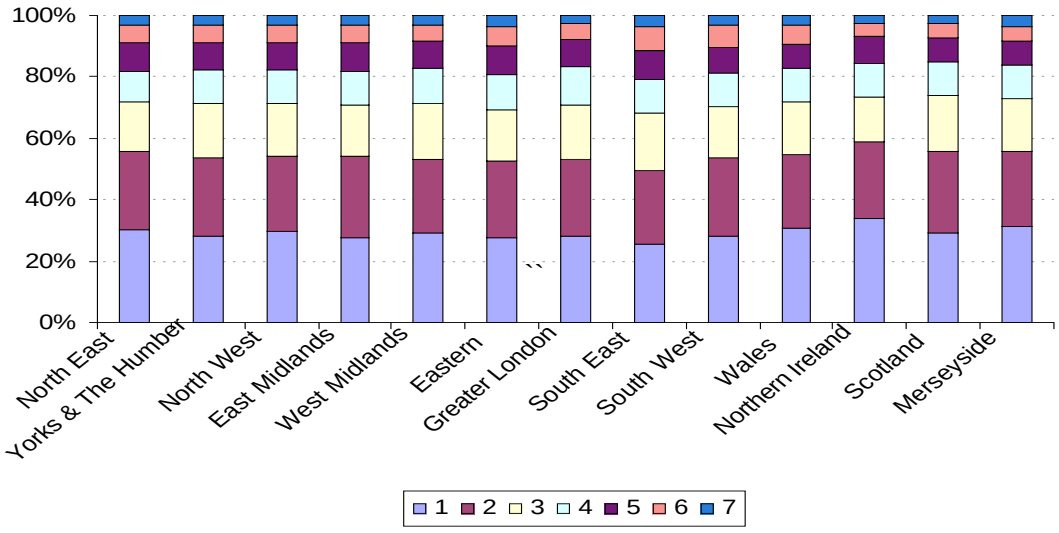
Where 1 means very dissatisfied and 7 means completely satisfied.
Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Given that the sample was of those who were accepted into a HE institution through the UCAS process the high levels of satisfaction shown in Figure 10.17 were only to be expected.

The profiles are consistent by region of applicant with in all cases over 60 per cent of respondents scoring the application procedure at one of the top two levels of satisfaction. There is little significant variation, especially if the two top categories are combined. Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh and North-east domiciled applicants were most likely to be completely satisfied, whereas those based in Greater London, the South West and eastern regions tended to score their experience lower.

Career planning and future expectations

Figure 10.18: Clarity of future plans and expectations by region



Where 1 = I have a clear idea about the occupation I want to enter and the qualifications required to do so. And where 7 = I have no idea what I will do after I complete the course I have applied for.
Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

On the seven-point scale reflecting how clearly respondents had clear views of their future occupational aspirations, distributions of response by region suggests that there was little difference to be found in the applicants' career plans. Figure 10.18 confirms that for each of the regions there was a strong bias towards the 'instrumental' end of the scale, although there is a 10 per cent difference between the region with the highest numbers scoring themselves 1 or 2 (59 per cent from Northern Ireland) and the region with the lowest propensity to score highly (49 per cent in the South East). Given the compositional profile of these two extremes, it is perhaps not surprising that those in Northern Ireland have a more instrumental approach to HE application, and this is borne out by the comparison in Table 10.6 of reasons for applying to HE by UK country of domicile.

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Table 10.6: Main reasons for deciding to apply for HE (most frequently cited only)

	UK Country of Domicile			
	England	**Wales**	**N.I.**	**Scotland**
I want to realise my potential	13.8	14.7	11.7	13.8
It is part of my long term career plans	35.3	34.3	33.8	33.9
To enable me to get a good job	21.3	21.1	26.8	23.4
I want to study the particular subject/course	16.8	18.2	15.6	18.1

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all accepted UK respondents to full survey, weighted.

Summary

This investigation of some of the key variables of the Futuretrack study explored according to of domicile prior to HE entry region shows some variation in responses, reflecting the different HE funding regimes between UK countries and their different socio-economic and wider demographic structures. The findings also reflect differences in access to the range of HE opportunities and to some extent, cultural variations in norms, values and expectations that will require further exploration and careful monitoring as the longitudinal study proceeds. The key message running through the information presented is that applicants from Scotland differ in many respects from the rest of the UK, as – in different ways - do those from Northern Ireland and Wales. This is not unexpected, certainly with regard to variables which measure outcomes and choices, given that their choices were in part structured by different funding arrangements. However, we do see stronger differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK in terms of attitudes, particularly around such issues as funding, loans and debt.

General attitudinal questions such as the value of HE and questions about self-perception did not show up as vastly different between the different regions of the UK. In many ways we would not expect attitudinal data to be related to region, except, as noted, in the case where different policy has had an effect on a particular area.

Future investigation should be aimed at investigating the regional differences in conjunction with other structuring variables, such as age, background and ethnic group, because as we have seen at the beginning of this section, there were some subtle (and some not so subtle) differences in the profiles of these variables across the different regions. Further analysis will enable us to make a better judgement of whether what has been presented above constitutes true regional difference or whether region is a proxy for some other structuring variables.

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11: APPLICANTS WHO DID NOT PROCEED INTO UK HIGHER EDUCATION IN 2006

The following section examines the attitudes and values of the applicants who were not accepted at a UK HEI or who chose not to accept a place. The data in this chapter comes from two sources: the main survey and a short survey for non-accepted applicants who had not responded to the main survey. Such applicants were invited to complete the shorter survey questionnaire in December 2006 to mitigate under-representation in the main survey.

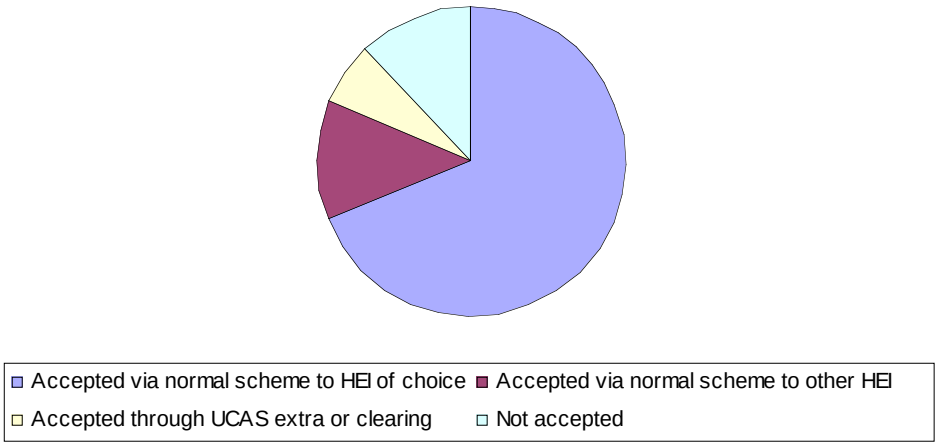
This chapter focuses on UK-domiciled applicants. Overseas-domiciled applicants had higher rates of non-acceptance or not taking up a place at a UK HEI. The characteristics of these applicants are discussed in Chapter 9.

The attributes associated with gaining or accepting a place at a UK HEI have been discussed in Chapter 2. The key factors that were associated with proceeding into higher education in 2006 were subject choice, age, entry qualifications, ethnicity, social background, access to information and region. Applicants planning to study medicine, dentistry and subjects allied to medicine had lower acceptance rates, as did applicants planning to study in Greater London, the South West, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Asian applicants had higher success rates than white applicants, who in turn had higher success rates than black applicants. Applicants from a middle-class background also had higher acceptance rates, as did those with high tariff points and those who felt they had good access to information about occupations they wanted to follow.

This chapter focuses on comparing the non-accepted and accepted, with a focus on the former, exploring differences within this group, their activities and planned activities in the year after application.

In Chapter 2, the distribution of outcomes for all applicants was discussed. Figure 11.1 shows outcome of application for the UK-domiciled applicants who responded to the main survey.

Figure 11.1: Outcome of UCAS application of UK-domiciled applicants



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

Overall, 69 per cent of UK domiciled applicants were accepted via the normal scheme to the HEI of their choice, 13 per cent were accepted via the normal scheme to another HEI, 7 per cent were accepted through UCAS extra or Clearing, and 12 per cent were not accepted or decided not to accept a place through UCAS.

Applicants who are shown as 'not accepted' fall into two groups: those who were not accepted by any UK HEI; and those who were accepted but chose not to accept the offer. For this reason, the 'not accepted' category is quite diverse, covering applicants with high tariff points who had failed to gain a place on popular, over-subscribed courses such as medicine and dentistry, applicants whose exam results were better or worse that predicted so that they

decided to withdraw from the 2006 application process and re-apply for 2007, as well as applicants with low tariff points or non-traditional qualifications. Table 11.1 shows the outcome of applications by acceptance. Students who expected to be enrolled on a higher education course in 2006 were more likely to be accepted, although some of this difference may be attributed to the time the questionnaire was completed, as some applicants will have already known that they would not be able to proceed at the time they completed the questionnaire.

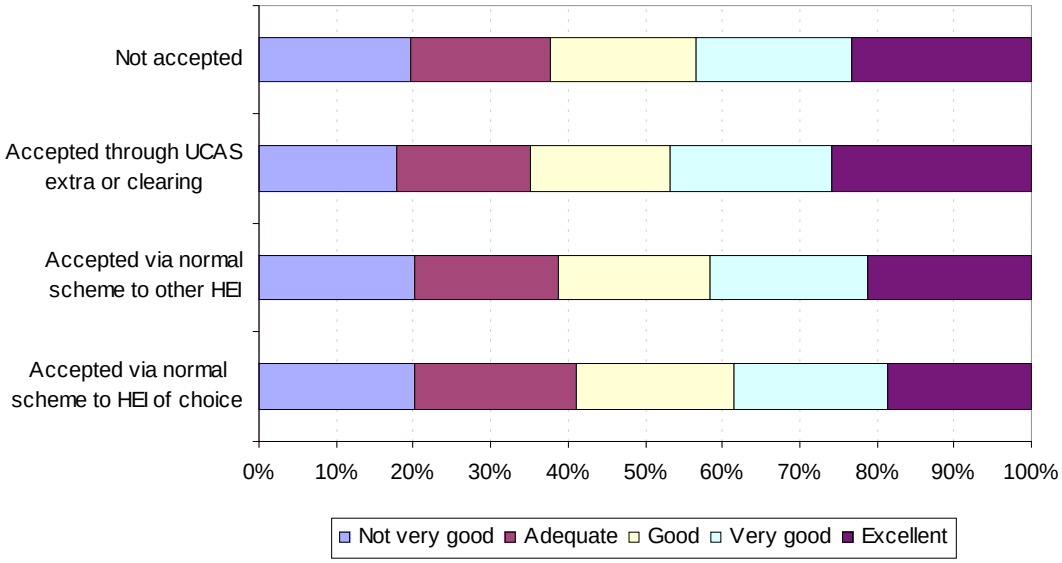
Table 11.1: Expectation of being enrolled on a higher education course in Autumn 2006

	Not accepted	Accepted	Total
Yes	61.9	93.9	90.1
No	38.1	6.1	9.9

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

The diversity within the group of the 'not accepted' may account for the somewhat surprising findings when looking at how respondents rated their confidence and written and spoken communication scores, as shown in Figure 11.2.

