

PAIRED PEERS: THE FIRST YEAR

'Getting in and Settling in'

A Leverhulme Foundation funded study at
the universities of Bristol and West of England

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INTRODUCTORY. 1 Context

- Concerns about widening participation, especially in elite universities
- Concern about effects of recent HE policy in possibly restricting access for young people from poorer backgrounds
- Need to understand what kind of provision will aid integration of students from diverse backgrounds into university life

INTRODUCTORY. 2 Aims of study

- To compare the experiences of students from different backgrounds, in 2 different universities, in a range of different subjects
- To do this utilising a matched pairs method
- To follow a cohort of pairs over their 3 years of study
- To explore what factors help students to academic success
- To investigate the impact of different forms of capital: economic, social, cultural, virtual, embodied etc
- To experiment with a range of methods to explore experiences, behaviours and attitudes

INTRODUCTORY 3. Methods Year 1

- Recruitment of pairs: biology, drama, economics & accountancy, engineering, English, geography, history, law, politics, psychology, sociology. 90 students (1 left)
- 1st interview: an unstructured account of how the students came to be at UoB or UWE. 90 completed
- 2nd Interview: semi – structured: how they have settled into student life and experienced their first year. 76 completed, including 30 pairs
- Photos of their Christmas holidays
- ‘A day in the life’: short diary accounts

FINDINGS 1 - GETTING IN

- **Motivations and choices**
- **Role of families and schools**
- **Significant others**
- **UoB or UWE?**

Motivations and choices

- Economic/career
- For many young people a degree was seen as economically necessary
 - a) to get a well-paid high-status graduate career
 - b) to get any kind of job with prospects

I just wanted to get a solid decent profession, and a lot of professions ask for a degree of some kindthere were certain subjects that I really liked, like politics and history and English but there was no kind of direct path to like a certain job, and I like to have kind of security (f UoB m/c)

- *If you don't have a good degree and you want to earn a lot of money in the future, which I do, there are very few avenues open to you I like the idea of sort of management consultancy, you know, maybe investment banking, something in the City, something that would pay very, very well.... a sort of multinational company would maybe give me the opportunities in the future of being able to work abroad for a few years.. get an MBA which you need sort of 5 years in business (m UoB m/c)*
- *Prospects aren't that great...if you don't have a degree, in retail, because a few of my friends at Sainsbury's I know are trying to work their way ... one of my friends, he's been there five years and he's only just become a team leader, the next step, and... yeah, it's not worth the effort you put in I don't think. The rewards you get back from that career structure isn't brilliant. Whereas conversely, my old store manager, he had an economics degree, he was 29 and he's been promoted again; now he's left, he's become personal assistant to the regional manager I think he's on really good money (m UoB w/c)*

Motivations and choices

- The done thing ... ‘rite de passage’
- Taken for granted in middle-class families
- Spreading to others; the ‘degree generation’?

I was always going to go to university. It wasn't a question of not. I don't know whether that's because of my....well yeah, both my parents went to university and everyone from my school went to university. But beyond that....I just don't know if I'm ready to be a real person yet, to work and all that kind of thing and all those worries (m UoB m/c)

It was the sort of thing that everyone did at my school. It was definitely expected of you to go to university ... in fact I don't think I know anyone that didn't, so... I just went with what everyone did (f UoB m/c)

People of my generation, it's just going to be the “degree generation”, everyone's going to have a degree, so it's just how you can distinguish yourself from those other people... that's the base rate (m UWE w/c)

Motivations and choices

- Escape and change.
- Moving out from straitened horizons
- Negative home experiences
- *I wanted to get a higher level of qualification as well as meet new people, do something, not just go straight out into work and stay in the same northern bubble that I was in, but to remove myself and like go to a completely different environment (f UoB w/c)*
- *Well none of my mum or dad have gone to university and through my life I've sort of seen the impacts of that, like financially throughout my whole life my mum's never had any money, and neither has my dad really. ...my whole life has just seen them struggling through debts and I just thought "well I can't be bothered to handle that", I'm going to work like hard and get a job hopefully that will earn me loads of money, which is why I want to be a barrister (m UWE w/c)*

Motivations and choices

- Local attractions
- Feelings of safety and comfort zone
- Staying with friendship group
- Family commitments: parents, spouses, children, sibs
- Lower costs

