

Project Report

**Widening participation to
postgraduate study: decisions,
deterrents and creating success**

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Executive summary

Background and aims for the project

There is limited research about which students take postgraduate qualifications, if there is any under-representation of particular groups in postgraduate study, why students decide to continue to study at postgraduate level and what their experience is once they take on a postgraduate qualification. This research was undertaken to investigate these questions.

Funded by the Higher Education Academy during the academic year 2006-07, the project examined, using quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the factors that affect students' decisions to undertake a postgraduate (PG) qualification following their undergraduate qualifications in higher education. It explored if there were any significant differences between student groups (such as traditional vs. non-traditional students) and their intentions and experience of studying at postgraduate level.

Intended audience

The research findings will be of value to higher education managers and lecturers who plan and teach postgraduate courses. They will also benefit higher education careers advisors, those responsible for marketing, financial counsellors in higher education and international student advisors. It also provides a contribution to the research on widening access in higher education for researchers and practitioners in the field.

Methods and data collection

Questionnaires were collected from 1073 students in their final year of undergraduate study at two different higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. A wide variety of subjects were targeted to make the results generalisable. Follow-up telephone interviews were held with 20 participants who had indicated their willingness to continue contributing to the research. The interviews were with a mix of those who had continued on to postgraduate study and those who had not. The interviews were conducted once the students had

completed their undergraduate studies. The interviewees were selected by their demographic characteristics.

Results from the questionnaire

A highly significant model was customised for predicting intentions to undertake postgraduate study. The regression analyses revealed that UK students, those who studied practical/applied courses, those who were more worried about debt (but not necessarily in more debt), those with no children, White/non-minority ethnic students and those from families who have no previous higher education experience are less likely to intend to undertake postgraduate study.

On the other hand, overseas students (including students from mainland Europe), those on theoretical/non-applied courses, those who are less worried about debt (but not necessarily in less debt), those with children, minority ethnic students and those who have family with previous higher education experience are more likely to intend to undertake postgraduate study.

There were no main effects of age groups, occupational class or actual debt on the students' intentions to undertake postgraduate study. There were differences between class and reported family higher education experience, but class alone was not a sufficient factor to affect intentions to undertake postgraduate study.

The regression analyses revealed a very 'similar' picture of key factors predicting intentions to undertake a postgraduate qualification at both the universities studied. The sample as a whole reveals a fairly homogenous and coherent representation of factors important for predicting postgraduate study. The factors encouraging intentions to go on to postgraduate study were the domicile status of the student (overseas), the course of study (theoretical), debt worry (low), family higher education experience (high) and then, marginally, their ethnicity (minority groups) and sex (female).

Many students who did not intend to go on to postgraduate study indicated that they did not wish to do so because they wanted a break from study. This is

understandable given that most of these students had been in education for 16 years. However, what was surprising was the extent to which participants in this research indicated that they felt that studying was particularly stressful and that they had been suffering from considerable anxiety while in higher education.

As the research also indicated that students who were the first in their families to go into higher education were less likely to go on to postgraduate study, there is perhaps a case for aspiration-raising work to be undertaken with these groups while they are studying undergraduate programmes. International students are more keen to undertake postgraduate study, and this suggests clear marketing possibilities for university marketing staff. Those who design and teach vocational undergraduate programmes in higher education seem to be meeting the needs of students studying these programmes.

Results from the interviews

The interviews provided more in-depth explanations from the findings in the quantitative phase. Students who had studied vocational/applied courses did not feel the need to continue on to postgraduate level study as they were able to find work in their chosen profession with their undergraduate qualification.

Many felt that they wanted to get out into the workplace quickly to use the knowledge they had gained at undergraduate level and to give them a break from study, which they found stressful and personally challenging. They also felt that employers would value work experience more than further study. Several believed they would return to gain further qualifications in the future, possibly paid for by their employer. This expectation may well have implications for higher education institutions as they develop their plans for employer engagement. On the other hand, students on theoretical courses felt that having a postgraduate qualification would give them an 'edge' in the workplace. Career prospects were important to all interviewees, whether they had gone on to postgraduate study or not. This is a significant finding as students in higher education are clearly concerned about their future job prospects. This could have

implications for future curriculum design and should also indicate the importance of the role of career guidance in higher education in general.

Students from lower socio-economic groups who had completed their undergraduate course indicated that they had good support networks to help them through their studies. This suggests that any disadvantage that is evident in students from lower socio-economic groups when entering higher education at undergraduate level is alleviated by the time they reach postgraduate level.

Several of the interviewees, from whatever background, highlighted the importance of emotional support from family and friends in succeeding in what many saw as the stressful environment of higher education study. Other personal factors, such as setting a good example to their children, also had an impact on the intention to undertake postgraduate study.

Actual debt was accepted as part of studying, but students' attitudes to debt did vary. Most did not regard the cost of postgraduate fees as prohibitively high. Far more significant for many of the interviewees was the concern of not having any money. In other words, access to credit was seen as a positive for many, but not having enough money for the lifestyle that they wanted was a reason given by students who did not continue on to postgraduate study.

There were differences between different ethnic groups and between UK and overseas students in their intentions to undertake postgraduate study. In the interviews, these differences often related to experience of higher education within their families (parents and partners in particular).

Conclusion

Students are making choices about further study based on their perceptions of their future position in the workplace. The research provides clear evidence of students balancing the risks between employment prospects, study and their own view of acceptable levels of debt. In this context, the sociological concept of 'reflexivity' (Beck 1992; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994) is particularly useful, in that it offers a way of understanding the decision-making process as students seek to minimise individual risk as they construct their career and learning biographies.

Recommendations

For careers services, advice workers and student support in HE

These findings indicate that those working to support student decision making (careers advisors, financial counsellors and tutors) should ensure students have sufficient support when they are making decisions. In particular, debt worry is more significant than actual debt; it is therefore important that students do understand the full implications of their choices. Students indicated that they found decision making at this stage of their studies caused anxiety, as did study itself. This suggests that the sector as a whole could look to provide additional support for students in taking decisions and in alleviating stress while studying. In particular, students on postgraduate courses indicated that peer support was important to them, and HEIs could do more to support peer-assisted learning and support throughout the student experience.

For marketing professionals

The research reveals the decisions students are taking about future study and why they are taking these decisions. Vocational undergraduate programmes clearly offer those students who undertake them the skill they feel they need for the job market. All participants indicated that vocational outcomes were important to them at different stages of their studies, and marketing professionals may want to emphasise this in their literature where it is appropriate. Marketing departments may also wish to look at the demographics of students who intend

to continue on to postgraduate study and investigate how best to encourage a wider spectrum of students to study at postgraduate level. They will also be interested in the numbers who intended to undertake postgraduate study in a few years time. It would be valuable for them to keep in touch with these students to encourage them to take up study at their previous institution.

For curriculum designers and postgraduate teachers

All participants indicated that career prospects were ultimately important to them. Those who had undertaken a more vocationally focused undergraduate programme were keen to go into employment as soon as possible, suggesting they felt their undergraduate programme had prepared them for a career. Those who had undertaken more academic subjects were looking to undertake postgraduate qualifications in order to gain an 'edge' in the market place. This suggests that in designing postgraduate qualifications consideration should be given to the possible career opportunities that arise from the qualification in order to meet the expectations of students.

For widening participation practitioners

The research indicates some concerns about which students are taking postgraduate qualifications. While there does not seem to be any direct disadvantage for students from lower occupational class backgrounds, there are disadvantages for students who are the first in their families to go to university as they are then less likely to go on to postgraduate study. While minority ethnic students overall did have high aspirations, they were more worried about debt than White students, which was a significant deterrent to continue studying. This suggests that widening participation should not stop once students enter higher education, and widening participation practitioners could do further work to raise the aspirations and provide additional support and advice for students who do not have family knowledge of the higher education system.

Section 1 Background to the project

The project was one of 18 projects funded by the Higher Education Academy in 2006-07 through a competitive bidding process. The aim of this research was to examine potential barriers and deterrents for students identified as 'widening participation students' when considering postgraduate study, as well as motivating factors that help create success beyond undergraduate level study.

Rationale for the research

While there is substantial literature on all aspects of the undergraduate student experience (Thomas *et al.* 2002; Woodrow 1998; Tinto 1988; Hatt 2005; Woodfield 2002; Kantanis 2002), research is limited in the area of postgraduate study. This lack of research has been noted in several recent publications (Leonard *et al.* 2006; Wakeling 2005; Bowman 2005; HEFCE 2006). Green (2005) argues that the research previously undertaken in the area of the postgraduate student experience has tended to focus on postgraduate research students. This research has included major reviews such as the Winfield Report (ESRC 1987), which looked at social science doctoral submission rates, and the Harris Report (HEFCE 1996), which looked at the structure and funding of postgraduate education.

The most recent study (Leonard *et al.* 2006) provided a systematic review of the grey literature on the learning experiences of postgraduate research students in the UK. Leonard *et al.* argue that 'there is relatively little research on what motivates students to undertake a doctorate or what use they make of it subsequently' (Leonard *et al.* 2006, p. 30). Both Bowman (2005) and Green (2005) state that this focus has resulted in attention being diverted from postgraduate taught students. Bowman also argues that existing work in this area, in both the UK and US, tends to comprise quantitative studies using large datasets. Consequently, there is no detailed qualitative analysis of the barriers graduates face when considering postgraduate study, or that explores and

compares the various characteristics of those who continue onto Masters or doctoral level study. There is a significant gap in the research literature that this study has attempted to address. The research therefore aims to:

- identify any barriers to postgraduate study, as well as success factors for those who continue on to postgraduate study
- examine whether prior higher education qualifications and experience alleviate the barriers to continuing on to postgraduate study for students from lower socio-economic groups, minority ethnic groups and students who are the first in their families to go into higher education
- examine the postgraduate student experience
- create new quantitative and qualitative datasets on the postgraduate experience.

In so doing the following issues will be investigated:

- What factors mediate against the barriers to higher education study to create success for social equity groups in HE?
- Is there a relationship between an undergraduate's prior exposure to higher education through the family, and their progression on to postgraduate study?
- Has the UK Government's widening participation policy had an impact on aspirations beyond undergraduate level for students from under-represented groups in higher education?
- Are there characteristics of undergraduates that predict intention to undertake postgraduate study?
- What barriers and deterrents are there to further study at postgraduate level?
- What is the experience of students on postgraduate courses?

The project ran over an academic year and gathered data from two universities in England. The overall research approach was guided by the limited budget and timescale, but did include a review of the relevant literature and both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Data were collected according to student demographics and analysed to answer the questions set out above.

Intended audience

The research was seen to be relevant to both policy and practitioner communities, especially those concerned with the postgraduate student experience and environment. It is of particular relevance to senior managers, marketing staff and lecturers in higher education in planning what they offer to postgraduate students and in evaluating the environment within their institutions that supports postgraduate students, such as financial counsellors, careers advisors or providing support to specific student groups. It also is of value to researchers who are interested in widening participation and the student experience in higher education.

Confines of the research

The research was conducted over a one-year period at two institutions in England. While considerable data were collected, the findings are based on the limitations that such a time and financially limited project can offer. As research interest in widening participation is still relatively 'young' and has largely focused on the transition from college/school to university, rather than from undergraduate to postgraduate study, there is little comparable research that has been undertaken. In other words, the researchers only claim that the findings relate to the cohorts studied. Both institutions in the sample were post-1992 institutions, creating a particular profile of courses; while the demographics of the students with regard to ethnicity, age and class were different, the institutions were no doubt different to those in other parts of the country. This has implications for further research. However, as this topic has not been investigated in any depth in the UK, the findings do contribute to our understanding of student decision making and experience of postgraduate study.

Section 2 Review of the literature on widening participation, student success and postgraduate study

A growing postgraduate population

There has been a large expansion in the number of postgraduate students in the UK over the past ten years, although this growth has slowed over the last couple of years. Bekhradnia (2005) reported on statistics from the Higher Education Policy Institute gathered between 1995 and 2003, showing that there has been an overall increase of 21% in postgraduate study. This confirms research by Sastry (2004), who looked across the whole sector of postgraduates in the UK. This growth has not been in the area of Masters by research or PhDs. which have declined by 7% and 3% respectively. The number of taught Masters students has increased by 42% and taught doctorates by 101%. New universities particularly have increased their taught Masters student numbers, up by 65% over the period, illustrating how taught postgraduate students are becoming an important section of the student population, yet who, until recently, have not been studied as extensively as undergraduate students. The significant growth of taught postgraduate students at new universities suggested that it would be useful to examine students coming to the end of the undergraduate studies in these environments.

Undergraduate student numbers are increasing: between 1994 and 2004 the number of UK, European (EU) and overseas (OS) students in undergraduate education increased by 40% (Universities UK 2005). In 2004, the number of UK graduates who had studied full-time totalled 229,250 compared to 215,425 in 2001 (HESA 2005). The statistics also show a notable increase over recent years in EU/OS graduates: in 2002-03 there were 78,195 and by 2004-05 the figure had risen to 98,660 (HESA 2005). Therefore, the pool of graduates from which to attract postgraduate students is large.

Wolf (2002) suggests that one possible reason why the postgraduate population has increased in recent years is that 'as the bachelor's degree becomes ubiquitous, its relative advantage in the labour market is diminishing' (cited by Wakeling 2005, p. 506). Anderson *et al.* (1998) and Barber *et al.* (2004) suggest that postgraduate study is undertaken for career advancement rather than self-fulfilment. Collins (1979) agrees and suggests in his 'credential crisis' thesis that education is part of a cultural stratification system and the reason why students go on to further study is to improve their job prospects. Keep and Mayhew (2004) suggest that the higher socio-economic groups maintain their advantage in society by acquiring additional qualifications such as Masters degrees.

UK Government policy initiatives

The British Government has recognised the importance of a knowledge driven economy in the paper *Building the Knowledge Driven Economy* (1998). In this document the Government state that: 'investment in the generation of knowledge, the education and training of the workforce, and the capacity for innovation and the exploitation of new ideas are now seen as the key requirements of success' (Department of Trade and Industry 1998, p. 10). The Government's commitment to higher education is part of the drive to improve not only the UK's industrial competitive global position (DTI 1998), but also its position in the global market of higher education (DfES 2003a).

UK widening participation and lifelong learning policies¹ could partly provide an explanation for the increasing numbers of postgraduate students. The policies are committed to increasing undergraduate numbers as well as lifelong learning and educational progression linked to a process of continuing and professional development (HEFCE 2003).

Gorard *et al.* (2006) and Wakeling (2003a, 2003b) specifically highlight the lack of research examining the impact of widening participation on postgraduate

¹ These are Government initiatives aimed at encouraging students from under-represented groups to participate in higher education and to encourage learning throughout the course of life.

study. The Government's commitment to postgraduate study is vague and unclear. The term 'postgraduate' appeared only seven times in the 37,000 word 2003 White Paper, and there was no mention of it in the White Paper's chapter on fair access (Wakeling 2003a). It is suggested that in policy terms the Government and HEFCE have not yet considered if there are any implications for widening participation at postgraduate level.

Barriers to progression at undergraduate level

Widening participation to higher education has been a progressive process of moving higher education from an elite system to educate upper class males, to a mass system designed to educate the majority for a post-industrial society (Scott 1995). Government initiatives in widening participation aim to 'provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it' (HEFCE 2006).

A wide range of research literature has been published on the undergraduate student experience, which provides a useful set of established theories explaining initial student entry into higher education through to successful completion.

At undergraduate level, being from a higher socio-economic group has long been a significant predictor for entry into higher education (Gorard *et al.* 1999; Gorrard *et al.* 2006; Marshall 1997). Halsey, Heath and Ridge (1980) recognised how occupational background was a major factor in the analyses of educational attainment and progression through the compulsory education system. Reay *et al.* (2005) suggest that the expansion in higher education has deepened social stratification and generated new and different inequalities, despite the fact that policy initiatives were aimed at decreasing these social inequalities. Noble (2004), Forsyth and Furlong (2003) and Quinn (2004) highlight how pressures linked to class impact on a student's ability to succeed.

Other explanations for success and failure include the importance of friendships (Stuart 2006; Thomas 2002; Wilcox *et al.* 2005), financial pressures (Mori 2005; Bamber and Tett 2000; CHERI 2005), the quality and style of teaching and learning (Kantanis 2002; Stuart 2005), caring responsibilities (Thompson 1983) and the role of academic mentors (Murphy 2003; Powney 2002). Another factor identified by researchers as impacting on a student's experience of higher education is their previous learning experience. This is highlighted by Bamber and Tett (2000), who argue that a poor experience can be a barrier to continuing in education by distorting and limiting students' expectations of future study. It is argued by Richardson (2003) that low levels of preparedness for entering higher education can increase transition difficulties.

Much of the literature is influenced by the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984), who introduced a conceptual framework for the success of the middle classes in education. He identified taken-for-granted practices within middle- and upper-class culture that created this success. He suggested that they had a form of cultural capital that enabled their children to dominate the education system. This success was built on a form a habitus that had unspoken rules and meant that only those who shared the same values and practices would be able to benefit. Bourdieu also suggested that higher socio-economic groups were able to draw on social capital through their familial, friendship and occupational networks, which provided extra resources for their children in the education setting. This idea was further developed by American sociologists such as Putman (1995), who examined how the use of positive social networks could advantage students in the school environment. In the UK, this theory has been reworked by Field (2005) to relate to lifelong learning and applied to working-class undergraduate students by Stuart (2006).

Barriers to postgraduate study

The National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) has identified a number of potential barriers to accessing postgraduate study. They include: little or no access to financial support; inappropriate or inflexible timetables; difficulty in accessing

facilities outside of undergraduate teaching times; pressure from employers; students being more likely to have childcare needs; and the perception that postgraduate study is for a particular type of person (Hoad 2001; Purcell, Elias, Davies and Wilton 2005). Some of these barriers are similar to those identified in the research on undergraduate progression. This research project examined the issues highlighted in these reports that related to widening participation, namely finances and debt, being the first person in your family to enter higher education, class, gender, ethnicity, employment prospects, discipline and vocational outcomes.