Figure 11.2: Outcome of UCAS application by self-reported self-confidence rating



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

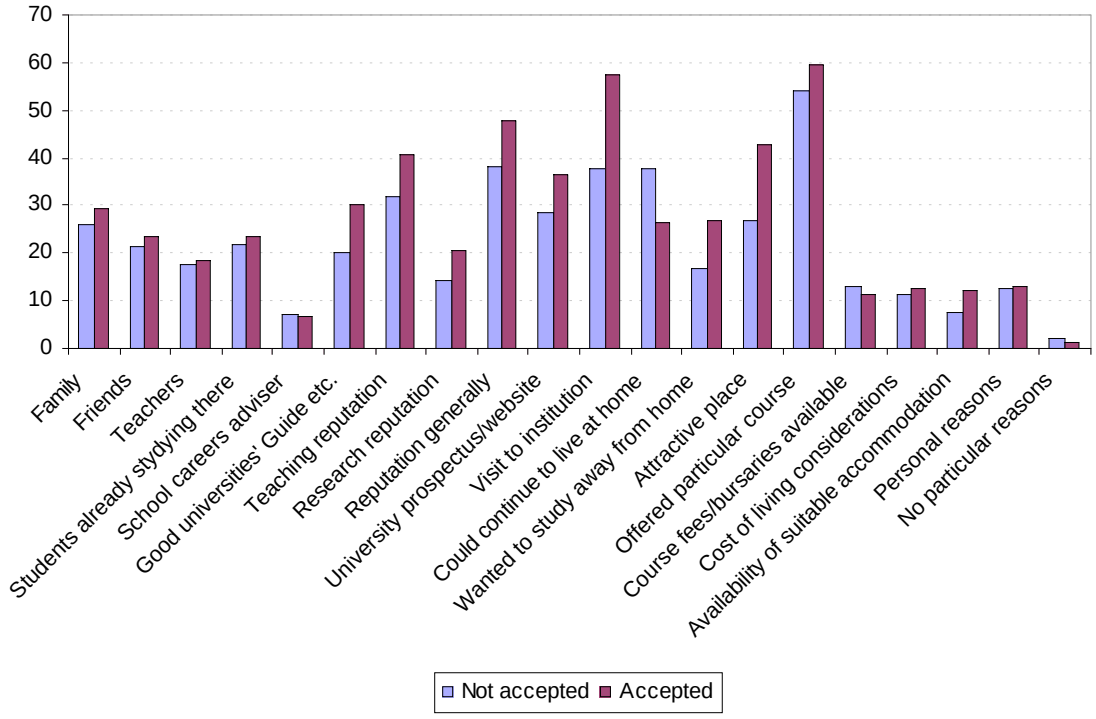
Applicants who rated their written or spoken communication skills as 'excellent' also had higher rates of non-acceptance than those who rated their skills not only as 'very good', 'good' or 'adequate', but also those who rated their skills as 'poor'. Whilst this may reflect some over-confidence in their skills, it may also reflect the type of courses applied for. However, this pattern is not repeated with the ratings of numeracy or computer literacy, in which those rating their skills as 'excellent' had the lowest rates of non-acceptance – reinforcing the contention in Chapter 3 that self-rated numeracy is a more reliable (perhaps less culturally-variable) indicator than the other areas of competence.

Attitudes towards higher education and the reasons applicants gave for choosing to enter HEI and study particular subjects at particular institutions show marked disparities between those who were accepted and chose to take up their place, and those who were not accepted or chose not to accept a place at a higher education institution.

When looking at the main reason applicants gave for choosing to apply to enter higher education, it is clear that students who gave reasons which can be related to self-motivation and knowledge of higher education were more successful than those who stated that their main reason for applying to enter higher education was the advice of other people. However,

as Figure 11.5 shows, when applicants were asked to select all the reasons they had applied to enter higher education, applicants who said that they had been encouraged by family and friends had higher rates of acceptance than those who had not. Applicants who had visited the institution were also more likely to accept a place at a higher education institution in 2006.

Figure 11.3: All reasons for choosing to enter higher education by acceptance



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

Table 11.2 shows the proportion of respondents in the accepted and not accepted categories who selected particular reasons for choosing their course. The applicants who were not accepted, (i.e. did not proceed into higher education in 2006), gave fewer reasons for choosing their courses. As Table 11.2 shows, enjoyment of subject, a history of high achievement in the subject and interest in course content were lower for the non-accepted respondents, as was the belief that the course would lead to good employment opportunities – though they were more likely to specify that it would lead to a particular profession. The overall picture suggested is of lack of intrinsic motivation to actually *do* the course.

Table 11.2: All reasons for choosing a particular course (percentage)

	Not accepted	Accepted	Total
Enjoy studying the subject	67.3	77.6	76.4
Get good grades in subjects related to the course	29.5	41.7	40.2
Interested in the content of the course	70.6	79.3	78.3
Modular course, keeps options open	15.0	21.2	20.5
Opportunity to spend part of the course abroad	7.8	13.2	12.6
Need the course to enter particular profession	52.9	44.0	45.0
Will lead to good employment opportunities	50.7	61.1	59.8
Enables me to qualify for another course	14.4	12.5	12.7
Had difficulty deciding, was a reasonable option	7.8	7.7	7.7
Was advised that the course would be appropriate for me	8.2	7.2	7.3
Other	1.5	1.2	1.2

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

We saw in Chapter 2 that those who had applied for new universities had a greater likelihood of having an accepted place than those who had applied to old ones. Table 11.3 shows what influenced applicants' choice of HEI. Looking only at the applicants who expected to be enrolled on an HE course in 2006, we see that there are significant differences between the applicants who went on to accept a place and those who did not. As in the case of course choice, applicants who accepted a place gave more reasons for choosing their HEI. There are four instances where a larger proportion of the 'not accepted' applicants than the accepted applicants chose a particular option, the most significant of which is the case of the applicants who chose their course so that they could continue to live at home: 38 per cent of applicants who expected to enter higher education in 2006 but who did not enrol gave this reason for choosing their HEI, compared to 26 per cent of applicants who expected to enter higher education in 2006 and who did so. Additionally, applicants who said they chose their HEI because they wanted to live at home had lower rates of acceptance at their chosen institution and higher rates of non-acceptance than those who did not give this reason. This suggests that the limits placed on an applicant by wanting or needing to live at home may have resulted in restricted or unsuitable choices of HEI.

Table 11.3: All influences on choice of higher education institution (percentage)

	Not accepted	Accepted	Total
Family	25.8	29.5	29.2
Friends	21.4	23.6	23.4
Teachers	17.6	18.4	18.4
Students already studying there	22.0	23.4	23.3
School careers adviser	7.0	6.5	6.5
Good universities' Guide etc.	20.3	30.3	29.5
Teaching reputation	31.9	40.7	40.0
Research reputation	14.4	20.7	20.2
Reputation generally	38.3	47.8	47.0
University prospectus/website	28.7	36.3	35.6
Visit to institution	37.9	57.4	55.8
Could continue to live at home	37.7	26.3	27.2
Wanted to study away from home	16.8	26.9	26.1
Attractive place	27.0	42.7	41.4
Offered particular course	54.2	59.7	59.2
Course fees/bursaries available	12.8	11.5	11.6
Cost of living considerations	11.4	12.6	12.5
Availability of suitable accommodation	7.4	12.1	11.7
Personal reasons	12.5	13.0	13.0
No particular reasons	1.9	1.2	1.2
Other	3.7	3.1	3.2

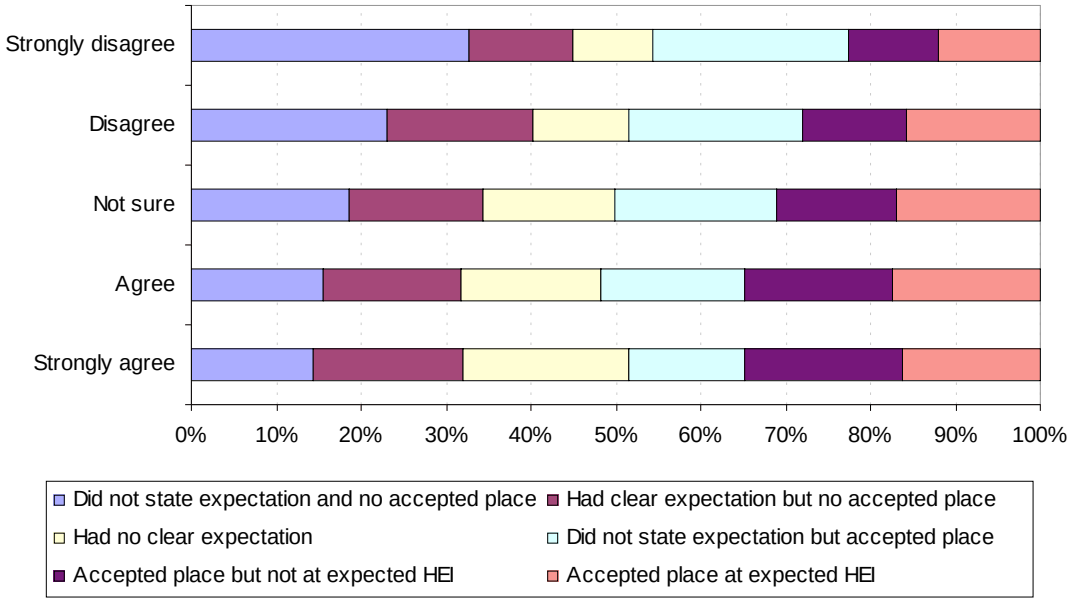
Source: Futuretrack 2006: UK-domiciled respondents to full survey who did not expect to be enrolled on a higher education course in 2006, weighted

As with the questions concerning reasons for entering HEI and reasons for choosing their courses, applicants who said they did not have a particular reason for choosing their HEI had lower rates of acceptance at their chosen institution, with just 63 per cent of applicants who chose this option having accepted places, compared to 77 per cent of those who did not say they had no clear reason for their choice.

Generally, applicants who held positive views about higher education showed higher acceptance rates than those who did not, although the differences were quite small. When applicants were asked whether education is valuable in its own right, rather than just as preparation for employment, and whether higher education provided opportunities for personal growth, rate of acceptance at the chosen institution declines, and rate of non-acceptance increases, as disagreement with the statements increases. Applicants disagreeing that higher education was a good investment or that for most good jobs a degree

is essential also showed lower rates of acceptance at any HEI. Applicants were asked whether they expected to be enrolled in a UK HEI in 2006, and when this data is compared to the outcome of their applications, the applicants who showed a degree of ambivalence about whether they would enter HE in 2006 were also the ones who expressed the most negative views about the value of HE.

Figure 11.4: 'For most good jobs a degree is essential' by expectation and outcome of application



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

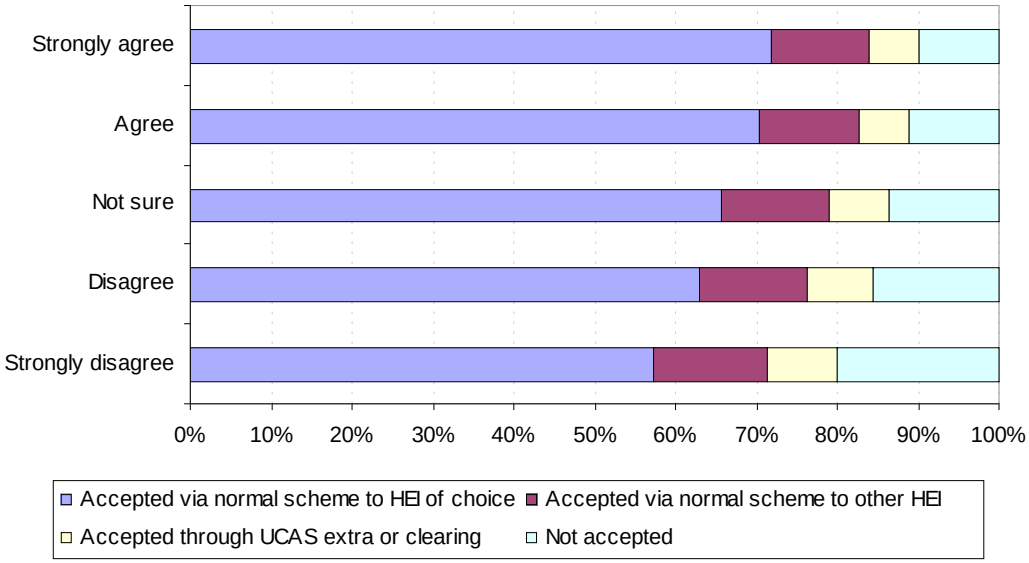
Surprisingly, applicants who said they had the clearest idea of their future careers (who had rated themselves 1 on a scale of 1-7) were the most likely to not accept a place at an HEI. They were also the second most likely, after those who rated themselves 7 (who 'had no idea' of what they would do on completion of their course), not to have been accepted at their chosen institution. This is likely to reflect the relatively high rejection rates for those aiming to study some of the more vocational subjects like medicine, dentistry and nursing. Figure 11.5 shows applicants' clarity of ideas about their future occupation, where 1 means 'I have a clear idea about the occupation I eventually want to enter and the qualifications required to do so', and 7 means 'I have no idea what I will do after I complete the course I have applied for'.