I was always looking at local because I am very family orientated so I do like being with my family and close to them in order to get home (f UWE w/c)

It's such a statistically a good university, you know it's a Russell Group university.. it's traditionally seen by employers as a reputable and a very good university and that, with the added bonus of cost, obviously it's a lot cheaper not to move away, I don't have to worry about accommodation fees (m UoB w/c)

Families: parental support

- Parental support, sacrifice and help
- *They were very proud of me. They didn't put any pressure on me, they just wanted me to achieve the best I could. Obviously it's been tough for them, first time in almost 20 years that I haven't been their focus, having moved away from home, moved away quite a long way, but yes they were very supportive, couldn't have asked for anything more than what they did for me (m UoB m/c)*
- *And then they used to like prepare me for university as well, mostly for the social life side of university. They were like "you need to do this and this, take pictures, if you're going out here make sure you do this" and I was like "OK". And then I think mostly preparing me for the study side and the emotional side was my mum, like we had a lot of talks about it (f UoB w/c)*

School effects

- Deficiencies in some state schools
- Others doing a good job of preparation
- *Well GCSE, kind of no-one really tells you anything.. my school was fairly good as state schools go but they just didn't....they said "well if you need to do...." but no-one even told me that if I wanted to do medicine I had to take the sciences and maths, I just knew that because people told me or I found out on the internet. They didn't prepare me at all (f UoB w/c)*
- *They did sort of work experience things but they were never very interesting, they didn't inspire you. No-one came in & said "do you know I've got this amazing career, if you really want to do this this is what you need to do in life". .. We went to see the careers people..they just kind of did their job and tapped into the computer (ibid w/c)*
- *In our form classes they helped with like our personal statement and our UCAS application. Like we had sessions in the computer room where we had to apply and stuff and join up. They made everyone sign up to UCAS even if we didn't think we were going to go to uni. Then our form tutor like wanted us to do our personal statement and like bring it to her every week so she could check on it (f UWE w/c)*

Families and schools

Disruptive learning environments

- *Our class was like kind of the bad class in the year, not because of me, like just we had like a higher number of people which were like really rowdy and stuff. So yeah like throughout the school I didn't really enjoy it that much until like Year 10 .because from like Year 7 to 9 it was you stay in your forms and you do like maths, english and everything together, and then when you get to Year 10 and 11 they like put you into sets to do with like how well you've performed.... 3 people from my form got expelled and then like 2 got moved out. And we had 3 different form tutors because like in Year 7 the guy who was our form teacher was like "no I can't have them for another year" and then in Year 8 a new guy joined for a year and then he had us, but then he left (m UWE w/c)*
- *Everybody was..not bothered, they didn't care you know about their lives, they weren't enthusiastic. You would see people on the streets just looking depressed and down. Some people would smoke weed and just get up to all sorts of bad things and.....you know, a lot of crime. But thank God for my faith that I didn't get involved in any of that (f UWE w/c)*

Significant others

- Individual teachers - even at schools with problems
- *It's a school with a bad reputation but it had brilliant teachers there (f UoB w/c)*
- *The teachers were very inspirational, I had a Psychology teacher -she was a lecturer as well at university and she was my Psychology A level teacher, and she would always motivate me and push me in the class and she was just my biggest inspiration, she made me want to like get up in the morning and attend the class and do the work. Many other students weren't but because of her, you know, just her zeal, it pushed me to want to do well in all my subjects (f UWE w/c)*
- *My form tutor in secondary school, she was my English teacher for 5 years and my form tutor for 5 years but you could just go to her for anything. I'm still in contact with her through e-mail because she just helped me so much, and almost like you had a friendship with a teacher (f UoB w/c)*

Significant others

- Relatives, where parents lacked ability to help:
- *My sister went to Aston University and lived at home and just like got the train in every day....she's kind of helped me more with my choices and that, she's quite a lot older than me but she obviously understands it more than my parents did and she was saying to me "it's not like they don't care, they just don't understand it all" sort of, they're a bit behind with the times (f UoB w/c)*
- *I had a hard time at school actually, I was bullied quite a lot. And I think that's why it took me a while to get all my confidence to do drama and to do things related like that....I don't know, I think what made me realise I was good at it is my grandma told me. Like she doesn't say stuff like that at all, and she told my mum actually and my mum told me. And I really thought then, I thought "hmm, I should go for this (f UWE w/c)*

UWE or UoB?