Finance and debt

Wakeling raised finance as a major barrier at postgraduate level suggesting that 'a 2.2 and rich parents leads to postgraduate study much more readily than a first and a modest background' (2003a, p. 15). Postgraduate fees are higher than at undergraduate level and, unlike undergraduate students, there is no means-tested financial support for postgraduate students and relatively little financial support of any kind. The changes to student support arrangements at undergraduate level and the introduction of fees have resulted in an increase in student debt (Callender 2003), and this is expected to continue rising (Natwest 2003). However, although previous studies suggest that lower socio-economic groups are traditionally more concerned about the cost of higher education and getting into debt than higher social classes (Connor 2001), the cost of study was not a main concern among the lower socio-economic groups.

The first in the family to study in higher education

Lack of family experience of higher education has been identified as a barrier to education. Feinstein *et al.* found that the most important 'distal influences on children's attainments are parental education and income' (2004, p. 1). They argue that the intergenerational transmission of educational success is a key element in equality of opportunity. However, in some of the literature, terms such as "non-traditional", 'under-represented', 'working class', 'widening participation students', and 'first generation' are often used interchangeably when they each

reflect a different, although sometimes overlapping, group of people' (Stuart 2006, p. 163). First-generation entrants into higher education should not be conflated or confused with students from lower socio-economic groups. Hatt *et al.* argue that 'the increase in participation in higher education during recent decades means that parents with professional or managerial occupations will not necessarily have progressed into higher education' (2005, p. 15). They go on to point out that these parents are likely to have a similar lack of insight and knowledge of higher education as parents from lower socio-economic groups. Thomas and Quinn (2007) argue that having parents who have been successful in higher education is the most significant factor in aspiration and success in higher education.

Social class

At undergraduate level, 'those from the top 3 social classes are almost 3 times as likely to enter higher education as those from the bottom 3. Young people from professional backgrounds are 5 times more likely to enter higher education than those from unskilled backgrounds' (DfES 2003b, p. 17).

Although social class is an important factor in deterring entry to undergraduate courses, it is unclear to what extent it applies to postgraduate study. Leonard *et al.* argue that it is particularly notable that socio-economic status is rarely explored in the existing postgraduate literature, stating that 'almost no research gives information on the social class background of research students, which is remarkable given its salience in most work in education' (2006, p. 27). Wakeling (2005) concurs, stating that this lack of research is applicable to all postgraduate courses, not just research degrees. Mare (1980) and Stolzenberg (1994) found no effect of socio-economic status on students enrolling on MBA programmes. In contrast, Mullen *et al.* (2003) outlined a link between parental education levels and entry to professional and doctoral programmes; however, the lack of appropriate data prevented further exploration of social class. Van de Werfhorst and Anderson (2005), using their measure of 'intergenerational credential inflation', suggest that postgraduate education is encouraged by parents where

they believe downward mobility might occur without it, thus explaining investment in postgraduate training. They go on to argue that this not only establishes social inequality, but also maintains it.

Purcell *et al.* (2005) conclude that social class, gender and A-level results are not key factors associated with a higher probability of studying for a Masters degree. Wakeling suggests that social inequalities in education continue at postgraduate level. He found that there was a strong relationship between the higher social classes progressing on to postgraduate research degrees and the lower social classes progressing on to the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Graduates from the lower socio-economic backgrounds were twice as likely to enter postgraduate teacher training as those from class I, whereas students from social class I were three times more likely to progress onto a research degree than peers from social class V. Wakeling (2005) found a strong relationship between the first degree institution and progression on to higher study; this is also supported by Purcell *et al.* (2005).

Ethnicity

Recent research by Wakeling highlights the limited research available looking at the ethnicity of UK postgraduates. He states that 'overall, the participation in postgraduate study by UK minority ethnic groups (MEGs) remains high but there are many complexities' (2006, p. 1). These 'complexities' include type of postgraduate qualification being undertaken, ethnic group, subject area and its relationship with the labour market, and the type of university attended. He reports that MEGs are more likely to undertake taught courses that appear to be clustered around professional and technical subjects. Proportionally, White groups are more highly represented on research postgraduate degrees. Chinese students are the only other MEG group that is highly represented in this area. Shiner and Modood (2002) identified that ethnic minorities are poorly represented in 'old' universities and tend to be concentrated in post-1992 higher education institutions. Wakeling (2006) expands on this stating that the only MEG to match

the success of students from White backgrounds in old universities are those from Chinese backgrounds.

Gender and discipline area

Berliner (2004) states that patterns in postgraduate study are changing in favour of women. Purcell *et al.* (2005) found little gender difference in the propensity to study at postgraduate level, but there are differences in the type of study undertaken: women are more likely to undertake PGCEs, postgraduate certificates or diplomas, and are more likely to study part-time. In contrast, Wakeling found that 'men are more likely than women to progress to a higher degree although the differential is greater in rates of progression to research degrees (3% against 1.7% for research; 7.3% against 5.9% for taught)' (2005, p. 511). Purcell *et al.* (2005) also suggest that men are more likely to undertake Masters degrees or professional accreditation courses.

Wakeling argues that the subject studied can determine progression to postgraduate study: 'the distribution of postgraduate students among disciplines is different to that at undergraduate level. Furthermore, the nature of subjects at undergraduate level make some less likely and some more likely to provide a progression route to postgraduate study' (2005, p. 514).

Conclusion

The literature suggests that at present we have a limited understanding of widening participation at postgraduate level. There is limited qualitative data of the postgraduate experience overall, and we have very little data that identifies if any particular groups of students are disadvantaged in making choices about and participating in postgraduate study. Therefore this study set out to investigate if there are any particular barriers to undertaking postgraduate study for under-represented groups in higher education, to identify any success factors for those who continued on to postgraduate study and to consider the students' experiences of their study.

Given the limited research in the area, the study also examined whether prior higher education qualifications and experience alleviate the barriers to continuing on to postgraduate study for students from lower socio-economic groups, minority ethnic groups and students who are the first in their families to go into higher education.

Section 3 Methodology and approach

The study was conducted simultaneously at two new universities in England, in two distinct phases: a quantitative questionnaire assessing demographic variables and key factors of interest, followed by a qualitative phase, with participants selected from the overall cohort. The universities were chosen because although they had a similar subject profile, each institution had a different student profile. South Coast University was below its benchmark for students from lower socio-economic groups and had a small number of minority ethnic students (around 5%), while South London University was above its benchmark for lower socio-economic groups and low participation neighbourhoods, and had a large percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds (over 50%). Thus, the two institutions together provided a variety of subjects as well as diverse student demographic groups (this research did not, however, examine issues relating to students with disabilities).

The first phase consisted of 1,073 respondents to the questionnaire, with 560 from one university and 513 from the other. Overall, 1,200 students were surveyed. The high rate of response was due to the method of collection. Having gained permission from lecturers, the research team surveyed students while in their lectures and collected completed questionnaires at the end of the lecture. The sample was selected by discipline, attempting to match disciplinary areas between the two institutions as far as possible.

Of the 1,073 respondents 47% were male and 53% were female, with an age range of 18 to 62. The breakdown of the occupational class background was: 31% from professional/managerial occupations; 32% from intermediate occupations; 15% from supervisory and small employers; and 9% from semi-routine and routine occupations. 70% of the respondents had entered higher education at the traditional age of 18, and while 75% of the respondents had studied A-levels, 6% had undertaken Access, BTEC or other vocational

qualifications, 10% had international qualifications and 9% held other qualifications. This pattern is similar to the average for the sector as a whole in the UK.

42% were studying for a BA, 57% for a BSc and 1% were undertaking MEng/MMath qualifications. 96% of the respondents had studied full-time. The ethnic make-up of the sample was different at the different institutions: 83% of the respondents at South Coast University were White (British, Irish and other), 5.2% were Black (African, Caribbean or other), 4.2% were from backgrounds from the Asian sub-continent and China, and 5.5% were Mixed ethnic background. At South London University 38% were White, 14% were Black, 29% were Asian and 18% were Mixed ethnic background. Overseas students made up 8% at South Coast University and 6% at South London University.

In the qualitative phase an initial short email survey was sent to all those respondents to the questionnaire who had expressed a willingness to participate in the second phase. This was to check if their intentions to undertake postgraduate study or not (as stated in the questionnaire) had changed or remained the same; of the 61 replies received only one respondent had changed their mind. The fact that nearly all the students had followed their stated intentions from the questionnaire gave the research team some confidence that intentions to study at postgraduate level as described in the questionnaire were relatively reliable. The team then selected 20 of this group to participate in in-depth interviews: eight who had continued on to postgraduate study and 12 who had not. The interviewees were selected to gain a spread of demographic differences. Of the 20 interviewees, nine were male and 11 female; 14 were White and six from different minority ethnic groups. 45% of the group were from higher occupational backgrounds, 10% from intermediate and 30% from lower occupational backgrounds. One interviewee was an overseas student. The demographics of the eight who had gone on to postgraduate study were relatively well matched to those of the 12 who had not taken a postgraduate qualification.

The questionnaire and interview schedule (see Appendix 1) were approved by the ethics committee at Kingston University, where the principal investigator is based. All answers were anonymous and remain confidential to the research team. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed questions (e.g. those using a five-point Likert-type scale). Questions were developed following an analysis of the literature and a pilot questionnaire, which had 50 respondents and tested the robustness of the questionnaire. The interview questions were tested on three interviewees to ensure that the questions asked and prompts used were appropriate.

The study aimed to sample participants from a wide range of disciplines in order to be generalisable and included health, natural/physical sciences, engineering/technology, social sciences, business and humanities. The questionnaire was administered at both institutions at the end of the academic year 2005-06, before examinations commenced. The overall data collection took place over three weeks.

The quantitative data collected were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A range of frequency and parametric tests were run on the data. Multiple regression analyses were run to identify the key factors that predict intentions to go on to postgraduate study. Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were run to illustrate where the group differences lay, and two-way Analyses of Variance were run in order to examine any significant interactions between factors.

It is useful to examine the sample as a whole using regression in order to develop generalisable statements regarding postgraduate study in the UK. Therefore, the analysis is presented for the sample as a whole, and any differences between the two universities locations are highlighted in the findings. Overseas and EU students were filtered out once overall findings were established to examine the relevant widening participation issues for the UK

relating to ethnicity, socio-economic background and age. Findings are described in the next section.

During the quantitative data collection, students were asked to provide contact details if they were willing to participate in the next phase of the research project. Twenty students were selected for interview from this group and interviewed on the telephone during February 2007. All interviews were taped and comprehensive notes were written immediately after as a back-up. The data were then transcribed and analysed thematically using the data analysis package Atlas ti. The results of these interviews are contained in Section 5.

Section 4 Barriers and deterrents to postgraduate study: quantitative findings

There was a significant difference in intentions to undertake postgraduate study between the two universities [$F(1, 1054) = 7.63, p < .01$], whereby South London University students were higher in intentions to undertake postgraduate study (Mean = 1.87 vs. South Coast University Mean = 1.53 on a 4 point scale). However, in other respects there were many similarities between the two institutions in the responses to the questions, and therefore the results are firstly presented as a whole, with significant differences between them highlighted later in the report.

Factors influencing overall student decisions

Vocational qualifications

For students not intending to go on to postgraduate study (49% of the sample), the most significant reason (at both institutions) was 'to enter employment' (38% of students cited this as their main reason for not continuing). In other words, the students who did not intend to undertake another qualification at any point felt they would be able to gain employment with their current qualifications. This indicates that students who undertake vocational qualifications do believe they have been properly prepared for the workplace. Given the current government agenda on higher level skills, this suggests that the curriculum of vocational qualifications is meeting student expectations. It would be interesting to see if this result is confirmed in broader surveys, such as the destination of leavers survey.

A rest from study

The second most important reason at both institutions was 'needing a break from study' (34% cited this as their main reason). In some senses, study itself seems to have been a deterrent to undertaking postgraduate level study, as needing a break from study was cited as an important reason for many who indicated that

they would not consider postgraduate study at any time in the future. 'Needing a break' was also the main reason why students said they would delay (not go on immediately) to their postgraduate study.

Debt

'Paying off debts' only accounted for 13% of respondents' reasons for not continuing to take a postgraduate qualification. Overall, the students had very similar amounts of debt at both of the institutions studied. The cost of living in both areas appears to be similar and, therefore, this result is as expected. The majority of the students had between £1 and £15,000 of debt, but a significant number (17%) had over £15,000 of debt. It should be noted that this cohort completed their studies before top-up fees were introduced in England. Credit card debt was also common, with 55% having approximately £5,000 worth of debt. Interestingly, 22% of the respondents had no debt whatsoever.

In order to measure intentions to undertake postgraduate study a 'scale' was computed. This intended to yield more variance than the simple question 'Do you intend to go on to postgraduate study?' (answer: yes or no). The scale was constructed using the initial question 'Are you thinking of going on to postgraduate study at any time in the future?' (answer: yes or no), but further variance was added by the more specific planning item 'Are you planning to go on to postgraduate study?' (answer: either 'immediately', '2-3 years from now' or 'later on'). These two items combined yielded a four-point intentions scale from 0 (no intentions and no planning) to 4 (yes intending and immediately going on). It should also be noted that the alternative use of the simple dichotomous variable 'intention to study' (yes vs. no) in a logistic regression yielded little difference in the results and so is not presented below.

Regression analyses predicting intentions to postgraduate study

For the sample as a whole, a very highly significant model was customised for predicting intentions to undertake postgraduate study, which accounts for approximately 9% of such decisions. All demographic and computed variables of

interest were entered into the model and the significant factors were combined as shown in the table below.

Table 1: A customised model explaining intentions to undertake postgraduate study²

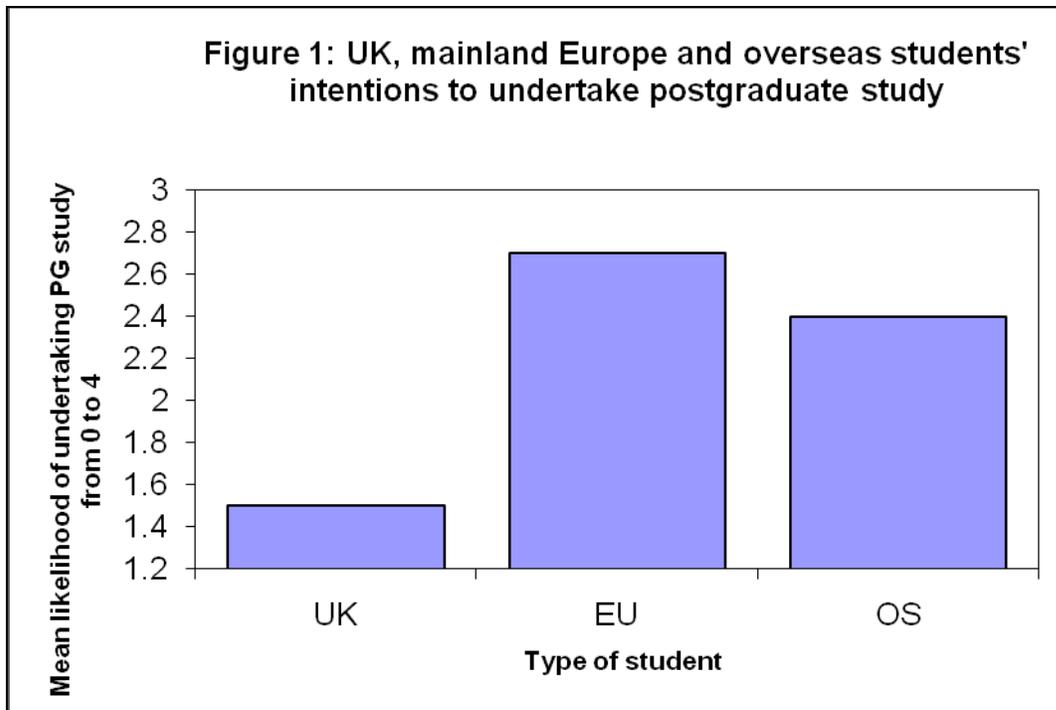
Factor ranking	Variance in postgraduate intentions explained= 8% (Adjusted R ² = .06) F(8, 510) =5.15, p<.001	Beta
1	Home or overseas student	.24***
2	Main subject of undergraduate study	-.11***
3	Debt worry	-.13**
4	Dependent children	.06*
5	Ethnicity	.06*
6	Family experience of higher education (Differs by university)	-.15*** -.10***
7	Self-funding (for students intending to go)	1.81 ^t

Key: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; and ^tp<.10.

Type of student (UK, mainland Europe, overseas)

As can be seen in Figure 1 below, EU and overseas students are both significantly more likely to intend to undertake postgraduate study than home students.

² In all tables ns = not significant and ^t = significant



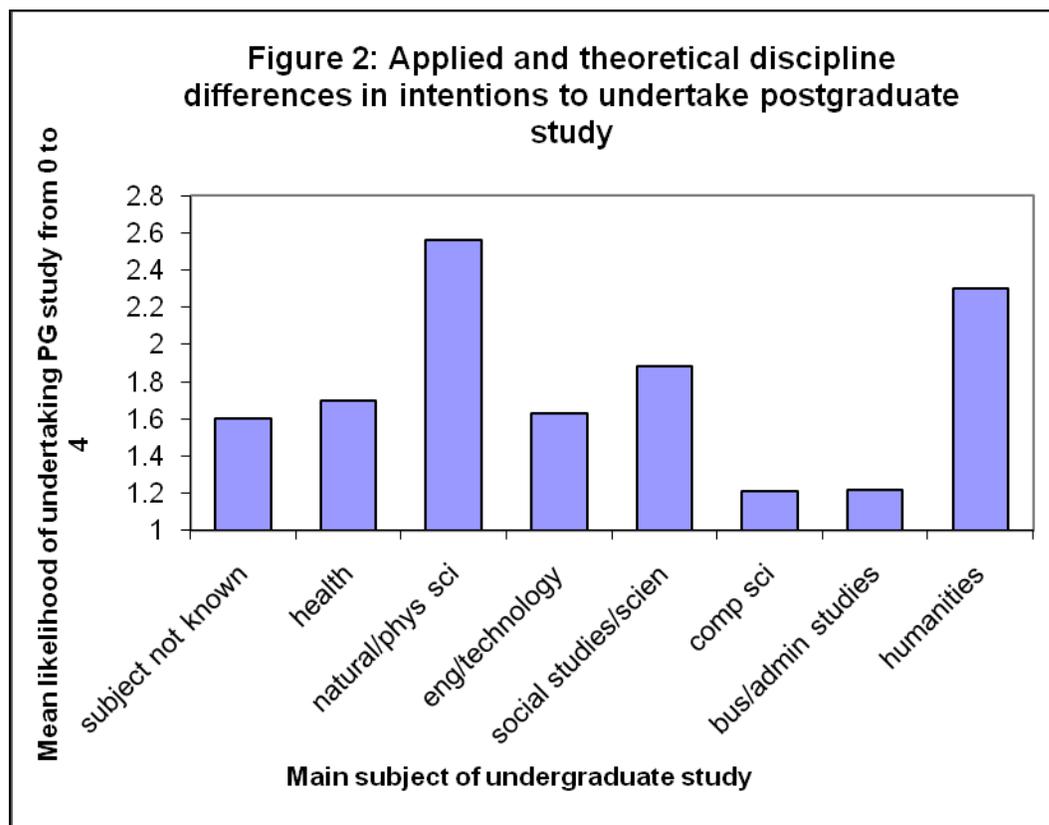
In order to assess 'where this difference lies' a one-way unrelated ANOVA was run and replicated, and this showed a significant difference between the type of student and their intentions to undertake postgraduate study [$F(2, 1053) = 39.74, p < .001$]. Post hoc tests revealed that both EU and OS students are more likely to intend to undertake postgraduate study than UK students ($p < .001$ in both cases); however, there is no difference between EU and OS students. There were no gender differences in this pattern ($p > .05$), and the pattern did not differ significantly between the two universities ($p > .05$).