Figure 11.5: Clarity of ideas about future occupation

Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

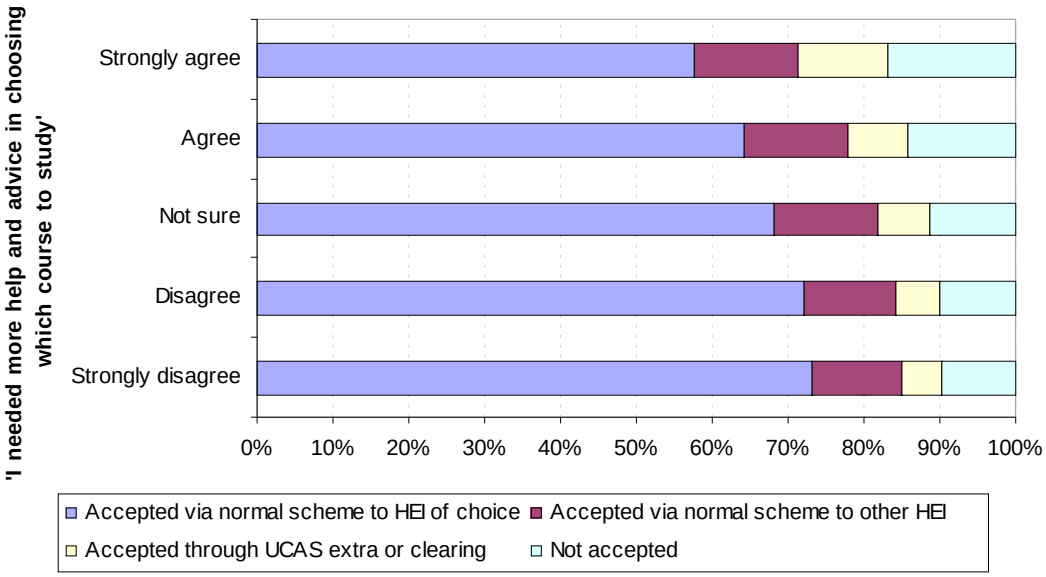
As was mentioned in Chapter 2, having adequate information about higher education plays a key role in the outcome of respondents' UCAS applications. Figures 11.6 and 11.7 show the impact having, or not having, different types of advice had on the outcome of respondents' UCAS applications.

Figure 11.6: Response to statement 'I had all the information I required about higher education courses' by outcome of UCAS application



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

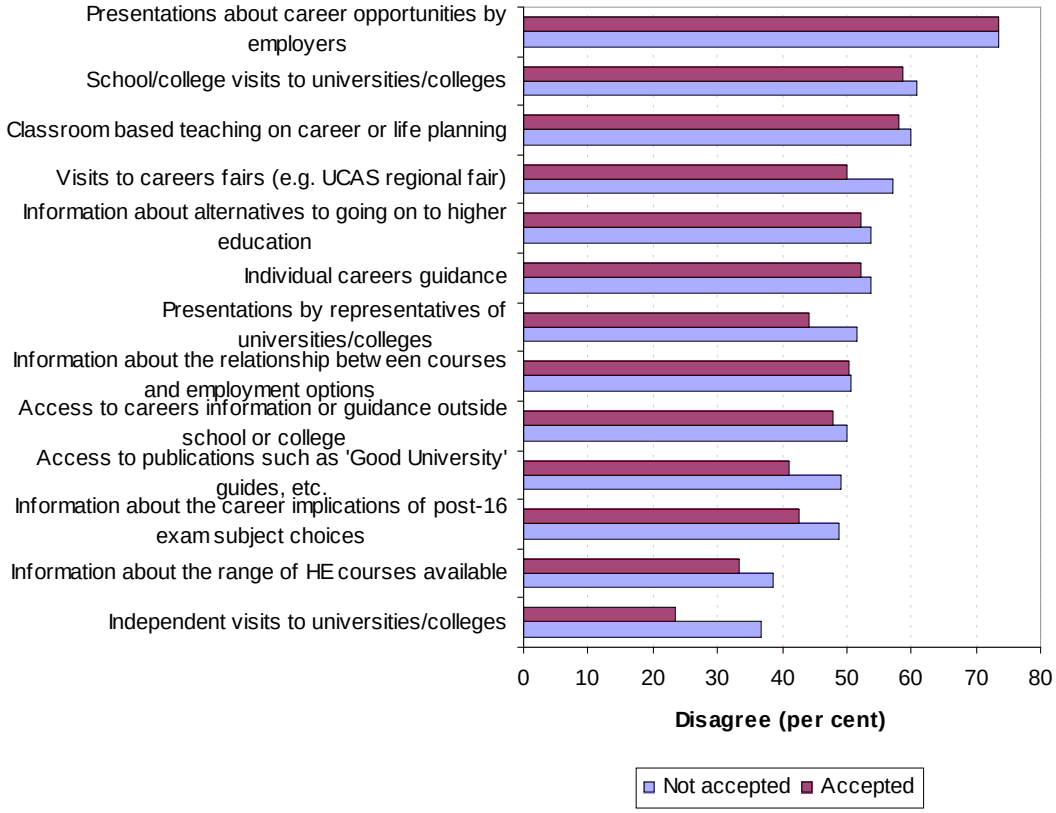
Figure 11.7: Response to statement 'I needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study' by outcome of UCAS application



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

As Figure 11.8 shows, other significant information gaps existed in relation to independent visits to HEIs and presentations by representatives of HEIs.

Figure 11.8: Percentage of applicants who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had enough information from different sources, by whether accepted



Source: Futuretrack 2006: all UK-domiciled respondents to full survey, weighted

The only time that this relationship between amount of information and outcome of the UCAS application is when respondents were asked about whether they had enough information about alternatives to higher education where the acceptance rates were similar across all categories, and those who felt they had too much information about alternatives were the least likely to be choose to enrol in higher education in 2006.

Why applicants did not enter higher education and what they are doing instead

This section looks at why applicants chose not to proceed into higher education in 2006 and the plans these applicants had for their future. The majority of the data in this section comes from the short non-respondents survey described above.

Table 11.4 shows that most of the applicants in the main survey who said that they did not expect to be enrolled on an HE course in 2006 were planning to take a gap year. Amongst the applicants who accepted a place in 2006 to enrol in 2007, a high degree of planning is evident. Applicants expected to take a gap year prior to knowing the outcome of their application.

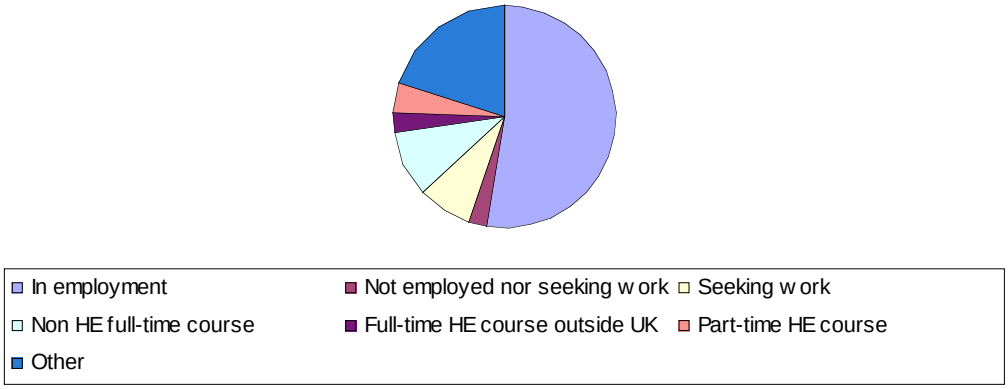
Table 11:4: 'Future plans of applicants who did not expected to be enrolled on a higher education course in Autumn 2006' (percentage)

	Not accepted	Accepted	Total
Taking a gap year to defer HE entry till 2007 to a course on which I hope to have a place	55.6	84.9	71.6
Doing something else	44.4	15.1	28.4

Source: Futuretrack 2006: UK-domiciled respondents to full survey who did not expect to be enrolled on a higher education course in 2006, weighted

Figure 11.9 shows the current situation of respondents to the short non-participant survey. Over half were in employment in December 2006, and around 17 per cent were studying.

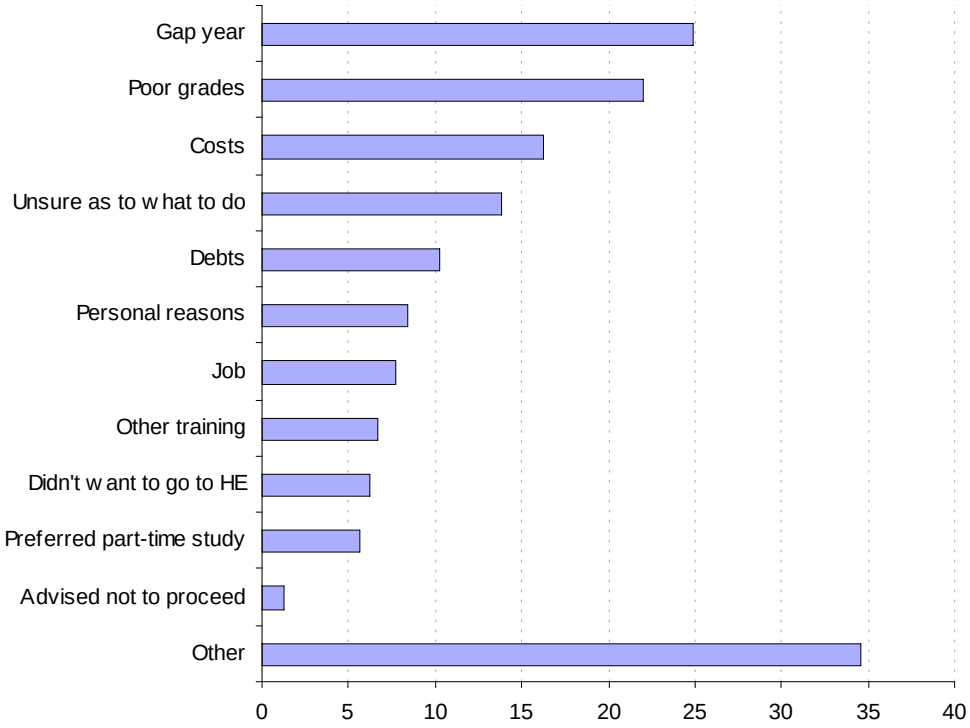
Figure 11.9: Current situation of non-participants



Source: Futuretrack 2006 Non-Respondents, weighted

Applicants to the short survey had various reasons for not proceeding to a full-time higher education course in 2006, as we discuss below. As Figure 11.10 shows, excluding the 'other' option, the most common reasons given in the short non-respondents' survey were to take a gap year (24 per cent), because they did not achieve the grades they needed to accept any offers (22 per cent), because they were unsure what to do (17 per cent), and because they were deterred by debts or the prospect of incurring debts (20 per cent).