- Both universities benefit from location
- Strong awareness of pecking order
- Grades determine choices
- Attractions of UoB: old buildings, driven students
- Attractions of UWE: modern campus, welcoming staff
- *And I was told that it's good academically but it's good for the social life as well, like the people at Bristol are quite friendly and a lot of student forums have said "Bristol was like one of the best times of my life" and things. They said that a lot of people didn't have anything bad to say about Bristol, so that was quite reassuring when I was choosing Bristol /f UoB*

UWE or UoB

- *I always knew this was where I wanted to go, it was just so different. It was really, really good. I came here and I was like “this is where I want to go”. It was just the whole atmosphere, the course sounded so good, they were so enthusiastic about it all (f UWE)*
- *It's not beating around the bush because Bristol is one of the best universities in the country, everyone knows that obviously Oxbridge is the pinnacle but underneath that you've got a layer of the Bristols, the Durhams, the 3 London universities, and maybe somewhere like Warwick as well. So I had to make a lot of sacrifices for that, to be here, so did my mum and dad, to the tune of nigh on £100,000 and a lot of time and effort (m UoB m/c)*
- *If I'd have gone to Cardiff to get a law degree I would have had a law degree that's like what, rated 32nd, come to Bristol and I have a law degree rated 10th, and that's quite a big difference (f UoB w/c)*

FINDINGS 2 - SETTLING IN

- **Expectations and adaptations**
- **Making friends**
- **The classed experience of studenthood**
- **Bristol and UWE**
- **Student identity**

Expectations & adaptations: the

Changes from school ^{course} work and the loss of
'spoon-feeding'

Struggles for less motivated students

Our course is only 9 hours long, so there's over like 3 days I do, so there's only about an hour a day sometimes, and you have to do a lot of work at home. So I go home, I just don't feel like working because there's always everyone around, and I'm struggling, I'm struggling to keep up with the pace to be honest (f UWE w/c)

The course is fantastic, kind of even better than I expected. The seminars and stuff have been a bit disappointing. I mean the lecturers have all been fantastic, but the seminars...because there's not much kind of discussion goes on, and no-one's ever really prepared for the seminars...a lot of students come to university just because it's the thing to do...some of them aren't even very passionate about the course (m UWE m/c)

Unless you've done the reading, you can't go into the seminar and discuss it.. You try to come up with things off the top of your head, and you know they're looking at you like "they definitely haven't done the reading" or

Expectations and adaptations

Learning to be self-directed: motivated students

It's different to what I expected. I expected that I'd be able to work better.....because I used to be really, really hardworking in school, but obviously you're spoon-fed, so it's easier to go out and do stuff by yourself, and you don't have to do it as often. It hasn't met my expectations but it hasn't disappointed me kind of thing ... I don't know how to adapt my revision pattern from A level, which is obviously completely different because you have proper notes and they've given you all this information (f UoB m/c)

Coming from a private school with sort of fees of like 9 grand I was sort of used to the very best sort of standard of teaching, and you've just got to realise that at university you're expected to do a lot more on your own (m UoB m/c)

So it's really self directed learning, it's just self reliant, you know, they just treat us like adults, do everything by yourself - which is good, which is really good. It makes you stronger as well, it makes you know yourself and the type of person you are (f UWE w/c)

cultures

UoB: experts don't always make good teachers

UWE: lack of sanctions?

Some lecturers, you can tell that they really know what they're talking about but they're not very good at.....they're pretty poor lecturers but they're clearly experts in their field. But others are really fantastic... there was one lecture which completely kind of changed my points of reference for thinking about poetry as a whole really, you know, from a lecture. I thoughtLiterally just put a thought into my head which I'd just never thought of before (m UoB m/c)

More elderly kind of professors, they're obviously used to being lecturers so they basically just sit there and kind of ramble on for an hour. And it's like "this is meant to be a tutorial where we kind of take part" and they're just there giving us a lecture all over again (f UoB m/c)

I found attendance to be just bizarrely shocking on this course. Each seminar group is 10 to 15 ...so one of mine is consistently around 5. One seminar, 3 times since January it's been me and the tutor. I can't comprehend how with 8 hours a week, contact hours a week, 8 hours, they wouldn't show ...& there seems to be absolutely no repercussions (m UWE m/c)

Construction of the 'just-passing' UWE student.