This pattern of UK students' intentions being significantly lower than overseas students is replicated at both universities. However, there is a slight difference as to whether the EU or OS students are higher (with OS being slightly higher at South Coast University and EU being slightly higher at South London University). This result concurs with findings from Bekhradnia's (2005) study, which indicated that the number of UK students studying at postgraduate level has declined significantly. This finding suggests that despite the increase in postgraduate

taught programmes, it is not UK students who are benefiting from or choosing to take up these courses. The reasons behind this are discussed in the following sections, but not undertaking postgraduate study may have a longer-term effect on these students' career prospects.

Type of undergraduate degree

A highly significant predictor of intentions to undertake postgraduate study in this sample is the area of study they are undertaking at undergraduate level (which is confounded with the 'type of degree' the student is studying). The highest 'intenders to undertake postgraduate study' are those in the natural/physical sciences, the humanities and social studies. Those who are in more applied courses, such as business administration, computing, engineering and health disciplines are lower in intentions to undertake postgraduate study.



The above graph shows a clear split between technical and non-technical disciplines. This pattern is replicated at both institutions. This result suggests that where there is a clear vocational outcome from the undergraduate programme, students are keen to get out into the job market immediately. It indicates that students are making choices based on their future careers and are quite focused on their future opportunities.

Debt worry

Debt worry is a significant negative predictor: the higher the debt worry the lower the students' intentions to undertake postgraduate study. As both of these variables are scale data, the correlation ($r = -.13$, $p < .01$) reveals that the magnitude is only moderate; however, the direction of the relationship is in the predicted direction, and it is a highly significant finding. This finding occurs for both institutions, but is stronger at South London University ($r = -.19$, $p = .001$). In other words, it is not the amount of debt a student might have, but rather the attitude associated with the debt that acts as a barrier to postgraduate study intentions.

Children

Having dependent children is also a significant predictor of intention to undertake postgraduate study. The intentions of those who have children (of any age) are significantly higher than those who do not. Interestingly, those with children aged 11 to 16 have highest intentions. This pattern is generally replicated at both universities. However, at South Coast University there is a clear simple linear pattern whereby as the children get older the intentions get higher, whereas at South London University there is a drop in intention once the children are over 17.

Ethnicity and gender (marginally significant)

The ethnicity of the participant is only marginally significant, but this factor emerges as significant when the universities are examined separately and will be revisited and discussed individually below. Gender is also a marginally

significant factor, with women being slightly higher in intentions to undertake postgraduate study than men ($p < .10$). However, caution must be used in interpreting this effect given the unequal numbers of men and women in the sample overall and distributed throughout the various courses.

Family experience of higher education

Although family experience of higher education does not appear as a significant predictor in the overall regression, it is in fact an important factor when the universities are examined separately. This is due to the fact that different combinations of family factors emerge with each dataset. This will be revisited below, but in summary the separate regressions reveal that 'overall family experience' was a significant predictor at South Coast University, and that 'father's experience' and 'mother's experience' predicted intentions to study at South London University. However, when this pattern is examined using ANOVAs to look more closely at the differences, 'father's study' is found at both universities, but as in the regressions 'mother's study' was only effective overall and at South London University. 'Partner's experience' was found for the sample as a whole, but when the sample is split it only reaches significance at South Coast University.

Additional factor: self-funding

When solely students intending to study are selected out for analysis, whether they are self-funding or not emerges as a marginally significant additional factor predicting the 'intentions scale'. The relationship is such that self-funding serves to strengthen the plans to study (Beta= -1.81, $p = .07$). It explains a further 0.5% of the variance in the intentions to undertake postgraduate study. This may, however, be confounded with students in theoretical courses and other key factors outlined above related to the necessity to self-fund (also with the fact that actual debt is not a significant predictor in and of itself, unlike debt worry). It is also the case that students who are determined to carry on studying may well be prepared to self-fund.

Non-significant predictors: age; occupational class; actual debt

Age (traditional vs. non-traditional) of the student did not emerge as a significant factor, with the probability of the null relationships being $p=.19$. Occupational class is also not a significant predictor of intentions to undertake postgraduate study, along with other factors, such as actual amounts of debt (student loans etc.). The headline in widening participation terms is that there is no significant relationship between class (defined by self-reported parental or own occupation³) and intention to take on postgraduate level study. This research confirms the work of Mare (1980) and Stolzenberg (1984), who found no effect of socio-economic status on Masters level students. However, as already highlighted, family experience of higher education is a significant predictor. There was some relationship between class and parental experience of higher education (those who had fathers from professional and managerial occupational backgrounds at South London University were also highly likely to have family members who studied in higher education), but this relationship was a secondary factor, which did not emerge in the direct predictions of those intending to undertake postgraduate study.

While it is true that many students from lower socio-economic groups will not have family members who studied at university, it is also true, still, that many middle-class students will also not have family members who have higher education qualifications. Massification of higher education only took place in the late 1980s, after the parents of this cohort would have entered employment. This result highlights the importance of being clear about what group we are referring to in the widening participation debate (Watson 2006), ensuring we do not conflate 'first-generation students' with students from lower socio-economic groups. This research seems to confirm the work of Mullen *et al.* (2003), who saw a link between parental qualification levels and progression onto professional and doctoral study. However, family experience of higher education also included partners in this study. At South Coast University this was an

³ If the student was over 26 their own occupational status was used; if under 26 in their final year, their parent's occupation was used.

important predictor of intentions to undertake postgraduate study. It is therefore important to be cautious about the actual explanation of these findings. This issue was further tested in the qualitative results.

Predicting postgraduate study at South London University

For South London University students alone, a very highly significant model was customised for predicting intentions to undertake postgraduate study, which accounts for approximately 9% of such decisions. All demographic and computed variables of interest were entered into the model, and the significant factors are combined as shown in the table below.

Table 2: A customised model explaining intentions to undertake postgraduate study at South London University

Factor ranking	Variance in postgraduate intentions explained= 9% (Adjusted R²= .07) F(5, 274) =5.43, p<.001	Beta
1	Debt worry	-.19***
2	Mother (or female guardian) studied at university	.18**
3	Father (or male guardian) studied at university	.14*
4	Main subject of undergraduate study (& type of degree)	.15*

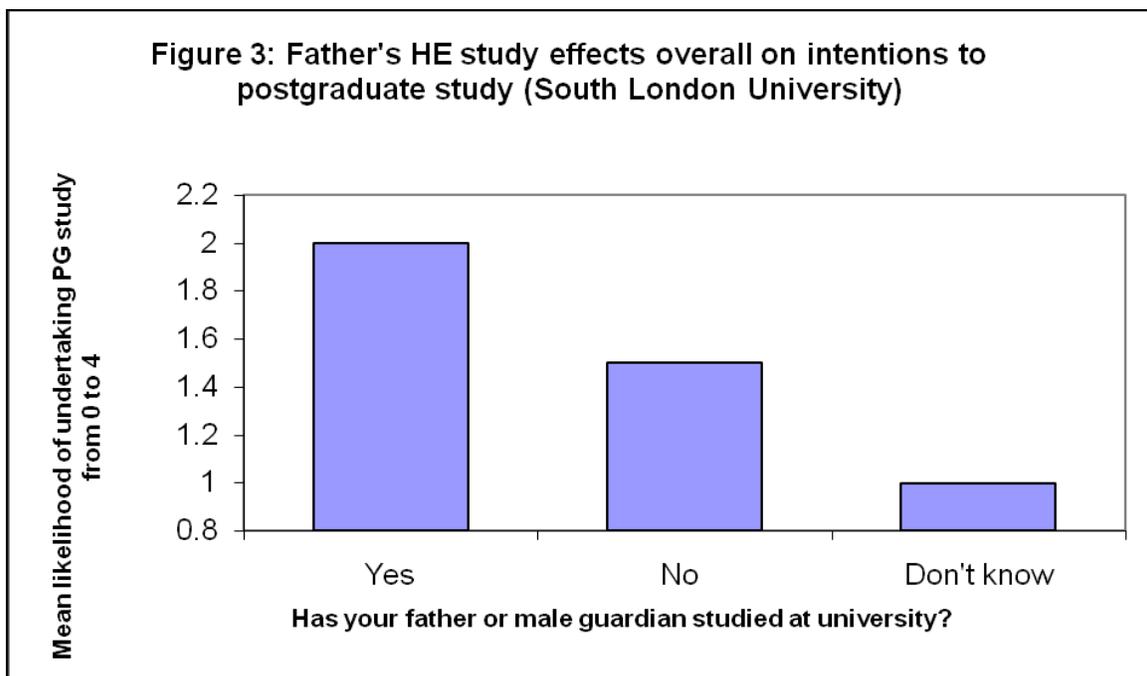
Key: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Debt worry

At South London University, debt worry remains a significant predictor (in this case a very highly significant predictor) of intentions to undertake postgraduate study, such that the higher the worry, the lower the intentions to undertake postgraduate study.

Parental experience of higher education

For the South London University students, having a mother or female guardian who studied at university significantly predicted higher intentions to undertake postgraduate study. Additionally, having a father or male guardian who studied at university was also a significant positive predictor and, therefore, indicated higher intentions to undertake postgraduate study. The fact of having had a father experience higher education significantly affects intentions to undertake postgraduate study [F (2, 1011) = 10.71, $p < .001$], whereby those whose father had studied were significantly higher in their postgraduate study intentions. Father's higher education experience remains a significant factor at both universities.

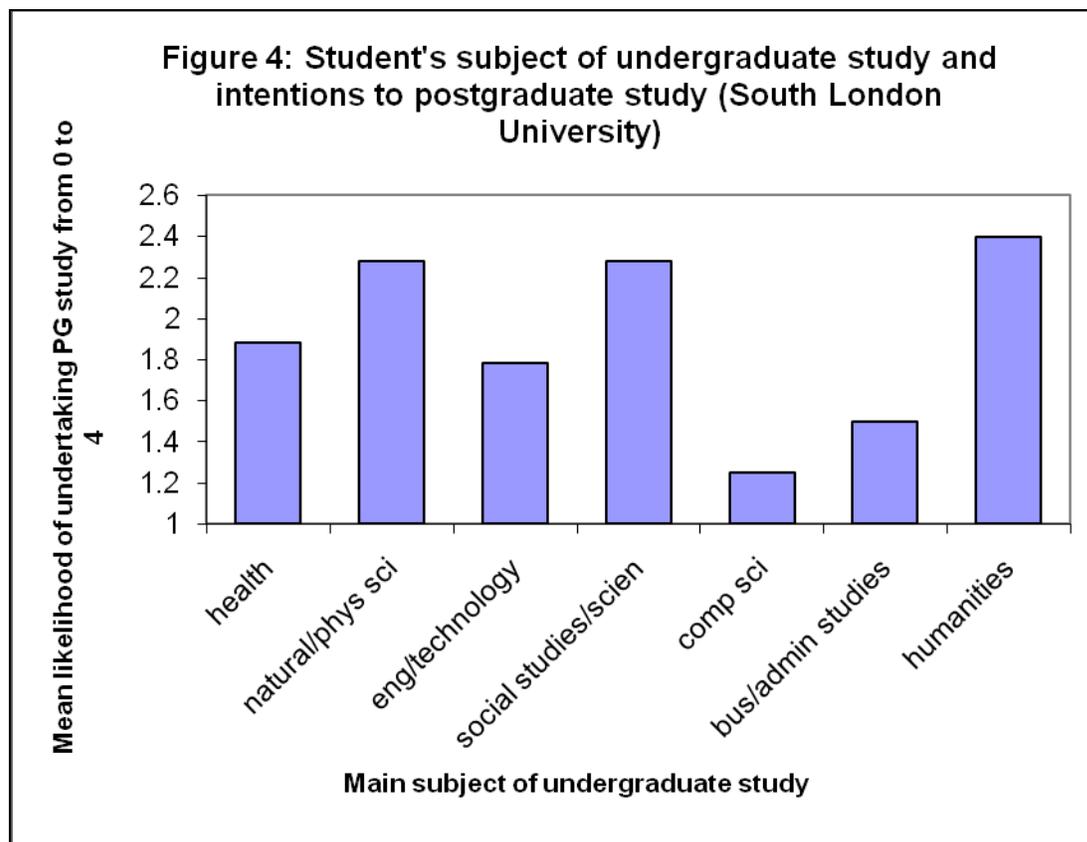


The fact of having had a mother experience higher education also significantly affects intentions to undertake postgraduate study at South London University [F (2, 1000) = 7.49, $p = .001$], whereby those whose mother had studied were significantly higher in their postgraduate study intention.

In disaggregating the institutions we see that, while father's higher education experience is a significant factor at both locations ($p < .05$), mother's higher education experience is only significant at South London University and not South Coast University.

Main subject of undergraduate study

At South London University, the subject of the degree course was again a significant predictor, and as can be seen in Figure 4 below, those taking practical/applied courses have the lowest intentions to undertake postgraduate study. Again this is confounded with the type of degree they are undertaking (yielding the same significance value as subject).



Predicting postgraduate study at South Coast University

For the South Coast University sample, a very highly significant model was customised for predicting intentions to undertake postgraduate study, which accounts for approximately 19% of such decisions [$F(5, 469) = 21.86, p < .001$]. All demographic and computed variables of interest were entered into the model and the significant factors are combined as shown in the table below.

Table 3: A customised model explaining intentions to undertake postgraduate study at South Coast University

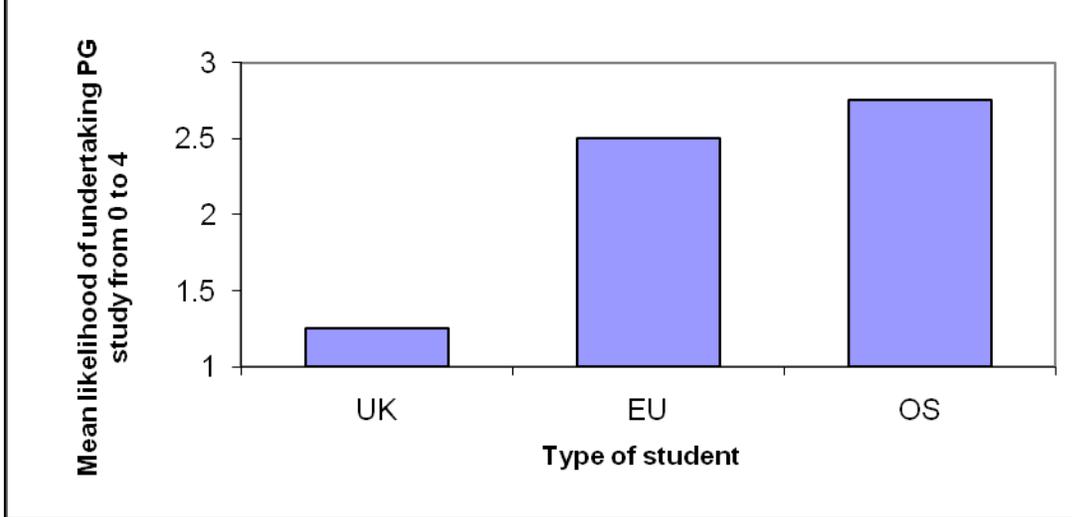
Factor ranking	Variance in postgraduate intentions explained = 38% (Adjusted $R^2 = .37$) $F(6, 468) = 46.22, p < .001$	Beta
1	Home or overseas student	.23***
2	Ethnicity (both classifications)	.15**
3	Dependent children	.08 ^t
4	Family university attendance	.07 ^t

Key: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; and ^t $p < .10$.

Type of student (UK, mainland Europe, overseas)

The most highly significant predictor at South Coast University is whether the student was a home or overseas student, as can be seen in Figure 5 below.