Figure 11.10: Why applicants did not move on to higher education



Source: Futuretrack 2006 Non-Respondents, weighted

Those who were dissuaded from continuing to higher education because of debt or costs were more likely to be non-UK domiciled applicants. Given the nature of fees, this is unlikely to be surprising. 30 per cent of those who were domiciled outside the EU cited the cost/debts

as a reason for not going on to HE. This is compared with 19 per cent from within the EU (UK excluded) and 17 per cent for UK domiciled applicants.

Considering all applicants, there were also some differences in perceptions of debt by age and occupational background of the applicant. Applicants from a routine and manual occupations background were the most likely to cite reasons of cost as putting them of HE (19 per cent as compared with applicants from a managerial and professional occupations background (15 per cent and also with those from an intermediate occupations background (14 per cent). Age was also a factor affecting perception of HE costs. The youngest age group (18 and under) were least likely to be put off HE by fears of debt (15 per cent). Across the other age groups, approximately one in five reported that costs/debts were a factor in their decision.

When students were not accepted or chose not to enter higher education, the majority of those who stated their alternative plans were ultimately aiming to re-apply to higher education at some point in their future.

> *'Taking a Gap Year and reapplying for Medicine, since I was rejected from the Universities I applied to this year. Hoping to get into somewhere to start the Medicine course in 2007.'* [Female, 18 and under, South East, White, applied to study Medicine]

In the short non-respondents' survey, 63 per cent indicated that they would apply to enter higher education in 2007. The figure was particularly high for those who at the time of the survey were planning to take a gap year. 84 per cent of gap year students said they planned to enrol on a higher education course, and a further 11 per cent said they planned to enter higher education within the next 2-3 years.

Gap year students

In the main Stage 1 survey, applicants were surveyed before they started university and asked whether they expected to be enrolled on a higher education course in autumn 2006 or planned to take a gap year to defer entry until 2007, and around 8,000 applicants, or 6 per cent of all applicants, planned to take a gap year at the survey point. In the short questionnaire for non-accepted non-respondents, distributed in December 2006, around 2,000 applicants stated that they were currently taking a gap year. Table 11.5 shows the characteristics of the gap year students.

Table 11.5: Characteristics of Gap Year Students

	Plan to take gap year	All accepted Students	Gap Year short Q	Other Short Q
Per cent female	55.2	54.1	51.7	55.6
Average age	19.6	20.4	19.7	23.1
Managerial and professional background	46.2	35.8	35.7	22.0
Intermediate occupations	14.5	14.8	14.0	10.7
Routine and manual occupations	13.6	16.7	13.8	14.6
Not known	(25.6)	(32.7)	(36.4)	(52.8)
Asian	4.6	8.3	8.8	7.0
Black	3.1	4.3	6.4	6.6
White	78.7	69.1	64.1	51.0
Mixed	2.8	2.4	2.8	1.5
Other	06	0.9	0.6	1.0
Unknown	(10.2)	(15.0)	(17.2)	(32.8)
UK	91.3	86.4	84.5	69.0
EU	4.5	6.6	5.5	13.0
Other overseas	4.2	7.0	9.9	18.0
Sources	*Futuretrack 2006 Sweep 1 (weighted)*		*Futuretrack 2006 Non-Respondents (weighted)*	

Both ‘planned’ and ‘actual’ gap year students are younger on average and more likely to come from socially-advantaged backgrounds. Applicants from ethnic minorities were less likely to plan gap years, but equally likely to give ‘taking a gap year’ as an explanation for deferral. We will not know until we are able to analyse the Stage 2 findings how far planned gap years matched with actual gap years, since there is evidence from the short questionnaire that some gap years were involuntary i.e. an adjustment to failure to achieve the grades, or the HEI preferred place, to enable candidates to re-apply in 2007. Most gap year students who completed the shot questionnaire, however, were in employment rather than engaged in substantial study programmes, although the relatively high proportion unemployed might suggest ambivalence about taking on substantial work commitments as well as lack of employment opportunities.

Table 11.6: Current situation of gap year students.

	Percentage
I am in employment (full-time, part-time or self-employed)	63.1
I am neither in employment nor seeking employment	4.0
I am unemployed and seeking work	10.6
I have started a different full-time course of study or training (not in higher education)	4.0
I have started a full-time course of higher education at a university or college outside the UK	2.2
I have started a part-time higher education course	2.5
Other	13.7

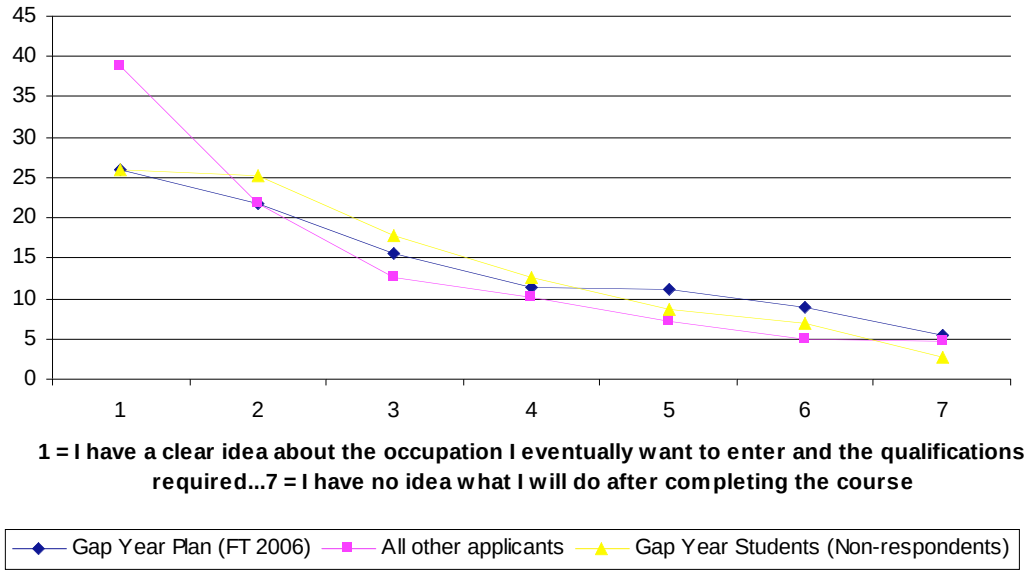
Source: Futuretrack 2006 Non-Respondents (weighted),

Those from a routine and manual background were the most likely (26 per cent) to indicate that low grades were responsible for not taking up a HE place, while those from a managerial and professional background were least likely (22 per cent) to cite low grades as a cause

Of respondents to the full Stage 1 questionnaire, 6 per cent planned to take a gap year to defer higher education entry until 2007 when they would begin a course to which they hoped to already have been accepted. Of those, who planned to defer entry to HE until 2007, over two thirds do appear to have achieved accepted places (63 per cent), somewhat lower than the proportion of applicants as a whole (86 per cent). This suggests that for some, the decision to plan for a gap year may be a way of ‘hedging bets’ in case the desired outcome is not achieved, although it may also reflect the fact that some of those accepting places, for example, through clearing, may be more highly motivated to commence study directly rather than defer, or may be les discriminating in their course or HEI preferences.

Not surprisingly, gap years are more common among school-leavers than older applicants, with 70 per cent of those planning to take a gap year in their final year at a secondary school and 15 per cent were students at a further education college. Figure 11.11 suggests that on balance, ‘gap year planers’ tended to have clearer career plans than average which, given that they are also younger than average, suggests that their decision is more likely to reflect a systematic rather than responsive approach to career development.

Figure 11.11: Clarity of career plans/ideas, comparing gap year planners and takers



Source: Futuretrack 2006 Non-Respondents (weighted), Futuretrack 2006 Sweep 1 (weighted)

Applicants who were not accepted

In the short survey, respondents from a routine and manual background were most likely (26 per cent) and those from a managerial and professional background least likely (22 per cent) to indicate that low grades had caused them not to proceed to HE.

Those over 25 were much less likely than all the other age groups to cite poor grades; only 11 per cent of this group suggested grades as a reason. The pattern shows that the younger the applicant, the more likely they are to cite insufficiently high grades. This finding reflects the greater likelihood of those in the younger age groups coming through the more 'traditional' route from school and hence being more likely than those in older age groups to have been in receipt of conditional offers of places that they failed to satisfy.

A common planned activity amongst these respondents was doing something to strengthen their application in the hope of acceptance the following year. As the following quotes show, in some cases this involved studying for further qualification or to improve their existing qualification, whilst in others it involved gaining more experience related to the course applied for.

> *'Working part time whilst trying to gain experience in the field of nursing. Hoping to apply for midwifery again next year.'* [Female, 19-20, South West, White, applied to study Midwifery]

> *'I was hoping to be offered a place at university in 2006 but I haven't been offered a place so I am thinking about taking some new courses in further education and hope I can afford to keep myself going until I am offered a place at university. I really wanted to go to uni this year and was very disappointed when I was rejected.'* [Female, 26-30, North West, White, applied to study Medical Technologies]

Other applicants

A further group of respondents had been accepted but had declined the place offered because they realised that they did not want to study the subject they had applied for. These

respondents often planned to take a year off building a strong application for the course that they had now decided they wanted to do:

> *'I have declined my offers as my ideas have changed, am now taking a gap year in which I have a job as a teaching assistant and plan to apply again in September for a course in primary education'* [Female, 18 and under, South East, White, applied to study Mathematics]

As has been mentioned, some applicants had declined the place offered to them because they were unsure what they wanted to do and wanted to take time to try out different things before committing themselves to a higher education course. Most of them planned to spend at least 1 year out deciding whether they wanted to enter higher education, and if so, what they wanted to study.

> *'During the course of the year I have realised more about the sort of person I am, and I need time and money to be able to get better at what sort of area I want to work in, as I still feel undecided about what area I am mainly interested in, the financial side of things is hard, and I don't want to commit three years of my life getting poorer and poorer and spending to much time in the wrong area'* [Male, 19-20, South East, White, applied to study subjects related to design]

Other activities applicants planned to do instead of taking up a place to enter higher education in 2006 included:

- working to earn money to fund their studies;
- travelling;
- studying in a different country;
- joining the Army/RAF/Marines/Police;
- having a baby.

Some applicants who were rejected or had decided not to accept a place had no plans to apply again. Some stated that they had realised since making their application that they could not afford the course.

> *'The childcare costs will cripple me financially and I don't think I want to be faced with huge debts when I am 40. So at the moment despite having a place, I think the reality of me doing the course is slim*.' [Female, 31-40]

> *'working and not going into higher education because the money involved in going into higher education is still too expensive for me to be able to attend'* [Male, 18 and under, West Midlands, White, applied to study Sports Science]

The short non-respondents' survey also illustrated how important finance was in applicants deciding whether to enter higher education, and this was particularly important for applicants aged over 19. Around 20 per cent of those aged over 19 who took the non-respondents' questionnaire said that 'costs/debt' was a factor in their decision not to enter higher education.

Others felt they could not wait a further year, either because they would be too old, or because of the financial burden of studying further to improve their application.