Teachers' expectations: self-fulfilling prophecies?

- *The seminar tutors and the lecturers is that, you'd think the people were aiming for the 41% mark for this year -- they always just talk about how it's pass or fail and the only mark they ever talk aboutin terms of what to achieve this year. You know, so they say "so if you've got 35 in the essays, don't worry, it just means that you have to get 45 in the exam". It's like well you don't have to get 45 in the exam, say you have to get 85 in the exam,...that's puzzled me from day one really, the way it's been very "just do your best" you know, "let's secure that 40 (m UWE m/c)*
- *My tutor teaches here at UWE on a Tuesday but all the other days of the week he teaches at Warwick, and he was just kind of absent-mindedly talking to me about the differences between the two. He was just like, if I say to people "right, just go, just talk about the topic and I'll step in if needs be" at Warwick, they just....you know, it flies off like a runaway train and everyone's just throwing ideas out... If he does the same thing here, it's just silence' (ibid)*

Expectations & adaptations

- Lessons in living
- Broadened horizons
- *There's a lot of people that I've met at university, or in my halls at least, who have got like real like serious problems, and a lot of people are having real problems with like depression and stuff, and it's just kind of like opened my eyes a bit I guess. I didn't realise how many people were like that (f UWE, w/c wants to change to counselling)*
- *It's definitely an eye opener, it really does broaden the mind. You think about so many, you know, different things in so many different ways, and obviously socially as well. Chance to meet new people, people from all different backgrounds, different walks of life, people from different age groups as well (m UoB w/c)*

Satisfaction scores (out of 10)

	w/c	m/c	all
UWE	8.3	7.9	8.1
UoB	7.7	8.0	7.9

Making friends: divisions

- Friends drawn from accommodation, not courses
- Public v state school divide (specific class sections?)
- *Bizarrely, they're so from accommodation and not from course. That's the other thing I kind of realised, is how I'm not really friends with anyone on my course (m UWE m/c)*
- *I have some good friends from my course but my sort of tight knit group of friends I'm going to be living with next year are all from my halls (m UoB m/c)*
- *I'm the only person in X Hall from a state school...there's 10 people on my law course of 250 who have been to a state school & the majority of them are like "oh I could have gone to boarding school but my parents thought it was a waste of money". I know no-one from my background, That's why I find it so difficult to adjust, when no-one can relate to me (f UoB w/c).*
- *A lot of people are what I would class as a higher class than me. Like they're all posh .. I don't know why but naturally I separate myself from them. If I talk to them we'd probably find we have things in common, but they don't talk to me and I don't talk to them (f UoB w/c)*

Importance of various sources of friends (out of 5)

	w/c	m/c	all
From halls	4.4	4.5	4.5
From course	3.7	3.8	3.7
From rest of uni	3	3.1	3.1
From city	3	2.4	2.8
From home	4.6	4.6	4.6
From school	4.3	4.2	4.3
Online	2.3	2.1	2.2

Making friends

- Technology helps
- *There's probably like a group of like 6 or 7 of us who I usually sit with. Originally like I met some of them on Facebook beforehand. Like it was actually a really useful tool in order to get to know some people before I got here, because I didn't know anybody who was coming to UWE, or doing Law here, so I went on Facebook and just typed in like UWE, Bristol, Law (m UWE w/c)*

Classed experience

- Economic constraints
- Limitations on social life
- *I'm on a lower budget than most of my flat-mates, so, they still want to go out two times a week and like "no I can't afford to go out two times a week". I'm on about £500 a term, which is £50 a week, which I'm managing quite well because I limit myself (f UoB w/c)*
- *They just spend money like it grows on trees ... go out and go shopping and buy more clothes and I'm like "but you have clothes, you don't need it, you have a wardrobe full of clothes, you don't need any more" (ibid)*
- *Without my job then I'd have to leave uni.... My parents took out their own loans just to be able to give me like set up costs to come here, like deposits for things, like internet, all these hidden costs, hundreds and hundreds of pounds, on top of their deficit between my university accommodation and my loan, which is about a grand. My loan doesn't even cover the accommodation, so ...I need the income to be able to live (f UoB w/c)*
- *I don't go out an awful lot. I'm not stupid, if I haven't got the money I won't go out. But you can't stay in all the time because you're missing the whole aspect of socialising with your friends. You get lonely if you do that. (f UWE w/c)*