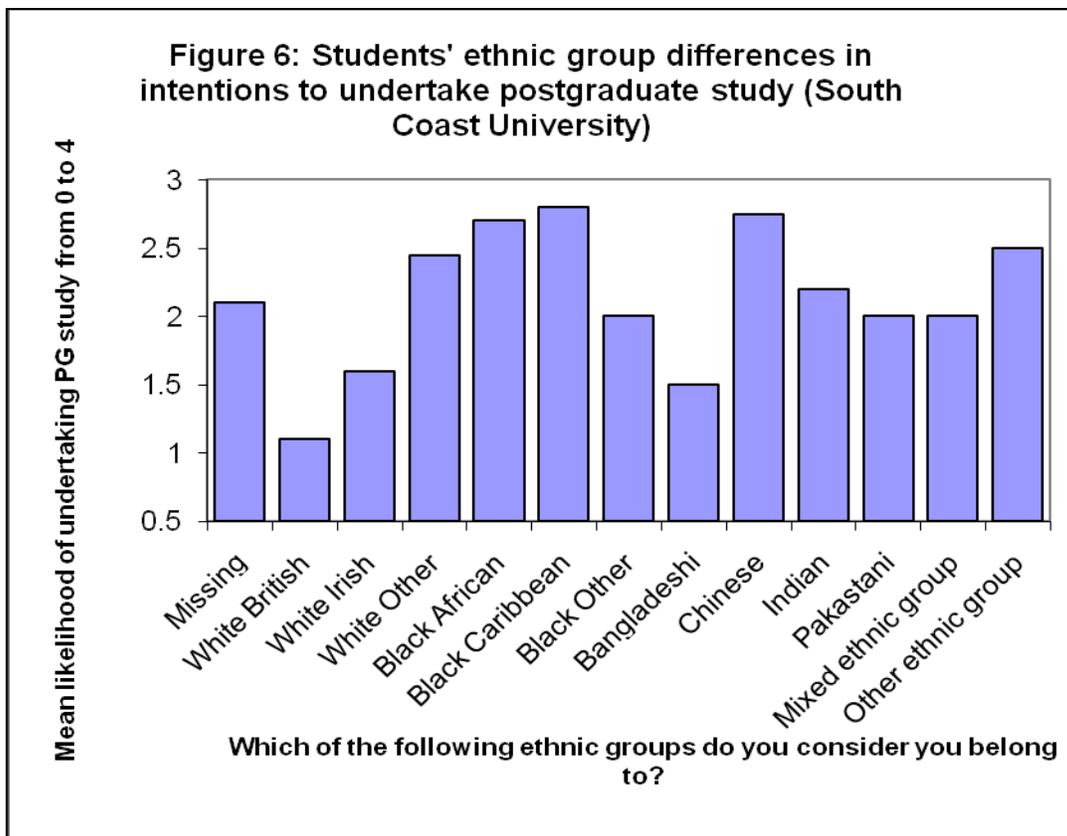
Figure 5: Home and overseas students' intentions to undertake postgraduate study (South Coast University)



Ethnicity

In the overall sample ethnic differences did not reach significance; however, at South Coast University ethnicity is a significant predictor of postgraduate study intentions.

Figure 6: Students' ethnic group differences in intentions to undertake postgraduate study (South Coast University)



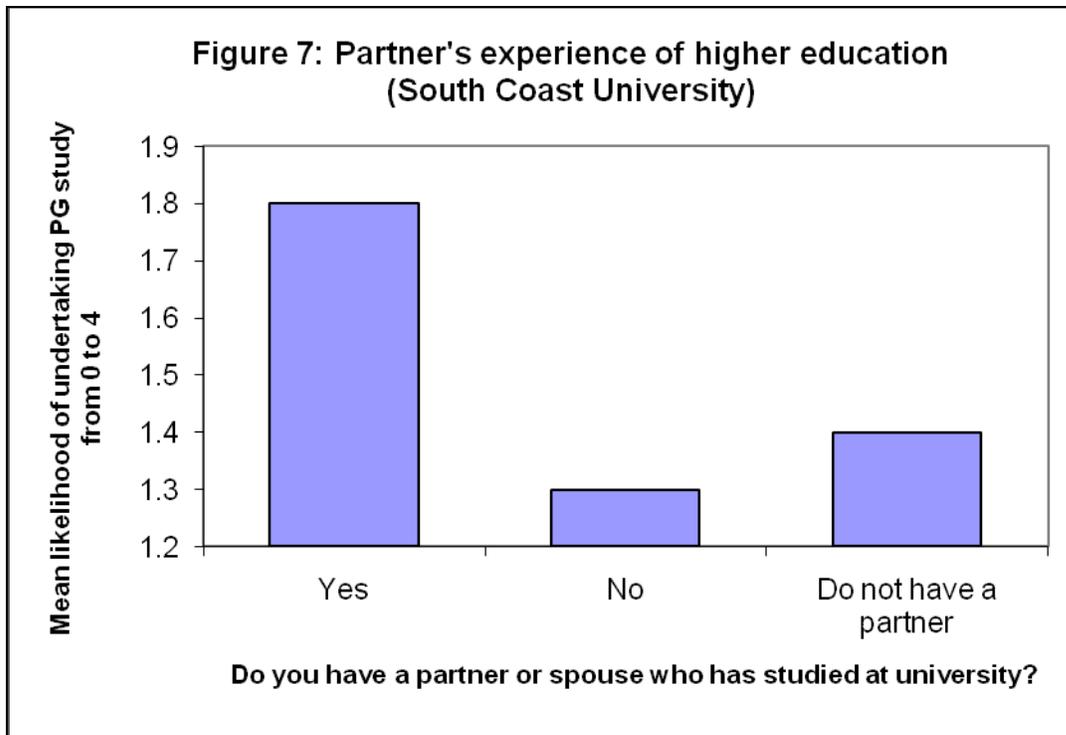
Children

Again, those without children are moderately significantly lower in intentions to undertake postgraduate study, and, unlike the South London University students, this simply increases positively with the age of the children.

Family experience of higher education

A new finding emerged in the separate analysis of South Coast University students, whereby those having more family members with university experience (i.e. parents, grandparents, partners and even children) are significantly higher in intentions to undertake postgraduate study. ANOVAs were run to examine further 'where these differences lie', and indicated that father's higher education experience is most important to the South Coast University students (as at South London University); however, partner's higher education experience matters at South Coast University, whereas mother's higher education experience does not (which is the reverse of South London University).

With regard to the partner's higher education involvement for the entire sample, there is a significant difference, whereby those who have a partner or have a partner with higher education experience are significantly higher in intentions to undertake postgraduate study than those whose partner did not have higher education experience and those who did not have a partner [$F(2, 1005) = 4.67, p < .05$]. Interestingly this partner effect is highly significant at South Coast University, but does not reach significance at South London University.



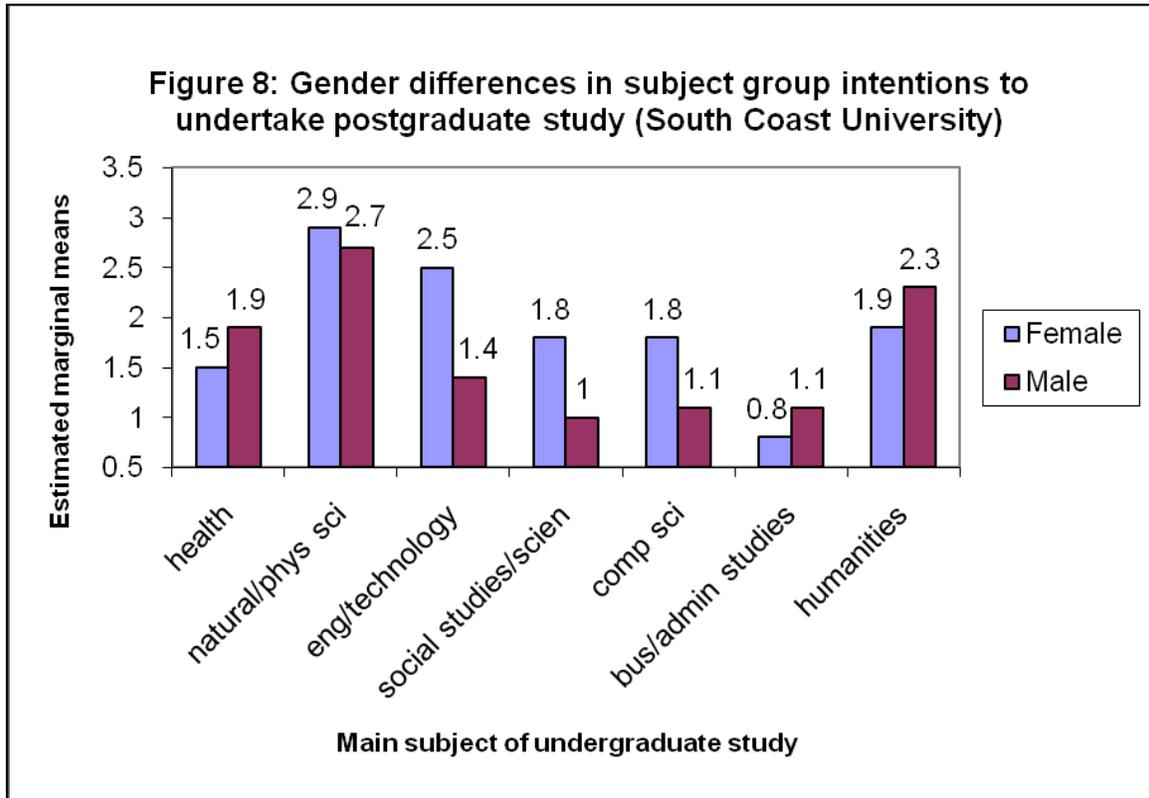
Analyses of variance examining interactions between factors

In order to examine the combined effects of two or more factors on student's intentions to study at postgraduate level, two-way analysis of variance was employed. This was done overall and then separately for the university samples; given the extended nature of these analyses, only significant findings are reported below. A brief discussion of non-significant factors will be included at the end of the section.

Gender differences in subject group intentions

The regressions above indicate that those involved in the practical/applied subjects are lower in intentions to undertake postgraduate study (overall and at South London University). For South Coast University an interaction occurs, whereby there are gender differences within the subjects as regards intentions to undertake postgraduate study [$F(6, 471) = 2.26, p < .05$]. As can be seen in Figure 8 below, for most South Coast University subject groups females are higher in intentions to undertake postgraduate study. This is especially true of

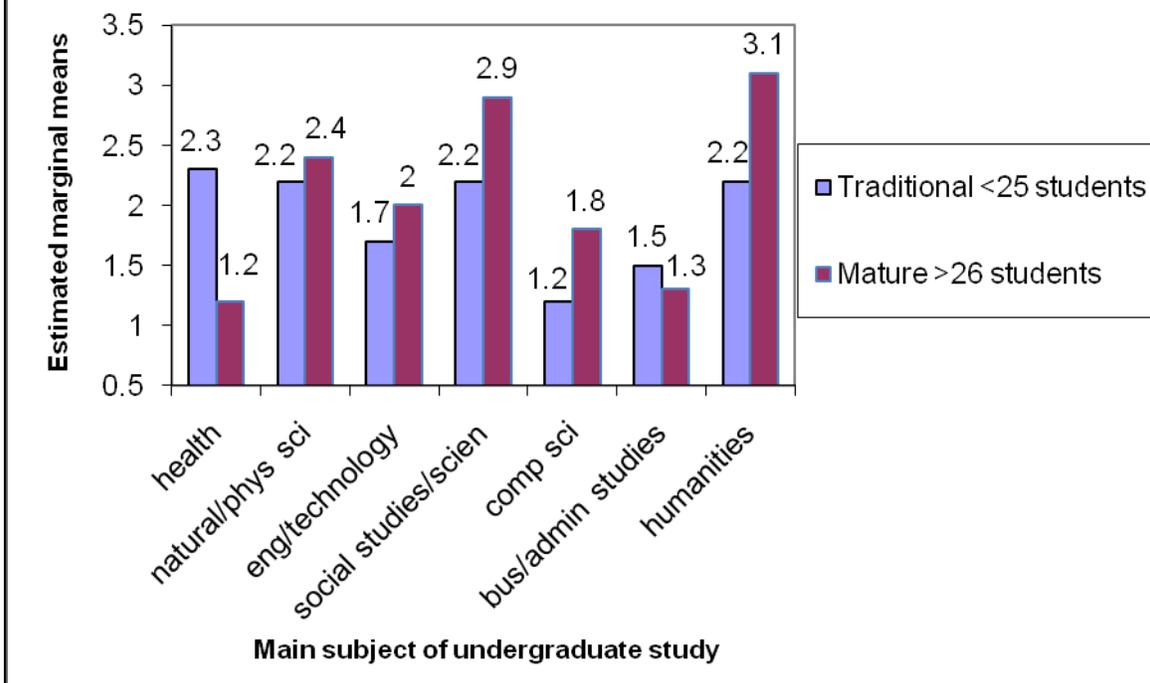
the engineers, but this pattern is reversed for both health and the humanities where males are higher in intentions. Gender differences in intentions to undertake postgraduate study must therefore be 'subject specific' in the attempt to target inequalities when promoting postgraduate study.



Age group differences in subject group intentions (South London University only)

As can be seen in Figure 9 below, for many South London University subject groups, 'mature' students are higher in postgraduate study intentions. This is especially the case for the humanities and social studies; however, for health disciplines this pattern is reversed, with traditional students (those aged under 25) being higher in intentions. In other words, age does make a difference in aspiration if combined with the highly significant predictor of subject studied at undergraduate level.

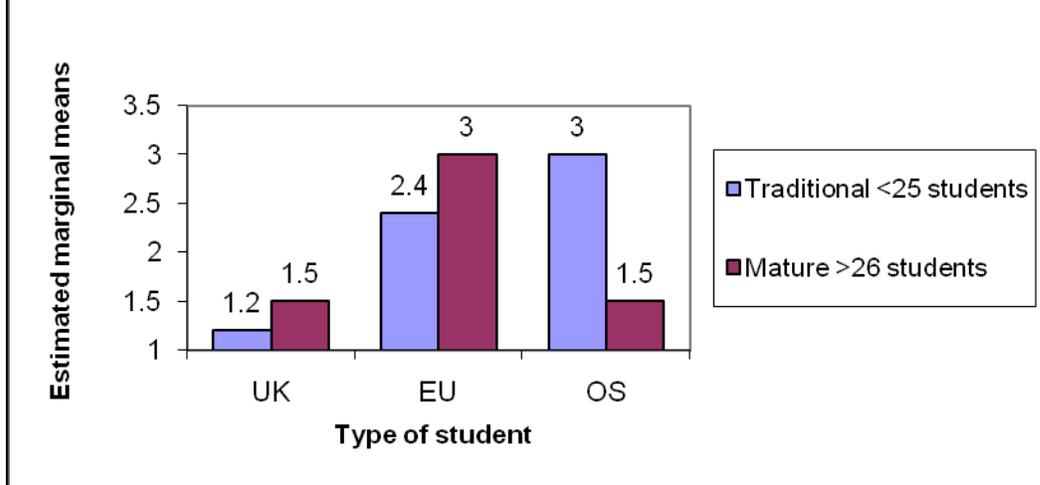
Figure 9: Age differences in subject group intentions to undertake postgraduate study (South London University)



Marginal age group differences in ‘type of student’ intentions

As stated in the regression section, age group is not a significant predictor of intentions to postgraduate study on its own, but as seen above it does influence other key factors, such as subject of undergraduate study. Furthermore, there is a marginal tendency towards age differences in ‘type of student’ preference to undertaking postgraduate study. As can be seen in Figure 10 below, overseas students’ intentions are significantly higher for the traditional students, but overseas mature students’ intentions are as low as the level of UK home students [F(2, 498)= 2.42, p<.10]. EU students’ intentions to undertake postgraduate study are high among both traditional and mature students (although mature EU students appear highest in intentions, this is not significantly higher than the traditional EU students, p>.05).

Figure 10: Age differences in type of student intentions to undertake postgraduate study (South Coast University)



In examining the data the students' ethnic background seemed to be important in determining their intentions to undertake postgraduate study. The following section examines this factor in more detail.

A closer examination of ethnic group differences in intentions to undertake postgraduate study

The regressions reveal that ethnicity was a significant predictor at South Coast University and was marginally significant overall ($p=.10$). The issue of ethnic background in the widening participation debate is a complex one. As borne out by the literature, there are significant differences between ethnic groups' engagement and success at undergraduate level. Therefore, a closer examination of ethnicity differences in variables other than postgraduate study intentions may go some way to explaining the moderating role of these factors in postgraduate study decisions.

When the sample is analysed as a whole, with the original 12 self-reported ethnicity groups, significant differences were found not only in overall intentions to undertake postgraduate study but also in parents' and family's higher

education experience, debt worry, actual debt (student loans and other debt) and even in expectations of postgraduate study.

Table 4: ANOVAs revealing significant ethnic group differences in postgraduate study, debt and family higher education variables

Ethnic group differences in:	F value (df= 11)
Intentions to undertake postgraduate study	8.38**
Family's experience of higher education	8.48**
Expectations of postgraduate study	1.88*
Debt worry	1.91*
Debt to Student Loans Company	1.80*
Other debt (e.g. cards, overdraft)	1.65^t
Perception of employer's value of a postgraduate qualification	1.39 n.s.

Key: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

In order to explore further the above findings in a clear (post hoc) analysis, the original 12 groups were condensed into five groups (namely White Caucasian, Black Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Asian, East Asian and Mixed/Other) to approximate more equal cell sizes represented in our population; this yielded even higher significance.

Table 5: ANOVAs revealing simplified ethnic group differences in postgraduate study, debt and family higher education variables

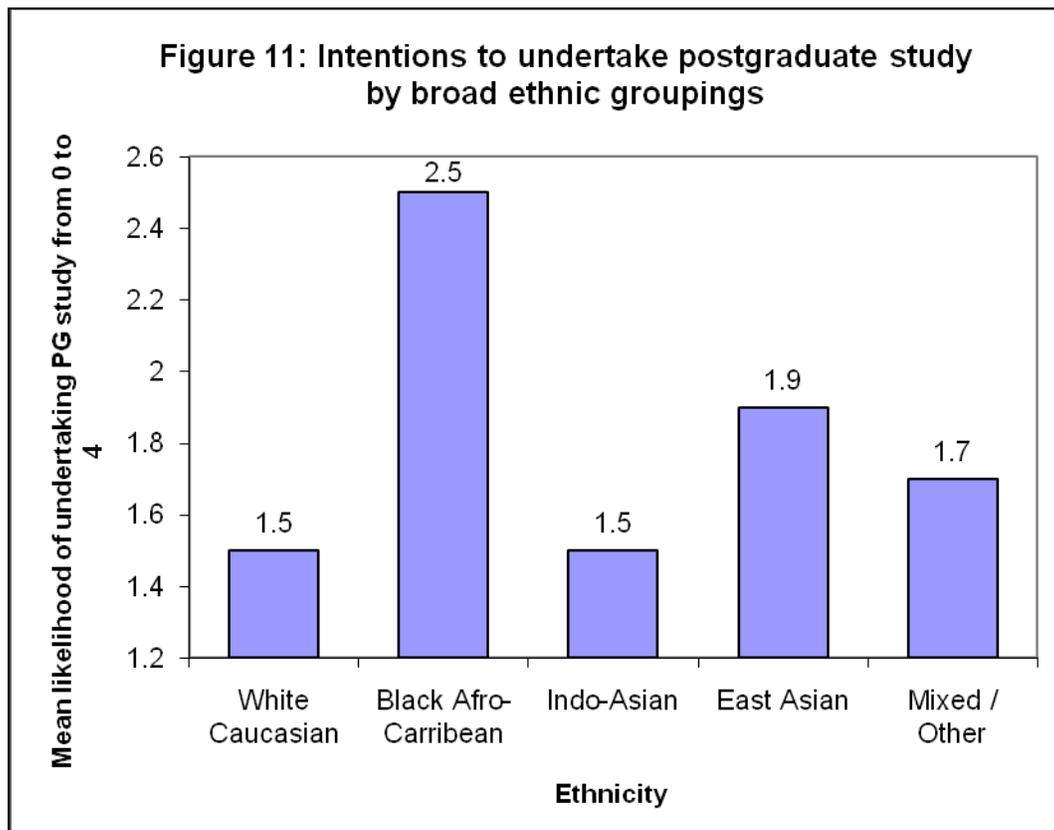
Ethnic group differences in:	F value (df= 4)
Intentions to undertake postgraduate study	8.88***
Family's experience of higher education	13.31***
Expectations of postgraduate study	1.20 n.s.
Debt worry	2.51**
Debt to Student Loans Company	1.79^t
Other debt (e.g. cards, overdraft)	2.79*
Perception of employer's value of a postgraduate qualification	2.44*

Key: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

All of the factors outlined above remain significant following this 're-grouping' except expectations of postgraduate study; the perception of employers 'valuing' postgraduate study becomes significant.

