

About PEP

The Postgraduate Experience Project was one of 20 projects funded through HEFCE’s £25m Phase 1 Postgraduate Support Scheme which was designed to test ways of supporting progression into taught postgraduate education in England. A description of PEP can be found in Briefing Paper 1. Postgraduate participation rates in the UK increased between the mid 1990’s and 2010. However, since 2011 enrolments levels have continued drop and in 2014/15, participation decreased to the 2008 level. One reason attributed to the decline is the lack of funding mechanisms to support participation (UUK, 2013; Boorman & Ramsden, 2009). As well as sustaining postgraduate education, government is committed to widening participation. In order to achieve this, a range of factors need to be explored including participation at postgraduate level of different social classes and generational status. This briefing paper reports the headline findings from PEP of social class and generational status participation amongst the respondents, their access to economic capital, and the impact on their participation at postgraduate masters level.

Social Class

Of the 1,226 respondents who completed the Entry to Study survey, 81% provided valid information about their parents or guardians occupation. The social class was obtained using SOC2010 (Standard Occupational Classification) and NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification). Table 1 shows the social class by domiciled status. The majority of students were from social classes 1 and 2. Generally, EU and OS domiciled students came from higher social classes compared to those who are UK domiciled.

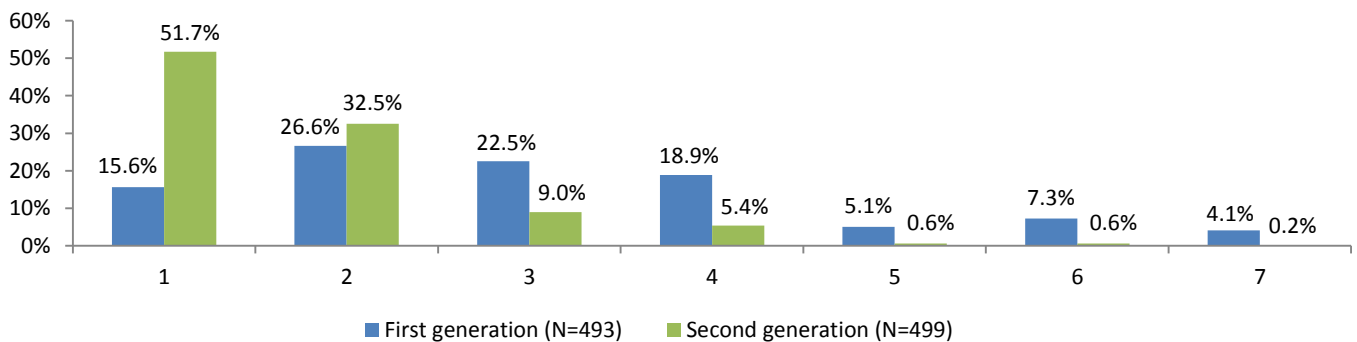
Table 1

	NS-SEC	Total	UK	EU	OS
Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	1	33.7%	29.3%	50.5%	36.5%
	2	29.5%	30.5%	23.4%	30.1%
Intermediate occupations	3	15.8%	16.3%	12.1%	15.8%
	4	12.2%	11.9%	8.4%	14.7%
Routine and manual occupations	5	2.8%	3.3%	2.8%	1.9%
	6	3.9%	5.7%	0.9%	1.1%
	7	2.1%	3.1%	1.9%	0%

Generational Status

Generational status (first or second in the family to go to university) is closely related to social class (Thomas & Quinn, 2006; Morgan, 2013). Of the sample, 52.3% were 1st generation and 47.7% were 2nd generation suggesting that generational status *per se* is not a barrier to postgraduate study. However, when combined with social class, 93.2% of 2nd generation respondents were from social classes 1–3 (see Figure 1) compared to 64.7% for 1st generation. Just over half of all the 2nd generation respondents were from social class 1 which is described as the ‘Elite class’ (Savage et al., 2013).

Figure 1



Mode and route into study

Of the sample, 82.2% were studying full-time and 17.8% part-time. A significantly higher proportion of full-time respondents were in social class 1 (35.8%) compared to those studying part-time (23.7%). Part-time respondents were more likely to be from social classes 5-7. Respondents from social classes 1 and 2 were more likely to come straight from university into postgraduate study than those entering straight from work.

Previous and current type of university

Of the respondents who had undertaken their undergraduate degree at a Russell Group university, 46.8% were from social class 1 compared to 27.4% with a prior degree from a post-92 institution. Of the respondents currently studying at a Russell Group university for their PGT qualification, 48.5% were from social class 1. For the other respondents at 10 of post-92 universities participating in the project, figures ranged between 11.1% and 36%. These findings support the existing research that higher social classes are more represented in the so called ‘traditional’ universities, whether at undergraduate level (Boliver, 2010) or postgraduate level (Wakeling, 2005).

Access to economic capital and funding PGT studies

Intentions to fund PGT studies

- Respondents from social classes 1-2 were more likely to expect to be funded by parents than respondents in social classes 3-7. This was especially the case for those in social classes 6 and 7.
- Respondents from social classes 6 and 7 were expecting to rely on savings and salary.
- Regardless of social class, 2nd generation respondents were more likely to expect to be funded by parents compared to their 1st generation counterparts.
- The major sources of funding for EU respondents were parents (54.3%), savings (35.5%), and salary (12.3%).
- Similarly, for OS students it was parents (50.9%), savings (19.3%), and salary (7.1%).
- However, for UK respondents it was savings (28.7%) followed by salary (25.2%) then parents (20.1%).

Impact of funding on study choices

- For 79.3% of the respondents (regardless of social class), the method of funding their PG course affected their decision about they intended to study.
- A higher percentage of respondents from social classes 5-7 mentioned the decision to study part-time.
- A higher percentage of respondents from social classes 6-7 mentioned the decision to study at a local university and live with family.
- Respondents from social classes 3 and 7 were more likely to consider fee levels as *very important* than those from social classes 1 and 2.
- When asked to select which factors affected their decision to choose their current institution, the reason *funding was available to study* was frequently more cited by respondents from social classes 3-7 (ranging between 23.1% and 46.4%) than social classes 1 and 2 (ranging between 14.9% and 18.2%).

PGT only study debt

- The majority respondents regardless of social class and domiciled and generational status expected to have a PGT (only) debt level of up to £9,999.
- Of the PEP scholarship respondents (65% were 1st generation), more expected to have debt up to £9,999 than the non-PEP UK counterparts suggesting that the scholarship had assisted in reducing their debt levels.
- Debt levels were similar for 1st and 2nd generation respondents in the lower debt categories, but more 2nd generation reported expected debt levels in the higher category. This corresponds to study mode and method of funding study at PGT level.

Financial anxiety

- Of the respondents who completed the Finance survey 75.9% reported being anxious of some kind about their finances.
- Social classes 3 and 4 were more likely to be anxious than respondents from social classes 1 and 2 and 5-7.
- 2nd generation respondents in social classes 1 and 2 reported being more anxious than their 1st generation counterparts.

Issues for further consideration

This briefing paper has highlighted that finance and access to funding impacts on participation at postgraduate level. Recent research on these issues showed that it not only impacts progression to higher degrees (Wakeling & Hampden-Thompson, 2013), but also access to social advantaged positions (Wakeling & Savage, 2015). It also impacts on financial anxiety levels which can be a barrier to progression and completion (Morgan & Direito, 2016). In light of these findings, there is the need to undertake further research on social class and generational status as part of the widening participation debate; explore a range of sustainable funding mechanisms that provides fair opportunity to engage in PGT study; and analyse the impact of high levels of debt for the individual, society and the economy.

References

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