> *'Place declined for 2006, and I feel I am too old to try again in 2007. I really want to get back to work as quickly as I can, and am now looking into other career opportunities.'* [Female, 31-40, Eastern, White, applied to enter teacher training]

> *'I have been told that I must complete an access course in order to gain sufficient points for the BA hons - unfortunately this means an additional year with no income - I am unsure whether my family could support this. It looks very unlikely. It is a great shame'* [Female, 31-40]

Finally, although the majority of respondents were positive about the application process, some respondents stated that they had been so disappointed in the process of applying to

higher education that they would not apply again. These people were usually mature students who felt that the application process was too orientated towards younger applicants:

> *'Unfortunately I was rejected before interview for a nursing course. I am bitterly disappointed and thought that my qualifications (which apparently are outdated now!) and my life skills and enthusiasm would be sufficient but apparently they are not. I had high hopes of a complete career change and to realise a dream that I have for years been dithering about but unfortunately I was turned down.'* [Female, 41-50, Eastern, White, applied to study Nursing]

> *'The experience of trying to enter higher education seems geared purely towards younger students and I found it very difficult - I am looking at other options'* [Female, 26-30, Yorks & Humber, White, applied to enter teacher training]

Summary

- Overall, 88 per cent of UK domiciled applicants had a place at a higher education institution.
- The 'not accepted' group is diverse. It includes applicants who were not offered a place at a UK HEI, as well as applicants who decided not to accepted places they were offered. It is also a diverse group in terms of prior educational experience, confidence and attitudes towards higher education.
- The majority of applicants who did not enter higher education in 2006, did not do so either because their application was unsuccessful, or because they decide to do something else, planned to apply again in 2007.
- The main reasons why applicants did not enter higher education in 2006 were: not getting the grades; feeling unsure; and concerns about debt.
- Applicants who are positive about the role and value of higher education are more successful in the application process than those who are not. They are more likely to be accepted at an HEI and more likely to be accepted at the HEI of their choice. The difference in attitudes is, however, not very large. This small difference is seen across nearly all the attitude questions that are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.
- Information plays an important role in determining the success of an application. Applicants who consider themselves well informed about higher education courses are much more likely to be successful in their application than those who do not. Applicants who have adequate information are also less likely to be ambivalent about their likelihood of entering HE.
- Applicants who chose their course so that they could continue to live at home lower rates of acceptance at their chosen institution and higher rates of non-acceptance.
- Most of the applicants in the main survey who said that they did not expect to be enrolled on an HE course in 2006 were planning to take a gap year, indicating a high degree of planning and confidence given that they mainly did not know the outcome of their application or A level results in most cases. However, those who had planned to take gap years were less likely than those who planned to enter HE in Autumn 2006 to have an accepted place, so the plan for a gap year may be a way of 'hedging bets' in case desired outcomes are not achieved.
- Students who had planned to take a gap year shared many characteristics in common with the more traditional applicants who had decided to enter HE in 2006. They were younger, more likely to be from higher socio-economic groups, to have high tariff points, and to be white. In contrast, applicants who were from less traditional backgrounds were more likely to have not entered HE because they had not achieved the grades needed or because they had not been offered a place.

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CHAPTER 12

Conclusions

Pulling it all together

The data collected in this Futuretrack study illustrate the diversity of the UCAS applicant and UK undergraduate populations. How far do they reveal an efficient allocation of opportunities and evidence of sound decision-making on the part of aspiring students at the outset of their careers (or in the case of the mature graduates, as they approached 'new beginnings')? Not all applicants went on to achieve the outcomes they sought. Some failed to obtain a place and some decided to take a different direction or to take a gap year before embarking on higher education. Further stages of the survey will reveal the impact of these decisions on subsequent career development and the opportunities and obstacles they meet on the way. In this concluding section of the report, we concentrate on those who were poised to enter full-time higher education in autumn 2006 and accepted a place to matriculate in 2006.

Previous research on the relationship between higher education and employment, including the recent longitudinal studies of UK 1995 and 1999 graduates that we have undertaken (Purcell *et al.* 2005, Purcell and Elias 2004, Elias *et al.*1999) demonstrated the importance of subject studied. As we saw in Chapter 6, the majority of courses are not narrowly vocational, but subject studied sets the parameters of the career gateways that can subsequently be accessed, both facilitating and restricting future options. Once the decision to apply has been made, choice of course at the transition into HE is consequently one of the most crucial decisions that people make, in terms of the impact it has on their subsequent life chances. The evidence that is revealed in this report suggests that, for a high proportion of those making this choice, it may be made on the basis of restricted knowledge of options, limited information about alternatives and culturally-constrained adhesion to the norms and values of applicants' immediate social networks. Is this optimum allocation of opportunity from the point of view of individuals, communities or the UK economy? All of those entering HE might be said to be taking a significant step into 'the knowledge society' but these steps – in terms of the choices that they reflect and the trajectories that they give access to – are influenced by individuals' attributes, experiences and contexts.

So *what* influenced subject choices? The patterns of choice and reasons given by respondents for these illustrate how choices are cumulative, in terms of earlier subject choices in schools and colleges; gender (and the interpretation of gendered roles and attributes) was important; age, social and cultural background were important. Self-rated numeracy and literacy, along with career aspirations, reflected cumulative educational experiences and perceptions of alternatives that were seen to be realistic and desirable according to and the conceptual language of opportunity to which students had access. For many, progression to higher education was an unquestioned next step, as automatic and progression from primary to secondary school whereas for others it was a step into the unknown for them and their families. At one extreme, 63 per cent of those who had attended independent schools said that 'it was the normal thing for somebody like me' to enter HE, compared to only 19 per cent of those applying from FE colleges.

It is important to remember that HE expansion means that the majority of new students are first generation undergraduates. Among Futuretrack respondents, 56 per cent came from homes where neither parent had experience of HE – and the range courses applied for by students from different social backgrounds was systematically different, as previous chapters have discussed, revealing different norms, vales and perceptions of the possibilities – and the last of these is contingent upon the information available to applicants. This is not simply a case of those from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds having less access to career information or being restricted to a narrower range of options. In fact, those who had applied for their courses as FE rather than secondary school students were more likely to report that they had had excellent careers guidance and those applying as mature students consistently demonstrated as well as stated that they had clear career plans and an understanding of the relationship between the course they had elected to study on and the opportunities to which it would be likely to lead. However, they were more likely to have formulated these plans on the

basis of relatively restricted options – limited by the need to study in their current location rather than able choose from a wider geographical range and, where they were applying with 'non-standard' pre-entry qualifications, probably constrained in the options easily accessible to them.

However, one of the findings from the study that deserves careful consideration is the extent to which many from the most traditional part of the 'HE consumer' population – second-generation students from higher managerial and professional backgrounds, who had attended schools that have long traditions of encouraging students to apply for university and college places – were among those most likely to have no clear career plans and what they would do on completion of their courses. They were also more likely than less advantaged applicants to have chosen their courses on the basis of having already enjoyed studying the subject or having achieved good grades in it at school. These are good reasons for choices, but if not accompanied by consideration of the less familiar doors that such enjoyment or aptitudes might provide access, they may preclude a more thoughtful evaluation of available options.

This is not an argument for social engineering. Indeed, it can be convincingly argued that in the light of greater awareness of the transferability of skills and the embedding of reflective learning across the full spectrum of academic programmes of study, students can safely be encouraged to make choices on the basis of enthusiasm and interest rather than narrowly employment-focussed considerations. It is, however, a call to identify the constraints and opportunities faced by different applicant groups that influence their capacity to maximise their potential, in terms of both learning opportunities and access to careers. What insights does this study provide into how aspiring students might make better-informed choices – and how parents, teachers and careers guidance staff might better facilitate such choices?

Making sense of complexity – the role of research

The complexity of the HE population – both in terms of its supply characteristics and the range of courses encapsulated within HE – was discussed in detail in Chapter 3. In the section that follows, we focus in on the diversity of the HE population, illustrating examples of 'typical' students from the range of larger and smaller concentrations within this complexity. In this way we summarise some of the findings.

First of all, we look at *where* they come from. We saw in Chapter 9 that UK, EU and other overseas students exhibit very different applicant profiles. What does this mean in terms of what they bring to UK HE, and in terms of their expectations of what they will achieve as a result of studying here? And what about differences among the UK component countries? How far do the populations of English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish students resemble or differ from one another? We found that respondents made HE applications with a view to international, national or regional participation in HE – almost certainly related to expectations and aspirations based on assumptions of subsequent global, national or regional careers. However, the influences upon different aspirations and choices is certainly related to access to and availability of courses, and the relationship between distance migrated to study and choices made may have implications for HE policymakers and providers. The survey data reveals patterns of choice and participation, but the potential offered by the longitudinal element, and by the qualitative follow-up opportunities provided by this data set, will provide answers to the 'why?' questions that are raised by differences revealed. The objective of policymakers and educators is to ensure that those able to benefit from higher education are able to participate in courses that will enhance their individual and market value, not only – or even predominantly - in terms of the financial returns that such participation potentially affords. Part of individual value for most applicants includes, as a key priority, enhancement of skills and knowledge that will lead to satisfying and appropriate employment that will enable them to realise their potential, as was clear from the responses to questions about why they had applied for higher education and for the courses they had selected.

Readers may have been surprised by the distribution across the range of subjects that applicants applied to study, with the biggest numbers found in Creative Arts and design, Business and Administrative Studies, Biological Sciences, Social Studies and Subjects Allied

to Medicine. We saw in Chapter 4 that the characteristics of students in different areas of study varied considerably:

- The average Creative Arts and Design student is a white female, studying at a new university, most likely having progressed from an FE college after completion of a Foundation course, or from a comprehensive school into such a course. She is less likely to have obtained her place on the basis of 'A' levels than on 'non-standard' qualifications.
- The average Business and Administrative Studies student is male – probably also having moved to his studies from a comprehensive school or FE college, if he has a place at a pre-1992 university, it is probable that his degree will be in Management rather than Business Administration – although the structure and syllabus of are essentially the same – and he will be likely to have obtained his place on the basis of slightly higher than average entry qualifications. As is the case with the student population overall, white students predominate, but this is one of the subjects that both Asian and black students are more likely to have opted for.
- Biological Sciences students are predominantly 18 year old white female comprehensive school *alumni* with middle-range 'A' level scores and lower than average likelihood of having a clear idea about what they will do when they complete their course.
- Social Studies students have fairly evenly-balanced gender ratios – but within the social sciences the gender balance varies – from Economics and Politics where male students predominate, to Social Work and Sociology where the gender ratios are reversed. Economics students have higher average UCAS tariff points and are disproportionately likely to have studied at an independent school, whereas Sociology students are among the most likely to have studied in the State sector, at comprehensives or FE colleges.
- Subjects allied to medicine are all substantially female-dominated, with women constituting 76 per cent of the total – ranging from 90 per cent of the largest group, nursing, to 57 per cent of Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy of which, as already discussed, a significant proportion are Asian, as are Ophthalmology students. Conversely, Asian and Black females are under-represented in the Nursing students, of which fewer than 90 per cent were white women, compared to 83 per cent of accepted female students as a whole. Students in these subjects tend to be older than average. Whereas 12 per cent of accepted respondents as a whole were 25 or older, 34 per cent of those doing subjects allied to medicine were, and this proportion rose to well over 40 per cent for Nursing, Nutrition, Complementary Medicine and Medical Technology. Not surprisingly, students in these subjects were most likely to enter HE with non-standard qualifications and were least likely to have progressed directly from school or Sixth Form College.