Ethnicity and postgraduate intentions

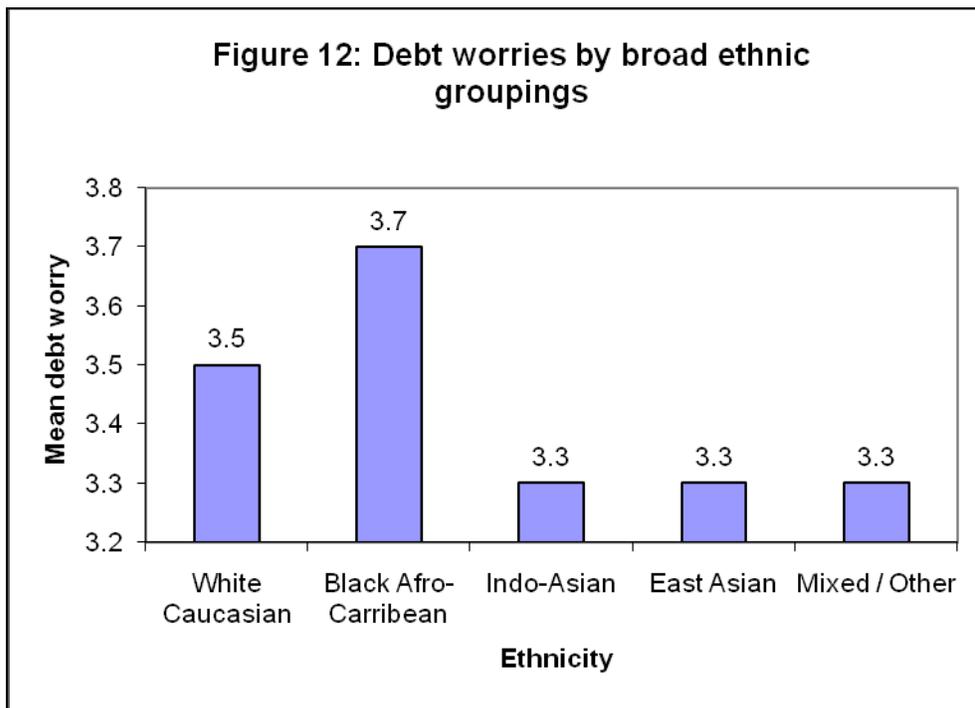
As can be seen in Figure 11 below, Black Afro-Caribbean students report significantly higher intentions to undertake postgraduate study than all other students ($p < .001$). When the sample is split it reveals that at South Coast University White Caucasian students are actually lower in intentions than all other groups ($p < .01$).



Ethnicity and debt worries

Furthermore, Black Afro-Caribbean students are marginally more worried about debt than all other student groups ($p < .01$ for all; marginally significant compared to White and East Asian students at $p < .10$). This pattern emerges at South

Coast University, where Black (but also White) students are marginally more worried than the other ethnic groups ($p < .01$). Thus, ethnicity 'matters' more at South Coast University, but in both cases ethnicity mediates differences in debt worry.

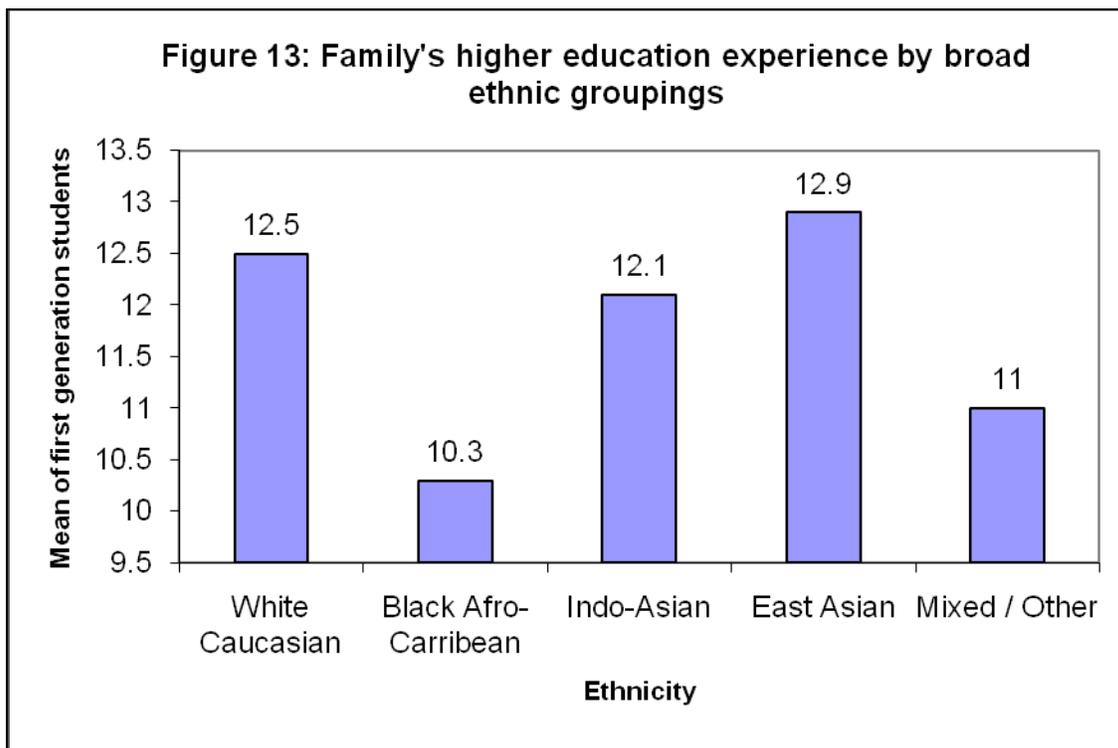


Ethnicity and student loans

With regard to actual debt, in line with the findings outlined above, Black Afro-Caribbean students report more student loan debt than Indo-Asian students. When split by institution, this pattern is only significant at South Coast University, where Black students have significantly more loans than all other ethnic groups. Also, ethnic differences in 'other debt' emerge overall and at South Coast University. This is probably due to the fact that South London University is largely a minority sample, and the combined sample is needed to produce equal group cell sizes.

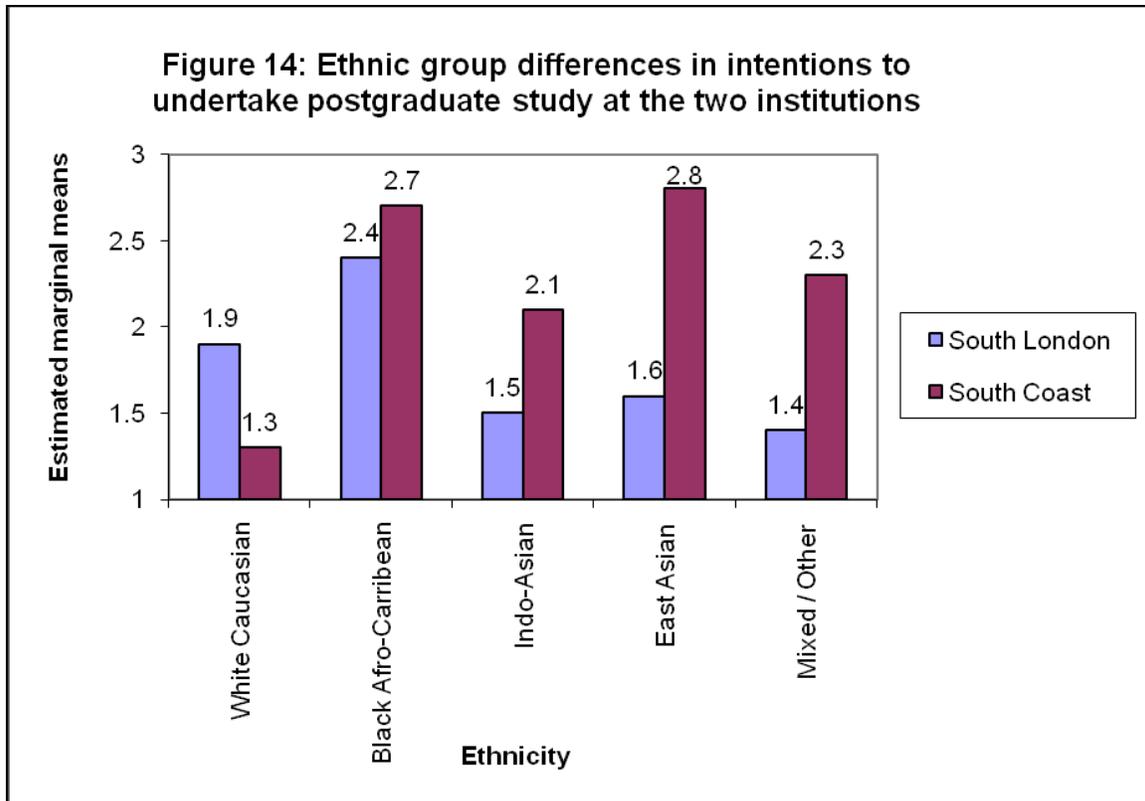
Ethnicity and family experience of higher education

As can be seen in Figure 13 below, Black Afro-Caribbean students are significantly lower in family's higher education experience (i.e. higher in first-generation studentship) than all other ethnic groups ($p < .001$ for all groups except Mixed/Other, which is marginally significant at $p < .10$). These differences remain significant at both universities separately. However, despite intentions to undertake postgraduate study being lowest in White students, family experience of higher education is relatively high.



Ethnicity and intentions to undertake postgraduate study at the two universities

It can again be seen that there is a main effect of ethnicity, such that White students are lower in intentions and Black Afro-Caribbean students are higher in intentions to undertake postgraduate study. However, at South London University, there is little difference between the minority ethnic groups except for, Black Afro-Caribbean students which is higher than all other ethnic groups. At South Coast University all minority-ethnic groups are higher in intention to study than white students.



Summary of ethnicity in determining actual postgraduate study

It might appear surprising at first glance that minority ethnic students, and particularly the Black Afro-Caribbean group, are higher in intentions to undertake postgraduate study in light of the fact that the majority of students who actually go on to study are in fact non-minority ethnic students. However, when we begin to examine these students (particularly Black Afro-Caribbean students) with regard to group differences on the other key determinants of intentions to undertake postgraduate study, it can be seen that minority ethnic students (and particularly Black Afro-Caribbean students) are disadvantaged in the two key areas of debt worry (which appears to be related, in the case of certain ethnic groups, to actual debt) and family experience of higher education, but also in relation to varying expectations of postgraduate study and perceptions of employers' value of postgraduate study. White UK males were significantly negatively identified with continuing to postgraduate study. The interviews shed some light on ethnic differences and how these interrelate with other factors in each individual's biography.

Class differences in family experience of higher education and interplay between factors

As we saw in the regression, there were *no class differences* in intentions to undertake postgraduate study (that is to say class cannot be used to predict such intentions). This does not appear to interact with any of the other significant predictors: type of student; course; family higher education experience; debt worriers; gender; or even the non-significant predictor of age. This is not necessarily due to the fact that these predictors are unrelated to postgraduate study intentions, but rather that the influence may be indirect.

Occupational class does not directly predict postgraduate intentions, meaning that there are no significant differences between the class designations with regard to intention to undertake postgraduate study. However, there are some class differences in some areas of family higher education experience. In this way class may have an indirect influence as regards whether family attended university or not, which then has an effect on intentions to undertake postgraduate study. This still indicates that class per se is not a direct factor influencing intentions to undertake postgraduate study, but it is worth considering in future theoretical models aimed at a 'bigger picture' for predicting postgraduate study intentions (such as can be accomplished with Structural Equation Modelling). However, this issue was further tested in the qualitative phase of the project, and the results of the effect of class background from the detailed interview data are discussed in the next section.

Summary: key findings

The quantitative data revealed that UK students, those on practical/applied courses, those who are more worried about debt (but not necessarily in more debt), those without family that have previous higher education experience, white/non-minority ethnic students and, marginally, male students *are less likely to intend to undertake postgraduate study* (although the effect for males may be manufactured by high student numbers).

Alternatively, the data indicated that EU and overseas students, those on theoretical/non-applied courses, those who are less worried about debt (but not necessarily in less debt), those with family that have previous higher education experience, minority ethnic students and, marginally, female students are *more likely to intend to undertake postgraduate study* (although this effect for females may be manufactured by high student numbers). For those who state that they are thinking of postgraduate study, self-funding is a further predictor, but interestingly, those who intend to self-fund have higher postgraduate intentions and more immediate intentions to undertake postgraduate study. This may, however, be confounded with students in theoretical courses needing postgraduate qualifications more for job opportunities, but also being less likely to receive funding (e.g. through teaching and grants) at the start of their studies.

These significant predictors discussed above were tested further in the qualitative phase to try to understand in more detail what these findings mean, but it is relevant to note, in relation to issues of widening participation in postgraduate study, that those who intended to take a postgraduate qualification, either immediately or in the future, had some of the widening participation demographical characteristics, but not all. For example, the most 'at risk' category in UK education at the present time is that of White working-class males. Class does not seem to have had a direct effect, but may have had a secondary effect through the important predictor of family experience of higher education. Women were more likely than men to wish to undertake postgraduate study, and minority ethnic groups were more aspirational than White students. However, despite some of these connections between concerns at undergraduate level and this research, the overall most significant finding is related to the undergraduate course being studied. The respondents indicated in the questionnaire that job prospects were an important factor in their decision-making processes whatever their background. These issues were further explored through the interviews and are discussed in the next section.

Section 5 Qualitative analysis

The issues raised in the quantitative phase of the research were then tested through the in-depth interviews with 20 graduates from the overall sample: eight who continued to postgraduate study and 12 who did not.

The interview schedule examined in more detail the participants' feelings, attitudes and decision-making processes, as well as investigating the experience of postgraduate study for those who had continued.

The interviewees were clear that those who had continued on to postgraduate study did so for a variety of reasons, but significantly: to gain a vocational advantage; to get all their study over before they went into employment; and because of a love of the subject area. (The majority of the respondents in the quantitative sample (65% who were continuing to postgraduate study) were doing so in the disciplinary area that they had studied at undergraduate level.) The interview sample included three PGCE students, three MA students and three MSc students.

Those who did not continue did so because they felt they wanted to get into the workplace immediately. They needed a break from education, having found undergraduate study stressful. Several wanted a decent wage, feeling they had had to 'go without' as a student. These reasons, both positive and negative, are discussed in more detail in this section, but overall they shed light on the reasons found in the questionnaire. We begin this section with those who continued on to postgraduate study immediately.

Being a postgraduate student

In the questionnaire students were asked about their expectations of postgraduate study. 85% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'my expectations in terms of quality of delivery and service at postgraduate level will be higher than at undergraduate level', while 73%

indicated that they expected more 'value for money'. Nearly two-thirds of respondents were expecting a 'more individualised study experience', and only 21% felt they did not know what to expect. Students' hopes were high for their future study. They expected more of their teachers, more access to appropriate resources and a more personalised experience. The qualitative interviews explored how far these expectations had been met.

In the interviews several students told us that they found the smaller seminar and lecture groups at postgraduate level beneficial to their learning. They found it easier to initiate discussion in small groups because they tended to know their peers better, and the environment was less intimidating than a lecture with several hundred students attending. It appeared to them to be less formal. Most students also found that they got more individual attention from tutors than they had at undergraduate level.

The students also commented that the curriculum allowed them to stretch themselves academically and to learn new skills; for example, learning new methodological techniques and being able to explore how theory and practice interrelate. Several students found the practical elements of postgraduate study more beneficial than undergraduate level because they were put in 'real life' situations. This was particularly true of the three PGCE students and a student studying law:

Now it is much more putting the work into practice. It is a big difference; it makes it a lot easier to understand, because you can relate it to real situations that would occur as opposed to in my case, case law and statutes, we are actually putting into practice, which is a lot more useful.
(Law student)

...the placement. I was able to express myself in some way, for instance, start a maths clinic or something like that, which I felt good about...because I am learning so much. It has further opened my eyes, it has given me some taste of real life... and that hasn't put me off. It is very hard with pupils and things, but it really hasn't put me off.
(Maths PGCE student)

I had a research methodology lecture and I haven't done many of them in the past, so it has been quite good to get my teeth into that so that has been good. There was one lecture...participatory research or something it is called and like I plan to use that for my dissertation. It was really interesting...like I was working with ex-offenders and I am going to try and make them make a DVD, which I would never have thought of.
(MSc student)

The above point links to the way in which postgraduate study allows students to develop personally as well as academically. This appeared to be an important factor for several interviewees, especially mature students who had effectively been given a 'second chance' to study. The ability to learn and develop, gain more skills, and become a more effective learner was raised by several respondents:

I'm still learning an awful lot and some of the seminar discussions are just really really interesting. Some of the things we've looked at, like...history and children's literature, and relating it to society and the changes in society. It's been very very good.