Classed experience: leisure

- *I was away for the whole Christmas holiday, because I went skiing with my parents and then on a rowing training camp in France (m UoB m/c)*
- *We've got a cruise booked, to the Baltic. I think it's 2 weeks. Copenhagen, I've been there before so I don't know if I'll do very much there. Helsinki.. St Petersburg, Tallinn and Estonia I think (m UoB m/c)*
- *The girl I'm sort of seeing at home...her very rich family, they always go to this five star hotel in Gleneagles at the start of August, or midway through August, even kicking in to the start of September, bit of a family ritual.. the 21 year old son and the 18 year old daughter, they usually bring a boyfriend/girlfriend if they have one, which the girl's brother has always had but she hasn't. So I may get the call for that (m UoB m/c)*
- *My mum didn't push me, she didn't have the money, and a lot of people I know have "oh yeah when we were little we were sent to ballet", we were sent to this, we were sent to that - I wasn't. I kind of wish I could get into something, maybe to do with sport, athletics, netball, something like that, now, but I haven't got the confidence to do that just because that was just not in my radar when I was younger (f UWE w/c)*

Classed experience

- The power of social capital
- Entitlement and being 'at ease'
- *I'm terrible with relations, Some relation on my mum's side like works for Northern Ireland Industrial Employment Tribunal, and so I did work experience there. I'll probably do that again, it's only a phone call. And then one of the people at my church back home is a Crown Prosecution Service barrister. But I'm sort of thinking trying more to get into the sort of big top firms.. and my dad got me work experience with a solicitor as well, just by nature of being a GP (m UoB m/c)*
- *I did some sort of internship kind of deal in London this time last year after my A levels in the Department of Business, the Government, the Treasury, and Credit Suisse, ...that was sort of through contacts really, Nick Clegg would not be very happy with my 35 year old civil service cousin getting me a gig in the Treasury (m UoB m/c)*
- *Yeah they see me as "the perfect private schoolboy" and I think all my friends see me as a decent lad. What is the perfect private schoolboy? Probably the white, very sporty, very academic, good looking, school colours wearing, charitably involved person (m UoB m/c)*

Bristol & UWE: the city view

- There is a 'Bristol Brand' of affluent student at UoB
- UWE students seen as belonging to the city, UoB not
- *I always say that you can spot a Bristol Uni student and you can spot a UWE student. oh this is again stereotyping. Their accent, the way they talk, it's obviously standard English, whereas I've got a bit of an accent and so have most people. We call them "the rahs" which means "oh darling". It's a bit stereotypical ,upper middle class, speaks good Queen's English and they dress....they wear Jack Wills or Hollister (m UWE w/c)*
- *I can almost guarantee the reaction when I say, when people ask, "what do you do", and I say, "oh I'm at uni, I'm a student". They say, "oh right, where do you go?", and I say "Bristol", their next question will be "oh what, UWE?" ..they, I dunno, exclusively almost in their minds associate local students with going to UWE and then people from Bristol, who go to Bristol, from being outside the city. There's almost that very clear distinction already in their minds (m UoB w/c)*

Student identity

- The student bubble
- Party culture
- Missing home
- *I don't know, I think it's a bit of a bubble to be honest. Like kind of pretending you're in the real world but you're not actually because you've still got your parents who are still going to support you. Next year will be different, I think because next year it will actually count, live in a house, it will feel more real-life-ish. But at the moment I think I'm still very much in a bubble pretending I'm in the real world (f UoB m/c)*
- *The first term everyone was like "oh we have to go out all the time...." all this like pressure, we have to just go to like rubbish stuff that no-one actually wants to go to and you just force yourself to go to (f UoB m/c)*
- *They just don't actually give a crap about what they're doing, they just go out and get drunk (f UWE w/c)*
Because I'm so far away from home I sort of feel quite lonely. I think I'm just being a bit of a baby to be honest. I've never been away from home and it's just sort of a little bit of a shock. Yeah I thought it would be easier than this, but it isn't (f UWE w/c)

CONCLUSIONS: 'a playground with books'

The transition from school to university is variable, but working-class students face more obstacles

- Middle-class students have more capitals to help them into university and to settle in
- Balancing work & social life is a problem

General satisfaction with the student experience but those in a situation of class misfit are less satisfied

- The key social divide is between public and