Patterns of participation in higher education, as in most areas of human activity, are not random, but systematically-patterned on the basis of evolved custom and practice that is underpinned, to a greater or lesser extent, by natural or socially-constructed predispositions or obstacles. It is well-established that women are under-represented in engineering occupations and on engineering courses, despite many initiatives on the part of policy-makers, industry and educators to attract them. Although it is tempting, in the face of limited success, to see this as somehow inevitable, there is sufficient evidence about the countervailing mechanisms that perpetuate existing industry norms, and about different experiences in different contexts, particularly recent trends in the emerging economies of India and China, to lead us to raise this as a problem of underutilisation of potential and restriction of opportunities that requires to be addressed. The gender balance of different subjects such as the under-representation of men in nursing raises similar issues, particularly where there is an imbalance in the supply of and demand for skills and the availability of opportunities. Among our respondents, women were just under 44 per cent of mathematics students, of whom two thirds had high entry qualifications, Why are they only 29 per cent of economics students, 12 per cent of computer science students and 11 per cent of electronic and electrical engineering students? Perhaps they aspire to teaching careers from the outset - and our previous research reveals that a significantly higher proportion of female than male Mathematics & Computing graduates in the *Class of '99* sample proceeded to teaching

careers (Purcell *et al.* 2005) – but does this reflect strong prior orientations or responses to market opportunities? The Futuretrack cohort has the potential to throw more light than has hitherto been possible on the important issue of gendered careers

Another well-established 'cultural clustering' that our analysis draws attention to is of Pharmacology, toxicology and pharmacy students, of whom 44 per cent of the Futuretrack sample were Asian and 57 per cent female. Why do Asian students with self-assessed high numeracy skills, particularly if they are female, apply disproportionately to develop careers as pharmacists rather than physical scientists (who are disproportionately white middle class males) or engineers, where they would have access to a considerably wider range of opportunities. Recent research on pharmacy careers (Wills *et al.*2006) also discusses this cultural clustering and also reveals that Asian pharmacy graduates face greater obstacles to career development than their white peers.

Implications

The implications of the Stage 1 findings for schools, college, community and other careers guidance staff who advise HE applicants, is that there is a need for better information about the relationship between prior qualifications, HE courses and career opportunities. This applies both to disadvantaged and relatively privileged applicants. Chapter 6 clearly shows the value of access to information and guidance and highlighted the areas where it tends to be inadequate.

For HE providers, there is evidence that applicants are, on the whole, relatively sophisticated consumers of HE, consult league tables and prospectuses and mainly visit at least some of the institutions they are considering applying to. Those who are committee to widening access, however, need to be aware of the extent to which applicants coming from non-traditional backgrounds often perceive themselves as having restricted choices and a proactive approach needs to be taken to broaden their awareness of options available. There is evidence that some applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds or who were entitled to support because of the courses they aspired to study were unaware of the financial help they could obtain to support their participation and were confused by funding regimes or unnecessarily discouraged by the prospect of debt. This last point has implications for the HE policy community too.

Further research is required at Stage 2 to reveal more confidently the implications of course choices for HE policy-makers. The outcome of courses and experiences of students according to degree of vocational focus will reveal the relative values of individual and social investment. The extent to which applicants made choices of subject on the basis of inadequate information about options, or lack of access to preferred choices because of location or other restrictions, or the implications of 'second choice' engagement in HE – and the subsequent experiences of students and their career trajectories - will have considerable policy implications. The responses to questions about HE funding in general, and attitudes towards student loans, although exhibiting ambivalence, reveal that the principle the individuals and their families should take some responsibility for funding HE participation has largely been accepted – although the Scottish case provides an interesting counter-example and it will be interesting the monitor the impact of the different funding regimes on career decision-making and outcomes, and the differences in debt accrued by different categories of participant.

It is rather early to identify the implications of career choices made so far for HE applicants, but it is clear that researching the options available to them by obtaining as much information and advice about subjects, courses, HEIs possible, and the extent to which they are suited for them and their ability to deliver the outcomes sought, contribute to success in obtaining HE places and satisfaction with the application process.

The next steps

Summaries of the detailed chapter findings, discussing differences among the applicant population in terms of socio-economic and regional differences, are provided in the executive

summary. This report has revealed the richness of the Stage 1, but the analyses represent the tip of an iceberg of potential. They raise questions that the research team will be continuing to address as the investigation proceeds, both as Stage 1 data, within the merged data set that has been amplified by Stage 2 data provided by respondents after completion of their first year or engagement in alternative activities. In addition, the study will include a programme of follow-up interviews with particular categories of respondent, to explore some of the explanations underlying patterns of response revealed in the survey: the 'Why?' questions. Much of the value of the Futuretrack programme is the opportunity it provides to explore issues qualitatively and quantitatively: to compare trends and patterns with holistic investigation of applicants and students in relation to their particular contexts and priorities and the opportunities and obstacles that they perceive. Working with careers advisors and other stakeholders as well as engaging with wider research on career decision-making and the relationship between HE and labour market trends, there is potential to clarify, for HE applicants and students and all those concerned with the future of HE, the factors that lead to success and failure of the components of the system – whether at an individual level or in terms of policies and practices at course, HEI or HE system levels.

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ANNEX 1

This annex compares the characteristics of survey respondents with non-respondents and describes the procedures used to identify an appropriate weighting scheme.

Table A1: Comparison of gender, age and ethnicity profiles of respondents to survey of applicants, respondents to survey of non-accepted applicants and the HE applicant population

		Respondents to survey of applicants (May/June 2006) (%)	*Respondents to survey of non-accepted applicants (Dec 2006) (%)*	*Total population (%)*
Gender	Male	37.5	37.6	45.3
	Female	62.5	62.4	54.7
Age	under 21	79.3	65.2	74.5
	21 to 24	9.9	15.3	12.9
	25 and over	10.8	19.5	12.5
Ethnic group	Asian	8.0	7.4	8.3
	Black	4.1	6.2	4.7
	Mixed	2.4	2.0	2.3
	Other	0.8	0.9	0.9
	Not known	14.8	27.1	18.9
	White	69.9	56.5	64.8
N		114,668	6,456	506,304

Sources: Futuretrack 2006 survey and 2006 UCAS HE applicant population data

Table A1 shows the greater propensity of women to respond, as in commonly found in most survey investigations. More mature respondents were somewhat less likely to respond than younger ones. The high proportion of respondents for whom their ethnic group is 'not known' among the survey of non-accepted applicants, reflects the greater propensity of EU and overseas applicants (who were not required in the UCAS process to provide details of ethnic background), not to proceed to an accepted place – and the same explanation applies to the response patterns by socio-economic background (again, not required information for non-UK applicants) revealed in Table A2.

Table A2 compares the socio-economic backgrounds of survey respondents and non-respondents. This information is generated via questions on the UCAS form about parental occupations, or previous occupation held for mature students. We anticipate that the web-based data collection method would bias responses in favour of those applicants from higher social backgrounds, on the assumption that they were more likely to have access at home to their email address.

Table A2: Comparison of socio-economic background of respondents to survey of applicants, respondents to survey of non-accepted applicants and the HE applicant population

		Respondents to survey of applicants (May/June 2006) (%)	*Respondents to survey of non-accepted applicants (Dec 2006) (%)*	*Total population (%)*
Parental background (NSSEC)[24]	Higher managerial and professional occupations	16.2	10.2	13.3
	Lower managerial and professional occupations	21.2	17.0	19.3
	Intermediate occupations	10.2	8.0	9.2
	Small employers and own account workers	4.5	4.0	4.9
	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	3.1	2.4	3.0
	Semi-routine occupations	9.2	8.6	9.0
	Routine occupations	3.7	3.3	3.9
	Not known	31.8	46.4	37.4
N		114,668	6,456	506,304

Sources: Futuretrack 2006 survey and 2006 UCAS HE applicant population data

Surprisingly, we note only a small response bias in favour of the higher social groups (higher and lower managerial and professional, intermediate occupations).

Table A3 shows the regional distribution of domicile at the time of application for a place in higher education, again comparing respondents to the total population of UCAS applicants. No significant regional response bias is evident.

[24] Note: NSSEC is the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification - the occupationally-based socio-economic classification used for all UK national statistics and surveys since 2001.

Table A3: Comparison of domicile of respondents to survey of applicants, respondents to survey of non-accepted applicants and the HE applicant population

		Respondents to survey of applicants (May/June 2006) (%)	*Respondents to survey of non-accepted applicants (Dec 2006) (%)*	*Total population (%)*
Region	North East	3.2	2.8	3.2
	Yorkshire & The Humber	6.5	4.8	6.4
	North West	7.4	5.8	7.8
	East Midlands	5.7	3.8	5.3
	West Midlands	7.3	6.2	7.2
	Eastern	7.9	6.3	6.9
	Greater London	13.0	13.6	13.8
	South East	12.5	10.0	11.2
	South West	7.5	6.2	6.9
	Wales	3.8	2.9	4.2
	Northern Ireland	2.6	4.5	3.4
	Scotland	7.3	6.6	7.0
	Merseyside	1.8	1.1	1.9
	Other UK	0.0	0.0	0.1
	EU	6.2	10.6	5.9
	Other overseas	7.3	14.7	8.7
N		114,668	6,456	506,304

Sources: Futuretrack 2006 survey and 2006 UCAS HE applicant population data

For those applicants who accepted a place in higher education, Table A4 shows the distribution of subject of courses to which they were accepted. There is some evidence of response bias here, with medicine and dentistry, subjects allied to medicine and biological sciences slightly over-represented among survey respondents and business and administrative studies under-represented.

Finally, Table A5 shows that there is a greater tendency for applicants with high tariff points to respond to the survey – those with 300+ points form 44 per cent of all respondents, compared with 33 per cent of all UCAS applicants.

Table A4: Subject of courses accepted to, comparing respondents to survey of applicants and the HE applicant population

Subjects of accepted courses	*Respondents to survey of applicants (May/June 2006) (%)*	*Total population (%)*
Combined arts	3.4	3.0
Combined sciences	1.7	1.6
Combined social sciences	1.2	1.3
General other, combined & unknown	1.4	1.4
Medicine & dentistry	3.5	2.3
Subjects allied to medicine	7.7	6.8
Biological sciences	8.4	8.0
Veterinary science, agriculture & related	1.2	1.1
Physical sciences	4.7	3.8
Mathematical & computer sciences	5.8	6.2
Engineering	4.9	5.4
Technologies	0.6	0.7
Architecture building & planning	1.8	2.2
Social studies	7.4	7.6
Law	4.8	4.7
Business & administrative studies	9.7	12.1
Mass communications and documentation	2.3	2.4
Linguistics classics & related		
European languages, literature & related	3.4	2.9
Non-European languages and related	1.4	1.0
History & philosophical studies	0.7	0.4
Creative arts & design	3.7	3.3
Education	9.9	11.0
Sciences combined with social sciences	3.5	3.4
Social sciences combined with arts	4.2	4.6
	2.8	2.7
N	99,887	390,890

Sources: Futuretrack 2006 survey and 2006 UCAS HE applicant population data

Table A5: Comparison of tariff points of respondents to survey of applicants, respondents to survey of non-accepted applicants and the HE applicant population

		Respondents to survey of applicants (May/June 2006) (%)	*Respondents to survey of non-accepted applicants (Dec 2006) (%)*	*Total population (%)*
Tariff points	0	30.5	50.7	38.8
	1 to 79	2.6	3.2	3.0
	80 to 119	1.5	2.6	2.0
	120 to 179	3.9	6.1	5.1
	180 to 239	7.1	6.8	8.1
	240 to 299	10.5	8.4	10.3
	300 to 359	12.1	7.0	10.7
	360 to 419	11.9	6.2	9.1
	420 to 479	8.9	4.3	6.1
	480 to 539	6.0	2.7	3.8
	540 plus	5.0	2.0	2.8
N		114,668	6,456	506,304

Sources: Futuretrack 2006 survey and 2006 UCAS HE applicant population data

Survey weighting

The preceding analyses give some indication of the nature of the biases that arise from the population under investigation and the method of data collection. As usual, men are less responsive and we find that those with higher entry qualifications are more likely to respond. There could be some indication of a small socio-economic bias, but this could relate to the higher entry qualifications of respondents.