...when you're changing all the time you're not aware that actually you're increasing your reading levels and you're learning to read faster and faster all the time and you learn ways to read ... But I suppose if I was to compare myself to what I could achieve reading wise I think I have far exceeded that now..
(MA English mature student)

Most of the postgraduate students interviewed were undertaking courses that they felt had a vocational outcome. (Only one student was studying an MA that had no clear vocational progression, and even she was intending to do a PGCE afterwards.) The interviewees were particularly pleased that their curriculum had been designed to help them gain practical experience because they felt it helped them prepare for employment:

...through the careers service they are always giving us possibilities to gain experience. They are always advising us. And there are a number of schemes, one of which I have got on. They have paired me up with a person from the legal world. He is practising and he will be able to give me some guidance and advice.
(Law student)

The interviews suggest that many of the expectations the students had before starting their course had been met. However, despite the fact that most of the students who were studying at postgraduate level were very happy with their course, one of the students who started a postgraduate qualification dropped out after a few weeks. Her reasons were less about expectations and more about the amount of work required on the programme. She commented that she thought the course would be too stressful. After attending induction during which she was given an indication of the workload involved, and after spending a few weeks on the course, she felt that the volume of work was too much for her at that time. She had found her undergraduate course stressful too and wanted a break. Before starting the course she had thought that she would only need to attend one day a week; however, once she began the course she found this not to be the case as it involved more hours than she had envisaged:

There was such an emphasis on how different postgraduate is compared to undergraduate study, the fact that you have to put in many more hours, and that pressure kind of led me to leave, because I thought I'm going to be so stressed with the amount of work and studying that I'm gonna have to do.

(former MSc student)

She had expected the course to be fairly 'self-directed', but felt that it was in fact very similar to the 'classroom' experience at undergraduate level, and this deterred her:

I did still feel like I was in a classroom and being lectured and very much based on doing assignments and coursework, and yes it was quite the same.

(former MSc student)

None of the other students undertaking postgraduate study had ever thought about dropping out.

Peers and friendship

Several interviewees mentioned that at postgraduate level students appear to be more committed to study and more willing to stretch themselves intellectually. This benefited all students because it meant that they were stimulated by discussing ideas with their peer group. This was a notable change from undergraduate level and was valued by respondents:

...because we are all at postgraduate level, they do have something to say. They are not there just to get the attendance marks. They are there because they want to be there. I feel it is different.
(Law student)

One of the most important aspects of the postgraduate experience appears to be the relationships with a peer group. Most respondents reported this as important to them because they felt that the support they received from other students had helped them through the (often stressful) postgraduate experience. When asked what positive experiences they had had while studying as a postgraduate, most mentioned their peers:

I've been very lucky I have some great people on the course with me.
(PGCE student)

I mean the people I have met have been lovely – everybody on the course are all lovely people they are all very nice and that's been very nice.
(MA English student)

The induction process, whereby students had an opportunity to meet, was viewed by most students as helpful in forging relationships with other students. This would usually take the form of a drinks evening or a tea party early on in the term. Students seemed to value this:

Yes, it [induction] was good. On the first days, we were broken up into smaller groups, and we made a lot of friends. And they had a drinks evening after so that was good. There have been a number of little events that they had done to try and enhance the social side, and to make you feel a lot more comfortable.
(Law student)

The role of friendship in supporting student success has been documented in undergraduate studies, and research indicates that for postgraduate students it is equally important. It suggests that students continue to feel that support networks are vital to their success, minimising the risks associated with taking on further study. The next section sets out more in-depth explanations for why students did not wish to continue their studies at postgraduate level.

Barriers and deterrents to postgraduate study

A key factor for many of the 12 interviewees who did not continue on to postgraduate study was the desire to gain work experience. For some this was because they did not have any idea of what further study they wanted to do, but for others it was because they knew that their undergraduate qualification would enable them to find work. This concurs with the findings of the questionnaire. The following comment is typical of the responses:

I don't think I would want to jump straight back into academia. I wanted to put into practice what I have learned over the last few years. I would like to do the job I was taught...(having studied engineering)

I think I was quite content in the fact that I could get a job and earn money and not be so stressed...so I think [that's why] I went into a job from college. I won't go back because I find it quite hard work.
(Undergraduate Engineering student)

Several also felt that employers valued work experience over further qualifications. 'Peter' captured this perspective:

I can't see that it [a postgraduate qualification] would help my career at this stage. Employers want work experience. A degree is important to learn the skills for the job, but then get out there and build your career, well that is what my Dad told me and it seems right (having done a business administration degree). (former BSc student)

Several of the interviewees commented on how much more stressful study was than working as this comment from 'Jackie' highlights:

I am very very conscientious with my work and most of the pressure to do well comes from myself, it's more of a personal thing. ...so decided to leave to get a job to earn money, cos I know I could still progress without having a Masters and be in the same position, if not higher up a year later. ...And not having the stress of doing coursework and assignments (former social science student).

Others referred to needing a break. This also came out strongly as a reason for not continuing immediately in the questionnaire, and is highlighted by the following three interviewees:

Yes I really needed a break, been studying for years. I wanted some normality to life, get a job and get some money coming in (former psychology student).

I wanted a break from study and to earn a bit of money and get some experience (former business student).

Just maybe a break from education, that was quite important I think because you can just learn and learn and learn, but sometimes you need to take a break at the weekend...so that plays a part and that is probably something that would stop me going on to further study (former engineering student).

It was surprising to the research team that in the interviewees' minds 'needing a break from study' was often connected with a sense that higher education study was stressful. The idea of study being stressful was repeated by students undertaking postgraduate qualifications, the student who dropped out of postgraduate study and those who did not go on to postgraduate study. Students pointed out that studying included a judgement on them that could affect their future lives, and for several interviewees being personally accountable for their future was particularly difficult, so much so that it was a barrier to further study. We return to this point in the analysis in the next section.

Financial concerns did not seem to be a significant barrier to postgraduate study confirming the result in the questionnaire where less than a quarter (17%) felt the cost of postgraduate study was a disincentive:

Did finances play a part in your decision to stop studying?

No I don't think so...I think it will be an issue for the students who come after us, with top-up fees, but no not for me.

However, while the cost of postgraduate study did not seem to be a deterrent, some interviewees wanted more money and decided to go into work to enable them to have a decent wage:

I realised that I was sick of not having any money, so decided to leave to get a job to earn money, cos I know I could still progress without having a Masters (former Engineering student).

The tuition fees weren't a problem, my parents would be happy to pay for them. It's very much a personal thing that I wanted to go out and earn some money (former business student).

This response is not about debt, debt worry or the cost of postgraduate study. It is about having money to live a particular lifestyle that they had been unable to while being a student. The interviewee also believed that they would be able to 'progress' without a postgraduate qualification, and they are therefore making a judgement that the postgraduate qualification was not worth the pain of living as a student for another year. Concern about money should not be conflated or confused with concern about debt. The next section takes a number of case studies to illustrate some of the explanations for the participants' decisions and attitudes.

Individual case studies: those currently undertaking postgraduate study

Of the eight respondents who had gone on to postgraduate study, three were from lower socio-economic groups and five from more professional and managerial backgrounds. Their circumstances vary considerably, and the following outlines of their attitudes and actions highlight the importance of individual biography in the process of decision making.

'Nicky'

Nicky is 21 and is currently studying for a Masters in Law. He describes himself as White British. Neither his parents nor his siblings attended university, but they actively encouraged and supported him in going. The reason for this was that his father had done manual work and wanted Nicky to have greater career opportunities than he had experienced.

His father, the main income earner, was employed in a manual occupation. Nicky had initially worked as a labourer but wanted to open up his career opportunities by obtaining a degree. Class was one of Nicky's main concerns before starting his course at university. He was worried about fitting into the social environment and thought that most of his peers would be from higher social backgrounds:

I was expecting to be with people who studied at Oxbridge that had family members who were solicitors [from] quite well-off backgrounds compared to the background I came from.

However, he found this not to be the case and that his peers came from a range of backgrounds. He therefore settled into the environment quite easily:

The expectation regarding people I would be studying with, that has gone now because obviously I have met the people and I've found out that it's not, not the stereotype, they are just ordinary people. So that expectation has gone.

Where I am studying there is another institution that is connected to us, as we are split into two campuses in London. The other campus, I have been told is full of quite high-class people, but the people I have met now, they are just like me. Some have been more fortunate than others but not as daunting as I thought.

Can you tell me the most positive aspect of your postgraduate study?
The people I have met, the friends, they are just brilliant

This emphasises the importance of peers and friendships in alleviating barriers to study. It mirrors work done on first-generation students at undergraduate level

(Stuart 2006), which found that friendships provided the support and information necessary to succeed. Nicky's comments suggest that if he had not found the peer environment supportive, he would not have succeeded.

Nicky has debts from his undergraduate study that he is concerned about, although he expects that once in employment he will be able to gradually pay off this debt:

What about debt?

It's not my main concern at the moment. Of course it's on my mind more now because I'm doing postgraduate studies. Last year the debt I had incurred wasn't that bad, but this year that I'm doing now has mounted it on a little bit, but no, it's OK.

Nicky has his fees paid by a family friend who agreed to sponsor him. However, he pays all other costs himself. He has been unable to work due to a foot injury, which has exacerbated the situation. Nicky did not receive any advice to help him make his decision to continue to study. He said:

Well it was my decision really. No one could advise me. My family were supportive but this is not something they know about, so I had to decide myself.

'Carol'

Carol is in her late forties, has five children and is currently studying for a Masters in Children's Literature. She is from a White British background. Her parents had not attended university and they did not expect Carol to do so, although it was not actively discouraged. They were happy for her to take up nursing as a career, which she pursued after leaving school. Her mother is also a qualified nurse.

Her family was not particularly academic, and although Carol's older sister attended a polytechnic, her two younger sisters did not go on to higher

education. Carol believes that her parents did not place any importance on the three younger sisters going to university. As a mature student, it was Carol's husband, having been to university himself, who had the greatest influence on her decision to go. Again emotional support and encouragement, this time from a partner, is vital to her success.

Carol has no debt as a result of her studies as she receives an LEA grant and also tax credits to supplement the family income. However, the family does live on a very tight budget. Despite having to cut back financially, she has not allowed financial considerations to prevent her from studying at postgraduate level, as she enjoys the subject greatly, and she feels that she has been given a second chance to study later in life. She intends to study for a PGCE after she completes the Masters. Carol also provides some insight into the reasons why having children is a predictor for going on to postgraduate level study. She told us she feels strongly that her experience of higher education has had a positive influence on her children:

It's actually been very very good for our kids to see, what priority the family has put on academic study and education. Cos our oldest son is 19 now, he's actually doing a primary education degree... and our daughter who is 17 is doing A-levels so they're at really influential age, you know, if Mum and Dad can do it, you know, we certainly can.

'Wung Tiet'

Wung Tiet is in her early twenties and had been offered places at two different medical schools for 2007. She is from a Chinese background. Her parents did not attend university themselves, but very much hoped that their children would go into higher education in order to improve their career prospects. She progressed very well at school, and it seemed appropriate that she apply to university. Financial factors are a major concern for Wung Tiet, and she is concerned about the debts she incurred as an undergraduate. The decision to undertake postgraduate study was a difficult one, given her level of debt and the length of training required to qualify in medicine:

I was in quite a lot of debt from my previous degree so this was something that I needed to discuss quite seriously with my Mum, if I would be able to carry on studying. Because at the moment, I'm staying at home for a year and she won't need to fund me next year when I'm studying again, but I need to talk to her about would you be able to fund me for another year while I'm at home, and I will be saving for next degree.

After taking a year out, she has decided to go to medical school and hopes that once in employment she will gradually be able to repay the debt. In discussing financial factors as a potential barrier she said:

I had to do a lot of research of what funding I had available as well so I probably would have gone ahead with it anyway, but it would have been quite a difficult decision without any support.

Despite her 'debt worry' she has sufficient support from her family, which has helped in her decision to take on postgraduate study. She is also making a choice based on her future earnings, weighing up the risks of gaining more debt now, but having greater earnings in the future:

So why do you think you will earn more after finishing your studies?
Well we are told that you do earn more. I have looked into it as I said. No one particularly advised me, but from what I have found out I think I will.

'David'

David is an Engineering student in his early twenties and is from a White British background. Neither of his parents attended university, despite his father being a senior manager in a large firm. However, there was an expectation from his family that he would go to university himself, and they thought that Engineering would lead to good career options. His school careers office also helped him decide to go on to higher education. This is an example of how many middle-class families still do not have experience of higher education despite an expectation that the children will progress to higher education.

David has debts of approximately £12,000, which he views as being an average amount of debt for recently graduated students. His parents paid for his accommodation and living expenses as an undergraduate. Despite this debt, he feels he made the right decision to go to university. He describes his feelings about the situation:

The debt, well it is a problem but I feel that if I've got a degree, I will earn more in my lifetime than I would if I hadn't so will compensate for having to pay the debt off. I'm not worried too much about paying it off to be honest.

Financial considerations were an important factor for him when considering postgraduate study, but his parents and grandparents helped him with the costs:

...course fees are about £3000 but also living expenses and things so that was something I needed to consider. So I talked to my family about that, about where the money was going to come from. That really enabled me to make the decision to do it.

'Ayman'

Ayman is from an Egyptian background and is studying part-time for a postgraduate degree in Pharmacy. He is in his early twenties. His family very much wanted him to go to university, and encouraged him to do Medicine. Both parents had been to university themselves. He finally decided to apply to do Pharmacy but didn't get a place, so went on to take a degree in Chemical and Pharmaceutical Sciences. This was partly because he had enjoyed Chemistry at school, as well as Mathematics. He and his family value education highly and feel that a degree opens up career choices. They therefore felt that it was important that Ayman went into higher education. His teachers also very much encouraged him to do so.

Financial considerations were not a barrier to postgraduate study as Ayman has no student debt to repay. He lived with his parents as an undergraduate and also worked to fund his studies. He also works at the moment and fits this in around part-time study.

'Patricia'

Patricia is in her thirties and has three children. She is studying for a PGCE. She describes herself as White. Her father went to the University of Cambridge and her family expected her to go to university after her A-levels. However, she did not do so at the time because she had had a disruptive education, having been bullied and then having to move schools.

By the time she had completed her A-levels, she was not keen to carry on in academia. Her family were reasonably supportive of her decision to go to secretarial college in the interim, but were still very keen for her to go to university after that. However, she gained a good job offer abroad and then later got married and had children, before attending university at the age of 33. At that time, her parents were not supportive of her decision to study because she had the responsibility of raising her children. Her siblings, however, who had been to university, viewed the decision in a positive light.

As Patricia has children, she is entitled to a student grant and also to government benefits. She feels that her financial situation is reasonable, and she is managing financially at the moment, but is relying on gaining work soon after she qualifies. The following comment sums up her attitude to undertaking postgraduate study:

Are you happy that you are putting money into postgraduate study?
Yes, it is a financial investment, and an intellectual investment.

Individual case studies: those not undertaking postgraduate study

'Heidi'

Heidi is a first-generation student whose parents had no expectation at all of her going to university. None of her siblings or wider family has attended university. There was no intellectual life at home and the matter of further education was not discussed. Heidi was in her mid-thirties when she went to university to study

Nursing. She has student debt of 'a few thousand', but says that it is 'just one of those things'. She explained:

You know it helped me.....I think I was in year two and me computer blew up so I was able to buy a new computer so it was a godsend so I suppose it was a bonus really. Obviously it's got to be paid back, but I am not fretting about it too much.

Heidi's comment suggests an attitude to debt that Watson (2006) calls 'debt joy'. Heidi was not worried about the consequences of building up debt, just interested in having what she regards as necessary for her study at the time. Debt is not something to be afraid of, but rather something to use. Heidi intends to go onto postgraduate study in the future, but would like a break first. She has gained employment and has aspirations to specialise once she knows what field she will be working in. Although she said she found it 'helpful' to be earning again, financial concerns were not a major factor in her decision not to go on to postgraduate study immediately.

'Alex'

Alex is in his early twenties and describes himself as White British. His parents went to university and expected him to do so. Although there was no particular pressure on him to apply, it was more of an assumption that he would given his family background:

I just always assumed I would do GCSEs, A-levels then university. I wanted to go to university mainly for the experience and just to further my education. I didn't see that there would be a benefit to me not going to university. Um ... the fact that my parents both went probably meant that I thought I would go. And I don't think there was any thought about me not going.

He does have some debt from his undergraduate degree, but considers that he is 'in a better position than a lot of people'. His parents helped him financially, buying him a house while he was an undergraduate. However, he is concerned about the financial impact of postgraduate study and does not wish to get into

further debt. Although he has put off postgraduate study because he would like some work experience, he cites debt as the main barrier to further study at present. Debt worry was not seen to relate to a student's occupational class background, and in Alex's case despite his well-off family background he has built up debt during his undergraduate studies. However, he is also aware, from his father's experience, that there are possibilities of employers paying for his future study, and he is making a judgement that going into work first is more likely to produce the career possibilities he would like:

So... you are not thinking of going on in the next year. You will probably try doing it through a company by getting sponsored?

Yes I would go on for a career. If I do go on it is likely to be something like being sponsored by a company. It will probably be an MBA or something further in the business arena. I would do something relevant to a job I was doing. It would be akin to something my father did. He got his degree and then got a job and his job paid for him to go back to business school to get an MBA.

'Elvis'

Elvis is in his early twenties and studied for a degree in Engineering. He describes his ethnic group as Indian. Both his parents have undergraduate degrees and hoped that Elvis would go to university and become an engineer. He felt sure while at school that he would go to university and needed no persuasion to do so, having enjoyed Mathematics and Physics, and gained good grades.

He has no student debts at all as his father paid for all his undergraduate expenses. He is currently applying for jobs in the financial sector, having applied for engineering roles with little success. He would like work experience at this stage because he believes that employers value experience over a higher degree. He said:

I wanted a break from study, and to earn a bit of money and also to get experience because I think a couple of years experience in business, in the real world, will aid my study.

The case studies reveal how each individual was making decisions about their future. Taken together the case studies show how complex the picture is: some with no debt but certain that gaining work experience is the best way forward for their career, such as Elvis, while others with considerable debt and responsibilities, such as Carol, determined that postgraduate study was the right choice for them. However, as with the quantitative data, the subject studied (theoretical or applied) had an impact on the individual's intentions to undertake a postgraduate qualification. The interviewees justified their reasons differently, but their undergraduate qualification and its perceived relevance in the job market was an important factor for all the interviewees. Equally important was the issue of how stressful the interviewees perceived study to be. The final section explores what the research tells us about changing patterns of engagement with higher education.

Section 6 Conclusions: widening participation beyond undergraduate study – lessons from the research

In undertaking this research, we wanted to explore whether the barriers identified in the literature on widening participation in higher education at undergraduate level applied to postgraduate study. Unlike much of the literature on undergraduate widening participation, which identifies class as a significant predictor of undertaking an undergraduate degree, this research found no significant relationship between the respondents occupational class background and their aspirations to undertake postgraduate study. In the qualitative phase of the research it became clear that for students who came from lower socio-economic groups issues such as cultural capital and habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1984), often used as theoretical explanations for class differences in higher education, seem to have been alleviated by the time the students complete their undergraduate qualification. Students who have completed their degrees are already successful, and this research indicates that if they do succeed, class does not affect their future aspirations or actions.

Nicky provides a good example of this. He sets out in his interview to tell us that his expectations of undergraduate study were proved wrong. As he was able to make good friends who were supportive he felt he was successful in his studies, which gave him the confidence to continue on to postgraduate level as discussed above. This does not suggest that habitus is not important, rather, as Thomas (2002) points out, the environment of the institution needs to fit the student. There may be too few people from lower socio-economic groups undertaking postgraduate qualifications, but the reason for this is not that the disadvantages associated with class background documented at earlier stages in education, apply at higher education level. Rather, as Watson points out, widening participation in higher education is less about the higher education experience and more about students 'getting more people to the matriculation starting gate' (2006, p. 8).

There were also no class effects on the type of undergraduate qualification that students had undertaken. However, the research was not able to test whether there were any class effects on the type of qualification students were taking at postgraduate level, and further research on this area should be undertaken because different qualifications can affect life chances.

The research did, however, find that family experience of higher education was a strong predictor of students going on to postgraduate study. While there was a weak relationship between family experience of higher education and class, it was insufficient to make class background a predictor of an individual's intention to undertake a postgraduate qualification by itself. The role of family experience in predicting intentions to undertake postgraduate study should be seen in the context of the number of people from higher socio-economic groups who had not attended a university despite their professional status. Massification of the higher education sector in the UK was only achieved in the late 1980s, and many of the parents (of whatever professional background) of the cohort studied in this research would not have had experienced higher education at this time.

Professions such as nurses, teachers, accountants and bank managers would have gained their training in colleges or in the workplace, and would not have had experience of higher education. Now, in order to enter these professions an undergraduate degree is taken for granted. In exploring this point in more depth in the interviews, it became clear that families had high expectations for their children to go on to take an undergraduate degree, even though they themselves had not studied in higher education; however, they did not always value a postgraduate qualification, as seen in the comments from Peter. Parental expectations are seen to be a significant feature in aspirations to undertake undergraduate study (Gorrard *et al.* 2006). This study highlights that parental experience of higher education also affects aspirations for postgraduate study. If there is an appreciation of the experience of higher education in the family, aspiration to continue to a postgraduate qualification is high. However, in this study, the role of parents was not the only significant aspect of family experience

of higher education that predicted aspiration to undertake a postgraduate qualification; if a student had a partner who had experience of higher education the research indicates that this also affected decisions to undertake postgraduate study. This was discussed with Carol in the interview stage of the research. Carol's partner had recently taken a degree. Neither she nor her partner had parents who had higher education qualifications, and she argued that the support from her partner was an important factor in her continuing on to postgraduate study. This would suggest that, as with peer support, partners can provide the necessary appreciation of the value of higher education to encourage progression to postgraduate level study. In other words, there are ways that the effect of parental experience of higher education can be mediated by other family members who had studied in higher education.

Watson (2006) argues that widening participation is not about debt aversion. This study suggests that debt worry is a deterrent for some groups of students in taking on postgraduate study. However, as the data show, this is not the same as actual debt or even debt aversion because the students who are 'worried about debt' did have debts, even if the actual amount did not make a difference to their anxieties. 'Aversion' indicates an unwillingness to get into debt, and this does not seem to be the case in this study, as participants indicated that they saw debt as a reality in undertaking higher education study.

In the qualitative phase it became clear that lifestyle choice was an important issue for some groups. It was not debt, but how much money students had that influenced some of their decisions to go into the workplace rather than going on to postgraduate study. This subtle difference is important and suggests that as with definitions of 'widening participation' we also need to be clear about issues such as debt, debt worry, debt aversion, available cash, lifestyle expectations and type of debt. For some respondents, such as Carol, having less money was acceptable, while for others, such as Elvis, having a reasonable salary was more important than studying. This research suggests that notions of 'debt aversion' as used in some of the literature, are too simplistic. The research suggests that

further work should be undertaken to examine expectations, lifestyles, money and debt.

The research threw up several issues relating to different ethnic groups. While the disadvantages of class background for those who have succeeded are alleviated by the time they have achieved an undergraduate qualification, there are issues about certain ethnicities and gender. This research does indicate that White UK males are less likely to go on to postgraduate study than people from other backgrounds. This relates to research on poor young White males who drop out early from school, and live within a cycle of deprivation (Jones 2005). This research suggests that even for those who have not dropped out early and have continued successfully into higher education, aspiration to continue on to postgraduate study is not high for White males.

Aspirations from minority ethnic groups in this research, however, proved to be high. This perhaps relates to research that highlights the positive role of parents from minority ethnic backgrounds in encouraging their children to study (Gorrard *et al.* 2006). Wang Tiet was one example where the support of her mother was key to her decision to continue on to postgraduate study. Several of the students from minority communities did not have any student debt as their families paid for their undergraduate study; Ayman is an example. However, the research also points out that the picture is complex, and while aspiration is high in some groups, Black Afro-Caribbeans, in particular have high anxiety about debt and less family experience of higher education, which militates against continuing to study. Recent reports (Broeke and Nicholls 2007) also suggest that some minority ethnic groups are not doing as well at undergraduate level as their white peers, and there is further work on the issue of ethnicity and higher education study that needs to be undertaken.

The research found that overseas students were much more likely to continue to study than UK students. This is perhaps an understandable finding. Students who have been prepared to travel to a different country in order to study are likely

to be highly motivated, but it is a worrying finding in other respects because it confirms other research (Bekhradnia 2005) that points out that despite the postgraduate market growing in the UK, home students are actually declining.

The most significant predictor of the respondents' intentions to undertake postgraduate level study at any time was the type of course they had studied at undergraduate level. Those with applied vocational qualifications were significantly less likely to want to take a postgraduate qualification. For many, such as Elvis, this was connected to a perception that employers valued work experience more than study. If this is the case it has implications for higher education institutions regarding how they engage with employers in the future, the courses they design and their ability to demonstrate the relevance of further study to the workplace.

Many of the interviewees who had taken jobs were keen to undertake a postgraduate qualification at a later stage. Several believed that their employers would pay their fees to do this. In some cases, such as Alex, this is based on family experience. Whether the perception is that employers value work experience more than qualifications or that employers will pay for postgraduate qualifications in the future, the respondents in this research, such as Nicky, were making a personal judgement, often only based on their own feelings. Even Wung Tiet, who had done research to try to weigh up the benefits, felt that she was taking a considerable risk in making her decision.

There is perhaps a need for better information for students from career services about their options. Providing relevant information to undergraduate finalists may be particularly important for students who have no family experience of higher education, as these students have no reference point on which to base their decisions.

A surprising issue that emerged from the qualitative data was the extent to which interviewees explained their decision to 'take a break from study' as being a

feature of the stress that they associated with studying. Stress was also a significant issue for the students who were undertaking postgraduate courses, but they felt that their support networks mitigated stress.

The participants in this study saw their life choices as personal responsibilities that involve risk. Their belief was that they were in charge (and therefore responsible) for their actions and decisions, which could have positive and negative effects. This world view was evident in the way the participants responded both to the questionnaire and in interviews, and is expressive of the theories of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992).

Beck developed the idea of a 'risk society' where modernist controls such as the state and traditional class boundaries have weakened, and individuals are increasingly bearing the risks for the development of their own biography. Previously structured choices and opportunities no longer determine biography, and individuals have to make choices and take decisions about their own futures. While this creates more freedom than in previous social environments, it is much more risky. Giddens (1991) and Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994) argue that with the weakening of traditional ties in late modernity, individuals are forced to reflexively monitor their own behaviour and biography. Decision making is an anxious process as there are fewer rules. As Furlong and Cartmel point out:

People are progressively freed from the social networks and constraints of the old order and forced to negotiate a new set of hazards which impinge on all aspects of their day to day lives. (1997, p. 3).

Miles argues that this 'liberation...at the same time [creates people] bereft of traditional forms of protection and support' (2000, p. 55). The importance placed on support networks, many of which focused on peers and friendships, by the respondents in this research would suggest that the anxiety expressed by respondents was partly due to the insecurity of late modern life. Rustin highlights that:

Society exposes individuals to bombardments of information, alternative versions of how life might be lived and requires of individuals that they construct an 'authentic' version of themselves, making use of the numerous identity props which consumer-society makes available to them. (2000, p. 33).

Risk society expects individuals to be personally responsible for their actions. Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994) take this further arguing that reflexive behaviour is about making choices that are reasoned. The respondents in this research are good examples of this. The most significant predictor of someone's intentions to undertake a postgraduate qualification or not was the discipline (theoretical or applied) they had studied at undergraduate level. They all had clear reasons for their decisions and saw these leading to positive outcomes for their future careers, whether the decision was to take on further study or not. It is rational to decide to go into employment if the undergraduate qualification you have studied leads directly into a career. It is equally rational to further your studies if your undergraduate qualification did not have an obvious career path. Risks are not evenly distributed, and Beck argues that social background does still play a determining role, but at the level of the individual not at the level of the whole class. This again is evident in this research as individual cases had different effects from their backgrounds.

The light that the theory of reflexive modernisation and risk society sheds on the widening participation debate is about the individualisation of society and the process of risk that individuals bear for their actions. In line with what Beck ascertains about the role of education in constructing successful biographies, higher education was seen by all the respondents in this research as a key to minimising risk and negotiating their future careers by undertaking an undergraduate qualification. However, the respondents made choices about further study based on balancing perceived risks of stress in study, the value of work experience and their undergraduate qualification, their perceptions of debt and their available money. The risks they bear, as Beck (1992) points out, are not evenly spread across society, and these risks are perhaps higher where the

individual has no family experience of higher education as they have to rely on their own resources to make their decisions. The research suggests that greater attention should be paid to the role of families; for example, parental experience of higher education, partners and children, the importance of financial and emotional support from families and peers, and familial aspirations and attitudes to higher education.

Study itself was regarded as stressful because it creates personal risks related to succeeding. The respondents took rational decisions to minimise this risk, either deciding they did not need further qualifications because they had taken a vocational route in the first place, or by using their support networks to help them bear the risk of further study. Staff working in higher education should be aware of the extent to which students feel anxious and stressed by study. They should look to find ways to alleviate that anxiety by encouraging social interaction between students and creating a friendly environment with staff, not only at undergraduate level, but also, as highlighted in this research, at postgraduate level.

Conclusions, recommendations and future research

Widening participation

This research was based on a large sample of finalists at two institutions in England. The sample provided an opportunity to test a number of assumptions about widening participation in higher education. Most significantly for widening participation, family experience of higher education had an important effect on the respondents' decisions. This was further conflated with some ethnic groups. Widening participation practitioners may wish to consider what advice and aspiration-raising work they could undertake with students once they are studying in higher education.

Student support and advice

The research suggests that undergraduate finalists could be better prepared, especially if they are the first in their family to go into higher education, for the crucial decisions they have to make about career and future study.

In policy terms, careers services and perhaps tutors teaching finalists should ensure there is sufficient information and guidance available at this point to students who are the first in their families to go into higher education to help them make informed decisions about their futures.

Curriculum design

All respondents indicated that career opportunities were important to them, whether this was because they had chosen a more vocationally focused programme of undergraduate study or whether they had decided to go on to postgraduate study in order to gain an edge in the job market. Those who design and teach vocational undergraduate qualifications should find the results of this research pleasing, as it indicates that students feel their qualifications have properly prepared them for the workplace. It is worth national higher education policymakers noting this, and further work to test this finding could be undertaken using the first destination of leavers survey as well as further research with undergraduate finalists. However, for those who design and teach postgraduate qualifications it is important to consider the implications from this research that suggest students are hoping their postgraduate qualification will enable them to progress in the job market. Curriculum should be designed to meet this expectation. The role of postgraduate qualifications in providing vocational outcomes is an important finding for those who devise programmes and develop curriculum to ensure their offer is what students are looking for.

The balance of postgraduate students

The sector should be concerned that the student number growth in postgraduate programmes is largely due to an increase in overseas students, which is confirmed in this study. It suggests that while for marketing managers in higher

education there is clearly a market in their current overseas students to encourage them to continue studying to postgraduate level at their institutions; it also suggests we need to pay more attention to our home students' aspirations. Perhaps there is a need to undertake further aspiration-raising work with home students on the value of postgraduate study.

Peer support and student expectations

The findings on the postgraduate experience highlight, as in the literature on undergraduate study, that peer support is important for students. The research also suggests that postgraduate tutors should support peer learning both in and beyond the classroom. This is especially important for postgraduate research students. However, overall the respondents indicated that their expectations of postgraduate study had been met, which is a positive finding for higher education institutions. Further research on the experience of postgraduate students could explore how student expectations of postgraduate study are developed.

Undergraduate qualifications that were directed towards particular careers had a negative effect on students wanting to go on to postgraduate study, and this was further compounded by anxieties about debt and worries about the stress of actual study. By the end of the research, concepts such as 'anxiety' and 'risk' became particularly significant: anxiety about debt as well as studying itself and the risks associated with decision making about future careers. Appropriate advice and support needs to be available and accessible for all students on campuses, and special attention should be paid to students during their final undergraduate year as they decide on their future lives.

Marketing

The research offers rich data on the decision-making processes of students. There is a clear indication that vocational outcomes are important to all students at different stages of their academic career, and marketing professionals may want to investigate how they can promote the vocational possibilities of their HEI's offerings at different levels. Equally this research indicates that different

student groups have different aspirations in taking on postgraduate study, and marketing departments may want to target their own student populations to recruit future postgraduate students, especially by staying in touch with those who indicate that they intend to undertake postgraduate study at a later date.

Further Research

Reay, David and Ball (2005) argue for sociology of choice and suggest that different groups are making choices about entering higher education in complex ways. For researchers examining 'choice' and decision making from the perspective of anxiety and risk, this could offer some interesting results for future research.

There is limited literature on decision making and postgraduate study. Certainly more work should be undertaken to gain a better understanding of how students exercise choice and take decisions, and what impact these decisions have on students' future life chances. This research has provided some insights into this process and, as always, has thrown up new areas for research. Further work on this topic could be undertaken using different institutions and a wider base of interviewees.

Further research on student stress and anxiety about study is also suggested as the research team were surprised at the extent to which participants indicated that one of their key reasons for not continuing to postgraduate study, whether immediately or not at all, was related to needing a break from studying. When probed at the interview stage participants clearly indicated that they had found studying particularly stressful.

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Personal Note

This project began under a set of very sad circumstances. Dr Sandra Winn who had worked on the bid with me and Shell Morgan, died quite suddenly, just after we had successfully gained the grant from the Higher Education Academy. I would like to dedicate this report to Sandra. I am very grateful to Dr Catherine Lido who stepped in and worked with the project team to ensure the effective delivery of the project.

Mary Stuart

Appendix 1 Questionnaire and interview schedule

Views on Postgraduate Study 2006			
<p>This survey of students' attitudes towards their education is being carried out by the Universities of Brighton and Kingston. It covers your views on future study. Your help is greatly appreciated. Please answer the following questions and tick only one box unless asked to tick more than one.</p> <p>All answers are confidential and will not be attributed to you in any analysis.</p>			
1 Introduction			
1.1 What type of student are you?			
1	UK	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2	EU	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3	Overseas	<input type="checkbox"/>	
1.2 What year are you in?			
1	Year 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	We are sorry to have troubled you! Please do not continue with the questionnaire. Please return it.
2	Year 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue on to question 2.1
3	Year 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue on to question 2.1
2 Before going to University			
2.1 Which of these was your highest qualification before going to University?			
1	A Levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	UCAS points / Grades.....
2	AVCEs	<input type="checkbox"/>	UCAS points / Grades.....
3	Scottish Highers	<input type="checkbox"/>	UCAS points / Grades.....
4	GNVQ/NVQ/SVQ Level 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	UCAS points / Grades.....
5	BTEC national diploma/ cert	<input type="checkbox"/>	UCAS points / Grades.....
6	Access course qualification	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7	HND/HNC	<input type="checkbox"/>	UCAS points / Grades.....
8	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Please specify qualification and grade/s.....
2.2 How were you offered a place at your university?			
Through a direct application to your University (excluding clearing)		<input type="checkbox"/>	2 Through UCAS <input type="checkbox"/>
			3 Through clearing <input type="checkbox"/>

3 About your course**3.1 What type of degree are you presently undertaking?**1 BA 2 BSc 3 BEng 4 MEng 5 BMaths 6 MMath 7 LLB 8 Other Please state.....**3.2 What is the main subject of your course?**1 Health (e.g. pharmacy, nursing, midwifery, pharmacology, radiography, physiotherapy) 2 Natural and physical sciences (e.g. biology, chemistry, enviro:sciences, maths, physics) 3 Engineering and Technology (e.g. mechanical, automotive, aeronautical, software) 4 Social studies/science (e.g. economics, social policy, politics, psychology) 5 Computer science (e.g. computing, internet, digital development, information systems) 6 Business and administrative studies (e.g. accounting, finance, business management, marketing) 7 Humanities (e.g. archeology, English, French, history, geography, philosophy) **3.3 Are you studying**1 Full-time 2 Part-time **4 After your undergraduate studies****4.1 Are you thinking of going on to postgraduate study at any time in the future?**1 Yes **If yes, continue on to question 4.2**2 No **If no, go to section 8****4.2 Are you planning to go on to postgraduate study?**1 Immediately after your undergraduate degree **If yes, continue on to question 4.3**2 Within 2-3 years of graduating **Continue on to question 4.4**3 Later on **Continue on to question 4.4**

4.3 Why are you planning to go on to postgraduate study immediately after your undergraduate degree?

1	Complete all education before starting career	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	To maintain career momentum	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Complete all education whilst used to financial constraints	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Postgraduate qualification needed for chosen career	<input type="checkbox"/>
	5	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Please state.....	