To disentangle these influences we undertook a multivariate analysis of response. The results of this analysis are shown in Table A6. This revealed that gender and tariff points were the two single most important factors which have a significant and systematic influence on the probability of responding to the on-line survey. For this reason, it was decided that a population weighting scheme would be applied to each response, dependent upon the tariff point band and the gender of the respondent. Weights were computed from the UCAS applicant population date. These are shown in Table A7.

It can be seen that, on average, each male respondent attracts a weight of 5, compared with 3.7 for female respondents. The strong variation by tariff point bands is clearly evident, with weights ranging from 6.2 – 2.7 for males and from 4.5 to 2.3 for females.

Table A6: Response rate regression
Dependant variable is '1' if a survey response was received, '0' otherwise

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)	Mean
Age group					
Under 21	ref.				0.745
21 to 24	0.142	0.013	0.000	1.152	0.129
25 and over	0.387	0.014	0.000	1.473	0.125
Gender					
Male	-0.414	0.007	0.000	0.661	0.453
Female	ref.				0.547
Home or overseas					
Home	0.065	0.035	0.068	1.067	0.854
Overseas					0.146
Region of residence					
A North East	-0.018	0.026	0.481	0.982	0.032
B Yorks & The Humber	-0.027	0.020	0.177	0.973	0.064
C North West	-0.095	0.020	0.000	0.909	0.078
D East Midlands	0.043	0.020	0.032	1.044	0.053
E West Midlands	ref.				0.072
F Eastern	0.061	0.019	0.001	1.062	0.069
G Greater London	-0.035	0.018	0.049	0.965	0.138
H South East	0.027	0.017	0.117	1.028	0.112
I South West	0.036	0.019	0.065	1.036	0.069
J Wales	-0.169	0.024	0.000	0.844	0.042
K Northern Ireland	-0.169	0.034	0.000	0.845	0.034
L Scotland	-0.181	0.025	0.000	0.835	0.070
V Merseyside	-0.063	0.030	0.039	0.939	0.019
Z Other UK	-0.088	0.202	0.662	0.915	0.001
EU	0.161	0.019	0.000	1.174	0.059
Other overseas	co-linear				0.087
Ethnic group					
Asian - Bangladeshi	-0.057	0.040	0.157	0.945	0.008
Asian - Chinese	0.187	0.036	0.000	1.205	0.008
Asian - Indian	-0.063	0.020	0.001	0.939	0.034
Asian - Other	-0.107	0.034	0.002	0.899	0.010
Asian - Pakistani	-0.120	0.024	0.000	0.887	0.023
Black - African	-0.080	0.021	0.000	0.924	0.032
Black - Caribbean	-0.233	0.033	0.000	0.792	0.012
Black - Other	-0.144	0.066	0.029	0.866	0.003
White	ref.				0.648
	B	**S.E.**	**Sig.**	**Exp(B)**	**Mean**

White and Asian	0.042	0.038	0.264	1.043	0.007
White/Black African	-0.249	0.071	0.000	0.779	0.003
White/Black Caribbn	-0.174	0.047	0.000	0.840	0.006
Other	-0.122	0.037	0.001	0.885	0.009
Other Mixed	0.030	0.038	0.430	1.030	0.008
Not given	-0.117	0.030	0.000	0.890	0.060
Not given (Dom=Home)	0.309	1.012	0.760	1.362	0.000
Not given (Dom=Osea)	0.201	0.033	0.000	1.222	0.129
Social background					
Higher managerial and professional occupations					0.133
Lower managerial and professional occupations	-0.047	0.012	0.000	0.954	0.193
Intermediate occupations	-0.008	0.014	0.580	0.992	0.092
Small employers and own account workers	-0.183	0.018	0.000	0.833	0.049
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	-0.057	0.021	0.007	0.945	0.030
Semi-routine occupations	-0.052	0.015	0.000	0.949	0.090
Routine occupations	-0.080	0.020	0.000	0.923	0.039
Unknown	-0.103	0.012	0.000	0.902	0.374
Applied from:					
Further/Higher Education	0.037	0.011	0.001	1.037	0.249
Comprehensive School	ref.				0.223
Sixth Form College	-0.024	0.013	0.065	0.976	0.094
Sixth Form Centre	-0.002	0.043	0.965	0.998	0.006
Grammar School	-0.085	0.019	0.000	0.919	0.043
Independent School	-0.299	0.014	0.000	0.742	0.086
Other maintained	-0.035	0.016	0.032	0.966	0.048
Other	-0.166	0.029	0.000	0.847	0.016
Not known/not given	-0.048	0.014	0.001	0.953	0.234
Tariff points					
0	-0.440	0.015	0.000	0.644	0.388
1 to 79	-0.433	0.024	0.000	0.648	0.030
80 to 119	-0.588	0.028	0.000	0.556	0.020
120 to 179	-0.531	0.019	0.000	0.588	0.051
180 to 239	-0.445	0.016	0.000	0.641	0.081
240 to 299	-0.282	0.015	0.000	0.754	0.103
300 to 359	-0.173	0.014	0.000	0.841	0.107
360 to 419	ref.				0.091
420 to 479	0.136	0.016	0.000	1.146	0.061
480 to 539	0.248	0.018	0.000	1.281	0.038
540 plus	0.426	0.021	0.000	1.532	0.028

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)	Mean
Number of applications					
Not known/not given	-3.074	0.047	0.000	0.046	0.077

1	-0.335	0.013	0.000	0.715	0.115
2	-0.231	0.018	0.000	0.793	0.043
3	-0.204	0.015	0.000	0.816	0.062
4	-0.147	0.013	0.000	0.863	0.078
5	-0.096	0.013	0.000	0.908	0.071
6					0.554
First choice subject					
Group A Medicine & Dentistry	0.157	0.020	0.000	1.170	0.043
Group B Subjects allied to Medicine	0.006	0.016	0.723	1.006	0.085
Group C Biological Sciences	0.070	0.017	0.000	1.072	0.065
Group D Vet Sci,Ag & related	0.188	0.034	0.000	1.207	0.010
Group F Physical Sciences	0.274	0.022	0.000	1.316	0.029
Group G Mathematical & Comp Sci	0.182	0.019	0.000	1.200	0.049
Group H Engineering	0.140	0.020	0.000	1.150	0.044
Group J Technologies	0.053	0.049	0.278	1.055	0.005
Group K Architecture,Build & Plan	-0.027	0.028	0.326	0.973	0.019
Group L Social Studies	ref.				0.076
Group M Law	0.008	0.020	0.677	1.008	0.041
Group N Business & Admin studies	-0.084	0.016	0.000	0.919	0.101
Group P Mass Comms and Documentation	-0.009	0.027	0.725	0.991	0.020
Group Q Linguistics, Classics & related	0.060	0.023	0.008	1.062	0.026
Group R European Langs, Lit & related	0.270	0.035	0.000	1.310	0.008
Group T Non-European Langs and related	0.364	0.045	0.000	1.439	0.005
Group V Hist & Philosophical studies	0.038	0.022	0.085	1.039	0.029
Group W Creative Arts & Design	-0.039	0.016	0.015	0.961	0.111
Group X Education	0.006	0.021	0.762	1.006	0.035
Y Combined arts	0.060	0.023	0.009	1.062	0.026
Y Combined sciences	0.129	0.031	0.000	1.138	0.013
Y Combined social sciences	-0.047	0.033	0.154	0.954	0.012
Y Sciences combined with social sciences or arts	-0.001	0.021	0.968	0.999	0.039
Y Social sciences combined with arts	0.072	0.024	0.003	1.075	0.023
Z General, other combined & unknown	0.208	0.033	0.000	1.231	0.010
Z Unknown	co-linear				0.077

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)	Mean
Region of first choice HEI					
A North East	0.004	0.023	0.846	1.004	0.041
B Yorks & The Humber	-0.024	0.018	0.180	0.976	0.082
C North West	-0.019	0.019	0.311	0.981	0.077
D East Midlands	0.000	0.019	0.994	1.000	0.055
E West Midlands	ref.				0.077
F Eastern	0.106	0.019	0.000	1.112	0.054
G Greater London	0.004	0.016	0.807	1.004	0.155
H South East	0.075	0.017	0.000	1.078	0.103
I South West	0.032	0.017	0.065	1.033	0.084
J Wales	0.004	0.021	0.840	1.004	0.052
K Northern Ireland	-0.364	0.037	0.000	0.695	0.026
L Scotland	0.048	0.021	0.024	1.049	0.093
V Merseyside	-0.080	0.027	0.003	0.923	0.025
Not known/not given	co-linear				0.077
Constant	-0.593	0.040	0.000	0.553	

Valid N (listwise) 506304

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	527407.751	0.060	0.090

Estimation terminated at iteration number 7 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

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Table A7: Survey population weights by tariff points and gender

Tariff points	Male	Female
0	6.204	4.487
1 to 79	6.007	4.045
80 to 119	6.849	4.605
120 to 179	6.411	4.463
180 to 239	5.756	4.188
240 to 299	5.088	3.642
300 to 359	4.548	3.356
360 to 419	3.930	2.948
420 to 479	3.471	2.671
480 to 539	3.090	2.508
540 plus	2.696	2.261
Total	5.043	3.664

Table A8: Logit Regression: econometric output
(Dependent variable: applicant accepted a place in HE = 1, not offered/accepted = 0)

		Odds ratio	Std. err.	z ratio	P value	Mean
Gender	Female	0.91	0.02	-4.63	0.00	0.68
Age group	18 and under (ref.)					0.54
	19-20	1.18	0.03	6.71	0.00	0.03
	21-24	1.27	0.04	6.88	0.00	0.09
	25+	1.12	0.04	3.40	0.00	0.09
Ethnic group	Asian	1.23	0.05	5.58	0.00	0.08
	Black	0.90	0.04	-2.60	0.01	0.04
	White (ref.)					0.78
UCAS tariff scores	Non standard applicant	0.45	0.02	-19.47	0.00	0.29
	1 to 79	0.41	0.03	-14.60	0.00	0.03
	80 to 119	0.29	0.02	-18.18	0.00	0.01
	120 to 179	0.42	0.02	-16.27	0.00	0.04
	180 to 239	0.57	0.03	-12.04	0.00	0.07
	240 to 299	0.77	0.03	-5.77	0.00	0.10
	300 to 359 (ref.)					0.12
	360 to 419	1.19	0.06	3.82	0.00	0.12
	420 to 479	1.44	0.08	6.93	0.00	0.09
	480 to 539	1.31	0.08	4.60	0.00	0.06
	540 plus	1.74	0.12	8.28	0.00	0.05
Subject of application	Medicine and dentistry	0.40	0.02	-20.18	0.00	0.05
	Subjects allied to medicine	0.53	0.02	-16.40	0.00	0.07
	Biological sciences	1.57	0.08	9.06	0.00	0.08
	Vet sci., ag. and related	1.11	0.10	1.23	0.22	0.01
	Physical sciences	2.16	0.16	10.40	0.00	0.04
	Mathematical and comp sci.	1.64	0.09	8.69	0.00	0.05
	Engineering	1.54	0.09	7.44	0.00	0.04
	Technologies	1.20	0.16	1.43	0.15	0.00
	Architecture, build. and plan.	1.39	0.11	4.12	0.00	0.02
	Social studies (ref.)					0.07
	Law	1.35	0.08	5.34	0.00	0.04
	Business and admin. studies	1.41	0.06	7.79	0.00	0.08
	Mass comms. and documentation	1.59	0.13	5.86	0.00	0.02
	Linguistics, classics and related	1.15	0.07	2.17	0.03	0.03
	European langs., lit. and related	1.39	0.14	3.19	0.00	0.00
	Non-European langs. and related	1.41	0.19	2.63	0.01	0.00
	Hist. and philosophical studies	1.37	0.09	4.74	0.00	0.03
	Creative arts and design	0.95	0.04	-1.25	0.21	0.08
	Education	1.14	0.06	2.35	0.02	0.03
	Combined arts	1.33	0.09	4.28	0.00	0.03
	Combined sciences	1.54	0.14	4.58	0.00	0.01
	Combined social sciences	1.15	0.10	1.56	0.12	0.02
	Sciences combined with social science	1.49	0.09	6.67	0.00	0.03
	Social sciences combined with arts	1.23	0.08	3.12	0.00	0.03
	General, other combined and unknown	1.37	0.13	3.33	0.00	0.08