Continue on to section 5

4.4 Why have you decided to NOT undertake postgraduate study immediately after you complete your undergraduate degree? (Please rank your top 3 reasons where 1= 1st choice)

1	Want a break from studying	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Want to start a family	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Level of postgraduate fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Personal/family commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Need to reduce undergraduate debt first	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	Gap year/travel	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Undecided about what to study	<input type="checkbox"/>	8	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify.....

Continue on to section 5

5 Postgraduate study

5.1 What type of postgraduate study are you thinking of undertaking?

1	MA	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	MSc	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	MBA	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	MPhil	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	MA/MSc followed by PhD	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	Taught/ professional PhD	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	MPhil/ PhD	<input type="checkbox"/>	8	PhD	<input type="checkbox"/>	9	LLM	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	PGCE	<input type="checkbox"/>	11	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Please state.....		

5.2 Will the postgraduate study be in the subject of your undergraduate degree?

1	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	If no, what is the subject?.....
3	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	

5.3 What type of postgraduate study mode are you considering?											
1 Full-Time <input type="checkbox"/>				2 Part-time <input type="checkbox"/>				3 Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>			
Please state why.....											
5.4 Why are you thinking of undertaking postgraduate study? (Please rank your top 3 choices where 1= 1st choice)											
1 Improve knowledge of my subject <input type="checkbox"/>				2 Provide more career options <input type="checkbox"/>							
3 Family expectations <input type="checkbox"/>				4 Improve chances of getting a graduate job <input type="checkbox"/>							
5 Delay going into the job market <input type="checkbox"/>				6 Desire to remain in higher education <input type="checkbox"/>							
7 For the enjoyment of studying <input type="checkbox"/>				8 Gain exposure to the research environment <input type="checkbox"/>							
9 Required for my chosen career <input type="checkbox"/>				10 Encouraged by university staff <input type="checkbox"/>							
11 Other <input type="checkbox"/>				Please state.....							
5.5 What will be important to you when choosing a University for your postgraduate study? (Please rank your top 3 choices where 1= 1st choice)											
1 Course content <input type="checkbox"/>				2 University's research reputation <input type="checkbox"/>							
3 Cost of fees <input type="checkbox"/>				4 University's teaching reputation <input type="checkbox"/>							
5 Campus facilities <input type="checkbox"/>				6 Where I studied as an undergraduate <input type="checkbox"/>							
7 My home town University <input type="checkbox"/>				8 Studentship grant /scholarship available <input type="checkbox"/>							
9 Reputation for social life <input type="checkbox"/>											
10 Other <input type="checkbox"/>				Please state.....							
5.6 Which university is your first choice institution for your postgraduate degree?											
Please state or tick don't know.....											
Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>				If don't know, go to section 6							
5.7 Why have you chosen this University?											
Please state.....											
Continue on to section 6											

6 Finances

6.1 By the end of your undergraduate studies, roughly how much money will you owe (if any) as a result of being at university? (Exclude any money owed on a mortgage)

Debt to Student Loans Company
Enter amount. A rough estimate is fine £

Other debt (e.g. overdraft, credit cards)
Enter amount. A rough estimate is fine £

6.2 What is your attitude to the debt students incur as a result of their undergraduate studies?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
1 Most students have to go into debt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Borrowing money for a University education is a good investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 I am worried about the debts I am building up whilst at university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 I am not worried about debt at university because I know I will get a well paid job after my studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Debt could put me off going on to further study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6.3 Are the fee levels the most important factor in making your choice of postgraduate course?

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither Agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6.4 How do you expect to fund your postgraduate studies?

(Please rank your top 3 sources of funding where 1= 1st source)

1 Self-funded though loan/overdraft	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 Overdraft	<input type="checkbox"/>	3 Funded by parents/guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Funded by spouse / partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	5 Savings	<input type="checkbox"/>	6 University scholarship/studentship	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Salary	<input type="checkbox"/>	8 Employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	9 Sponsorship	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Research Council Studentship (e.g. ESRC, EPSRC, AHRC)	<input type="checkbox"/>	11 Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Please state.....	

6.5 Do you intend to undertake paid work during your postgraduate studies?
 (Exclude work placements which might be part of your postgraduate studies)

1 Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue on to section 7	2 Only during term time	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Only during vacations	<input type="checkbox"/>		4 In both vacations and term-time	<input type="checkbox"/>

6.6 If you intend undertaking paid work during your postgraduate studies, will it be

1 Full-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 Part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>
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7 Postgraduate study expectations

7.1 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

(Tick one box for each statement)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither Agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
1 My expectations in terms of quality of delivery and service at postgraduate level will be higher than at undergraduate level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 I expect to be treated in a manner which reflects my academic achievement as a graduate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 I expect to learn in a more independent manner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 My tolerance of poor quality of delivery and service at postgraduate level will be lower than at undergraduate level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 I expect more value for money at postgraduate level than at undergraduate level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 I expect a more individualised study experience at postgraduate level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 I don't know what to expect when studying at postgraduate level	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Now go to section 9

8 Reasons for not undertaking postgraduate study

8.1 Why do you not want to go on to postgraduate study?

(Please rank your top 3 reasons where 1= 1st source)

1 Want a break from studying	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 Will not add to my employment prospects	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Want to enter employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	4 Do not expect to achieve the entry requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Level of postgraduate fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	6 Personal/family commitments	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Want to start a family	<input type="checkbox"/>	8 Need to reduce my undergraduate debt first	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Please state.....	

Now go to section 9

9 Employers' attitudes to postgraduate study

9.1 . Do you think employers value a postgraduate qualification more than an undergraduate one?

1 Yes 2 No 3 Don't know

If Yes or No, please state why.....

10 About you and your family

Everybody to answer this section

10.1 What is your age?

(Please write your age in years in the box)

10.2 Are you

1 Female 2 Male

10.3 To which of the following ethnic groups do you consider you belong?

1 White British 2 White Irish 3 White other
 4 Black African 5 Black Caribbean 6 Black other
 7 Bangladeshi 8 Chinese 9 Indian
 10 Pakistani 11 Mixed ethnic group

2 Other ethnic group Please state.....

10.4 Who do you live with?

1 Parents/guardian in their home 2 Other students/friends in owned or rented accommodation 3 Partner/spouse in owned or rented accommodation
 4 By myself in owned or rented accommodation

10.5 Do you have any dependent children in the following age groups?

1 None 2 Under 5 yrs 3 5-10 yrs 4 11-16 yrs 5 17 yrs +

10.6 Have your parents/guardians studied at University?

	Yes 1	No 2	Don't know 3
1 Father/male guardian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Mother/female guardian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Grandparents (mother's side)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Grandparents (father's side)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10.7 Have you a sibling or a child who has studied at University?				
(Tick yes if started even if they withdrew later)				
	Yes	No	Relative of this kind	Not old enough to go to university
				Did not go to university
1	Brother/sister	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Son/daughter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.8 Do you have a partner/spouse who has studied at University?				
	Yes	No	Do not have a partner/spouse	
1	Partner/spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.9 Which of your parents/guardians is/was the main income earner?				
(main income refers to the person with the largest income whether from employment, pensions, investments or any other source)				
1	Father/male guardian	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Mother/female guardian <input type="checkbox"/>
	3 Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Please state.....	
10.9 Was this parent/guardian				
	1 an employee	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to question 10.10	
	2 self-employed with employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to question 10.11	
	3 self-employed without employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to question 10.13	
10.10 How many people worked for your parent/guardian's employer?				
1	1 to 24	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	25 or more <input type="checkbox"/> Go to question 10.13
10.11 How many staff does/did your parent/guardian employ?				
1	1 to 24	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	25 or more <input type="checkbox"/> Go to question 10.13
10.12 Did your parent/guardian supervise any other employees?				
1	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	No <input type="checkbox"/> Go to question 10.13

10.13 Which group best describes the sort of work your parent/guardian does/did undertake?									
1	Group A	- e.g. Teacher-Nurse-social worker-welfare officer-police officer-software designer- artist-musician	<input type="checkbox"/>						
2	Group B	- e.g. Secretary-personal assistant-clerical worker-office clerk-nursing auxiliary-nursery nurse	<input type="checkbox"/>						
3	Group C	- e.g. Finance Manager-chief executive- responsible for planning,organising and coordinating work	<input type="checkbox"/>						
4	Group D	- e.g. Motor mechanic-fitter-plumber-printer-tool maker-electrician-gardner-train driver	<input type="checkbox"/>						
5	Group E	- e.g. Postal worker-machine operative-security guard-caretaker-farm worker-catering assistant-receptionist	<input type="checkbox"/>						
6	Group F	- e.g. HGV driver-van driver-porter-packer-sewing machinist-labourer-waiter/waitress-bar staff	<input type="checkbox"/>						
7	Group G	- e.g. Office manager-retail manager-bank manager-restaurant manager-publican-warehouse manager	<input type="checkbox"/>						
8	Group H	- e.g. Accountant-solicitor-medical practitioner-scientist-civil/mechanical engineer	<input type="checkbox"/>						
9	Group I	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>						
If other, please state.....									
Please turn over the page for the last section									

11 Final Section									
Thank you for your help so far.									
We would like to interview some students a few months after you have graduated. There will be a payment of £10 per interview .									
If you are willing to be interviewed									
Please write your full name and your long term address, telephone number and email address where we could contact you in the future. Your details will be treated confidentially by us and will not be passed on to anyone else. They will only be used by us for research purposes.									
Name									
Long-term Address									
Postcode									
Telephone number									
Personal email add:									
Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire									

Interview questions for all interviewees

During the interview, we need to ask you a few quick questions you have already answered on the questionnaire you completed back in April. This is because all the information you supplied on the questionnaire is anonymous and confidential. From your email response regarding participating in phase 2, you have already told us if you had gone on to PG study, your ethnicity and whether a parent/guardian had been to university. The following questions are designed to help us understand all the issues around students' decisions relating continuation on to PG study. Is that OK?

	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
1	Tell me about your previous educational experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest entry qualifications • Entry route to uni
2	Did you feel there was an expectation from your family that you would go to university?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home life • Exposure to books/newspapers • Intellectual conversation • Politics
3	Why did you decide to go to university?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career • Interest in subject • Love of studying • Expected to • Didn't know what else to do • College staff
4	Who helped you decide?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Teachers • Friends • Careers Officers
5	How old were you when you started at university? And when you finished your undergraduate studies?	
6	What did you study at undergraduate level and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BA/BSc • Science/Arts subject • Good at it • Enjoyed it
7	How do you feel about your finances as a result of your undergraduate study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worried because of debt • Fine about it • Has this influenced future decisions?
8	Is there anything specific about your undergraduate experience that influenced your decisions regarding postgraduate study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendships • Personal Tutors • Academics • Support staff • Welfare services
9	Who, if anyone, helped you decide about	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academics

	postgraduate study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends • Parents/family • Careers advisors
10	Are you happy with your decision regarding postgraduate study?	
11	Do you see any major issues regarding you going on to PG study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debt • Family commitments • Cost of PG study
12	<p>Are you attending or do you intend going on to PG study? If so, when?</p> <p>If not gone at all, go to part 2</p> <p>If they have gone immediately, go to part 3</p> <p>If they intend going on in the next year or later, go to part 4</p>	
<p>PART 2: For those not intending to go on to PG study at all</p>		
13	Why did you decide not to go on to PG study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money • Bored of study • Family commitments
14	Having been out of education for 9 months, has your attitude towards further study changed? Please state why.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't get a job • Bored • Will go back at some point • Still do not want to do anymore study
15	Are there any issues which have impacted on your ability to study at PG level?	
16	If there were no issues, would you consider studying at PG level?	
<p>Go to part 5 to ask about Occupational Class</p>		
<p>PART 3: For those currently studying at postgraduate level</p>		
17	What were your reasons for continuing on to PG study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve knowledge of subject • Love of studying • Required for career • Encouraged by uni staff • Provide more career options • Friends going on • Parents encouraged
18	Why did you choose the subject and qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyment

	you are studying at PG level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career requirement
19	Why did you decide to go straight on to postgraduate study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get education over with • Maintain career momentum • Need PG qualifications
20	Did you have any expectations about PG study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher level of teaching • More independent study • More autonomous
21	Where are you studying and why did you choose this particular institution?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Near home • Good course • Excellent reputation • Cost • Studied there at undergraduate level
22	Is it a different institution to that of your undergraduate degree? If yes, does it differ in anyway and how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bigger/smaller • Academically better • More friendly • Better/poorer facilities • Diff attitude to students
23	Are the differences due to studying at PG level or is it an institutional difference?	
24	How are you funding your postgraduate studies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self • Grant • Parent • Loan/overdraft • Work
25	How do you feel about your finances as a result of your PG study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment • Worried • Could put me off further study
26	Do you feel that you are getting the right level of academic and student welfare support as a PG student from induction onwards? Explain how and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good supervision • Enough supervision • Good induction to PG study • Good welfare support
27	Was the induction process an important step of your PG studies? If yes why and how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded me into my studies • Showed diff between undergraduate and PG • Made good friends
28	Have your PG studies met your expectations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard of teaching • Level of intellect • Quality • Right for career path
29	Is your experience studying at PG level different to that at undergraduate level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More autonomous • Less contact

	If yes, how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self directed
30	Have you had any specific experiences, good or bad, whilst studying at PG level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learnt more about myself • Made good career contacts • Made good friends • Experienced diff teaching methods • Felt more grown up about my learning
31	How important are the university facilities in helping you in your PG studies? Which ones have been important and why? And are they the same as at undergraduate level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computing • Welfare
32	Having continued studying, has your attitude changed towards further study? Please state why.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wish I hadn't gone on • Not worth it • Loved every minute
33	Do you feel that there are any issues which have impacted on your ability to undertake postgraduate study?	
Part 4:		
For those considering going on to postgraduate study within year or later		
34	Why have you decided to go on to PG study later?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break • Need work experience • Reduce undergraduate debt • Family commitments
35	What are your reasons for wanting to go on to PG study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve knowledge of subject • Love of studying • Required for career • Encouraged by uni staff • Provided more career options
36	Have you chosen a subject and qualification to study at PG level yet? If so, what and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSc/PhD/PGCE etc • Enjoyment • Career requirement
37	Having taken a break from studying, has your attitude changed towards further study? Please state how and why?	
38	Do you feel that there are any issues which have impacted on your ability to undertake postgraduate study?	
39	If there were no issues, would you be studying at PG level now?	
Go to part 5 to ask about Occupational Class		
Part 5:		
Occupational Class question		

And finally, as the study is attempting to understand the reasons why students from all groups and backgrounds make the decisions about postgraduate study that they do, one area we need to explore is that of your parents' background. One issue is if they went to university. You have already supplied us with this information. The other factor you may have supplied us with already (it was part of the anonymous questionnaire so we can't use it for this section of the study) is the type of job they did. The next few questions will help us try and understand if the type of work they did impacts on their son or daughter continuing on to PG study. Are you happy for me to proceed?

40	Which parent was the main income earner?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Father • Mother • Other – please state
41	<p>Was your parent/guardian an:</p> <p><u>Employee? (if an employee, ask the questions directly below)</u></p> <p>How many worked for your parent/guardian's employer at their place of work?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1-24</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">25 or more</p> <p>Did they supervise any employees?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Yes</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">No</p> <p><i>Now go to the next main question</i></p> <p><u>Self-employed with employees? (if self-employed with employees, ask the questions directly below)</u></p> <p>How many staff does/did your parent/guardian employ?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1-24</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">25 or more</p> <p><i>Now go to the next main question</i></p> <p><u>Self-employed without employees?</u> <u>(if self-employed without employees go to the next Question)</u></p>	

42	<p>Which group best describes the sort of work your parent/guardian does/did?</p> <p>Group A - e.g. teacher, nurse, social worker, welfare officer, police officer, software designer, artist, musician</p> <p>Group B - e.g. secretary, personnel assistant, clerical worker, office clerk, nursing auxiliary, nursery nurse</p> <p>Group C - e.g. finance manager, chief executive, responsible for planning and coordinating work</p> <p>Group D - e.g. motor mechanic, fitter, plumber, printer, tool maker electrician, gardener, train driver</p> <p>Group E - e.g. postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, receptionist</p> <p>Group F - e.g. HGV driver, van driver, porter, packer, sewing machinist, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff</p> <p>Group G - e.g. office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, publican, warehouse manager</p> <p>Group H - e.g. accountant, solicitor, medical practitioner, scientist, civil/mechanical engineer</p> <p>Group I - other (please state)</p>	
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Turn tape off and ask for the address they want the book voucher sent to.

For all students undertaking PG study now – ask them if they will be happy to be interviewed at the end of their studies.

We will send you a web address so you can follow the research if you wish and make further comments on the blog.

Thank you for your time and good luck with whatever you do.

Appendix 2 Dissemination of the project

Dissemination was integral to the project. A steering group was established at the start of the project with representation from both institutions participating in the project, the Postgraduate Students Council, the Higher Education Academy and two academics working in the field of postgraduate students and widening participation.

In order to create a wider forum for discussion, an external website and 'blog' were set up. The blog proved to be an interesting communication tool with colleagues from different parts of the UK. In particular, widening participation practitioners in pre-1992 institutions, who were looking at widening access to postgraduate study, followed the reports of the project through the blogs and emailed the team several times asking follow-up questions about the data presented. From our experience in this project, the research team would recommend using blogs as a useful and more informal way of communicating with the wider community.

Findings were presented to managers at both the institutions that participated in the research, and the findings are being used by their student services and marketing departments.

The research team also contributed to several conferences including the UK Council for Graduate Education in 2008 and The Fifth Annual Postgraduate Conference in 2007. A project dissemination conference was held in May 2007 at Kingston University, which attracted 50 participants.