Table A8: (contd.) Logit Regression: econometric output
(Dependent variable: applicant accepted a place in HE = 1, not offered/accepted = 0)

		Odds ratio	Std. err.	z ratio	P value	Mean
Socio-economic group	Higher managerial and professional (ref.)					0.16
	Lower managerial and professional	0.93	0.03	-2.06	0.04	0.21
	Intermediate	0.93	0.04	-1.70	0.09	0.10
	Small employers and own account	0.89	0.05	-2.13	0.03	0.05
	Lower supervisory and technical	0.85	0.05	-2.50	0.01	0.04
	Semi-routine	0.86	0.04	-3.48	0.00	0.09
	Routine	0.85	0.05	-2.85	0.00	0.04
	Unknown	0.65	0.02	-12.76	0.00	0.31
Type of school attended	Further/higher education	1.06	0.03	1.72	0.09	0.02
	Comprehensive school (ref.)					0.03
	Sixth form college	0.96	0.04	-1.14	0.25	0.11
	Sixth form centre	1.25	0.17	1.60	0.11	0.01
	Grammar school	1.03	0.06	0.58	0.56	0.05
	Independent school	0.89	0.04	-2.92	0.00	0.09
	Other maintained	1.12	0.06	2.34	0.02	0.06
	Other	0.81	0.06	-2.83	0.01	0.01
	Unknown	0.65	0.02	-12.39	0.00	0.61
Career guidance	Positive	1.35	0.03	15.46	0.00	
Fathers education	Higher education	0.95	0.02	-2.37	0.02	
Region	North East	0.90	0.05	-1.83	0.07	0.05
	Yorks and Humber.	0.98	0.05	-0.41	0.69	0.09
	North West	0.90	0.04	-2.23	0.03	0.08
	East Midlands	1.02	0.06	0.35	0.73	0.06
	West Midlands (ref.)					0.08
	Eastern	0.77	0.04	-5.32	0.00	0.07
	Greater London	0.65	0.03	-10.82	0.00	0.16
	South East	0.78	0.03	-5.66	0.00	0.12
	South West	0.86	0.04	-3.20	0.00	0.10
	Wales	1.01	0.06	0.09	0.93	0.05
	Northern Ireland	0.40	0.03	-13.28	0.00	0.02
	Scotland	0.54	0.02	-14.01	0.00	0.11
	Merseyside	0.83	0.06	-2.65	0.01	0.02

Note: model chi^2=0.000, number of observations =114,668, Log likelihood = -40,288.9, Pseudo R^2 = 0.09, 'ref.' denotes the omitted category.

Table A9: Ordered Logit Regression: econometric output
(Dependent variable: I have a clear idea about the occupation I eventually want to enter and the qualifications required to do so – seven point scale'1' = No idea '7' = clear idea)

		Coefficient	Std. err.	z ratio	P value	Mean
Gender	Female	0.06	0.01	5.56	0.00	0.68
Age group	18 and under (ref.)					0.54
	19-20	0.16	0.01	11.58	0.00	0.03
	21-24	0.57	0.02	25.10	0.00	0.09
	25+	1.20	0.02	48.19	0.00	0.09
Ethnic group	Asian	-0.03	0.02	-1.36	0.17	0.08
	Black	0.33	0.03	11.55	0.00	0.04
	White (ref.)					0.7
	Mixed	0.01	0.04	0.27	0.79	0.02
	Other	0.06	0.06	0.99	0.32	0.01
UCAS tariff scores	0	0.29	0.02	14.41	0.00	0.29
	1 to 79	0.31	0.04	8.31	0.00	0.03
	80 to 119	0.21	0.05	4.48	0.00	0.01
	120 to 179	0.10	0.03	3.33	0.00	0.04
	180 to 239	0.08	0.02	3.28	0.00	0.07
	240 to 299	0.05	0.02	2.43	0.02	0.10
	300 to 359 (ref.)					0.12
	360 to 419	-0.11	0.02	-5.40	0.00	0.12
	420 to 479	-0.10	0.02	-4.22	0.00	0.09
	480 to 539	-0.13	0.03	-5.11	0.00	0.06
	540+	-0.22	0.03	-7.62	0.00	0.05
Socio-economic group	Higher managerial and professional (ref.)					0.16
	Lower managerial and professional	-0.10	0.01	-7.02	0.00	0.21
	Intermediate	-0.03	0.02	-1.46	0.15	0.10
	Small employers and own account workers	-0.08	0.03	-2.95	0.00	0.05
	Lower supervisory and technical	-0.09	0.03	-2.76	0.01	0.04
	Semi-routine	-0.03	0.02	-1.40	0.16	0.09
	Routine	-0.09	0.03	-3.01	0.00	0.04
Type of school attended	Further/higher education	-0.06	0.01	-3.84	0.00	0.02
	Comprehensive school (ref.)					0.03
	Sixth form college	-0.05	0.02	-2.84	0.00	0.11
	Sixth form centre	-0.10	0.07	-1.51	0.13	0.01
	Grammar school	-0.08	0.03	-3.02	0.00	0.05
	Independent school	-0.20	0.02	-9.92	0.00	0.09
	Other maintained	-0.13	0.02	-5.45	0.00	0.06
	Other	0.03	0.05	0.77	0.44	0.01

Contd../

Table A9: (Contd.) Ordered Logit Regression: econometric output (Dependent variable: I have a clear idea about the occupation I eventually want to enter and the qualifications required to do so – seven point scale'1' = No idea '7' = clear idea)

		Coefficient	Std. err.	z ratio	P value	Mean
Subject of acceptance	Medicine and dentistry	2.26	0.04	55.66	0.00	3.55
	Subjects allied to medicine	1.37	0.03	49.25	0.00	7.63
	Biology, vet. sci., ag. and related	-0.18	0.02	-8.37	0.00	10.56
	Physical sciences	-0.64	0.03	22.39	0.00	4.81
	Mathematical and comp sci.	-0.41	0.03	15.34	0.00	5.8
	Engineering, technologies	0.21	0.03	8.14	0.00	5.95
	Architecture, build. and plan.	0.96	0.05	20.99	0.00	1.82
	Social studies (ref.)					9.01
	Law	0.57	0.03	19.45	0.00	4.85
	Business and admin. studies	-0.28	0.02	12.07	0.00	9.62
	Mass communication and documentation	-0.30	0.04	-7.67	0.00	2.24
	Linguistics and classics	-0.83	0.03	24.87	0.00	3.37
	Languages	-0.81	0.03	27.58	0.00	4.56
	Hist. and philosophical studies	-1.09	0.03	33.12	0.00	3.63
	Creative arts and design	-0.15	0.02	-6.05	0.00	9.87
	Education	1.67	0.04	41.19	0.00	3.47
	Science combined with social science	-0.25	0.03	-7.98	0.00	4.19
	Social science combined with arts	-0.59	0.04	16.55	0.00	2.78
	Interdisciplinary, other combined subject	-0.45	0.04	-11.23	0.00	2.31
Career guidance	Positive	0.23	0.01	20.51	0.00	0.58
Access to information	Positive	0.38	0.01	30.85	0.00	0.73
Fathers education	Higher education	-0.09	0.01	-6.88	0.00	0.38
Mothers education	Higher education	-0.07	0.01	-5.84	0.00	0.36
Type of HE institution	Russell group university (ref.)					0.28
	Other pre-1992 university	-0.05	0.02	-3.22	0.00	0.26
	New (1992) university	0.06	0.02	3.59	0.00	0.37
	Other	0.25	0.03	9.87	0.00	0.08

Notes: model chi squared=0.00, number of observations = 120,524, Log likelihood = -197,811.9, Pseudo R^2 = 0.06
'ref.' denotes the omitted category.

Table A10: Logit Regression: econometric output
(Dependent variable: I needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study. Strongly agree/agree = 1, not sure/ disagree/ strongly disagree = 0)

		Odds ratio	Std. err.	z ratio	P value	Mean
Gender	Female	0.98	0.01	-1.73	0.08	0.68
Age group	18 and under (ref.)					0.54
	19-20	1.14	0.02	8.30	0.00	0.03
	21-24	1.16	0.03	6.61	0.00	0.09
	25+	1.47	0.03	17.15	0.00	0.09
Ethnic group	Asian	1.44	0.03	15.31	0.00	0.08
	Black	1.26	0.04	6.97	0.00	0.04
	White (ref.)					0.7
	Mixed	1.12	0.05	2.57	0.01	0.02
	Other	1.44	0.10	5.28	0.00	0.01
Subject of acceptance	Medicine and dentistry	0.51	0.02	-14.92	0.00	3.55
	Subjects allied to medicine	0.75	0.02	-9.44	0.00	7.63
	Biology, vet sci., ag. and related	0.77	0.02	-9.93	0.00	10.56
	Physical sciences	0.71	0.03	-9.56	0.00	4.81
	Mathematical and comp. sci.	0.82	0.03	-5.88	0.00	5.8
	Engineering, technologies	0.85	0.03	-5.03	0.00	5.95
	Architecture, build. and plan.	0.81	0.04	-3.78	0.00	1.82
	Social studies (ref.)					9.01
	Law	0.77	0.03	-7.34	0.00	4.85
	Business and admin. studies	0.96	0.03	-1.65	0.10	9.62
	Mass communication and documentation	0.87	0.04	-2.74	0.01	2.24
	Linguistics and classics	0.80	0.03	-5.40	0.00	3.37
	Languages	0.75	0.03	-7.68	0.00	4.56
	Hist. and philosophical studies	0.69	0.03	-8.85	0.00	3.63
	Creative arts and design	0.74	0.02	-10.39	0.00	9.87
	Education	0.68	0.03	-8.77	0.00	3.47
	Science combined with social science	0.89	0.03	-2.94	0.00	4.19
	Social science combined with arts	0.92	0.04	-1.90	0.06	2.78
	Interdisciplinary, other combined subjects	0.83	0.04	-3.83	0.00	2.31

Contd../

Table A10: (contd.) Logit Regression: econometric output
(Dependent variable: I needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study. Strongly agree/agree = 1, not sure/ disagree/ strongly disagree = 0)

		Coefficient	Std. err.	z ratio	P value	Mean
Career Guidance	Positive	0.64	0.01	-32.76	0.00	0.58
Access to information	Positive	0.45	0.01	-55.34	0.00	0.73
Fathers education	Higher education	0.93	0.01	-4.91	0.00	0.38
Mothers education	Higher education	0.94	0.01	-3.92	0.00	0.36
Russell group	Russell group university (ref.)					0.28
	Other old (pre-1992) university	0.93	0.02	-3.99	0.00	0.36
	New (1992) university	0.99	0.02	-0.55	0.58	0.27
	Other	0.88	0.02	-4.57	0.00	0.08

Note: model chi squared=0.06, number of observations =118,276 , Log likelihood = -70,864.1, Pseudo R^2 = 0.06
'ref.' denotes the omitted category.

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