

The High-Potential Learners Project: Increasing access to Russell Group Universities

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The Context

- If you are in a school or college where many students achieve the top grades, it's no surprise to go on to university, often a highly selective, research-intensive Russell Group University
- But what about if you are a high-attaining student in a school or college where few other students achieve the top grades...? Students from these backgrounds are less likely to go to a highly selective university than students with similar attainment from independent and grammar schools.

In short, context matters!

Research Aims

- To provide new evidence on the key influences on the decision-making of disadvantaged learners with high potential from different types of institutions with low levels of average attainment at A-level.
- Using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, our research investigated which home, school, and personal characteristics of KS5 students are the key influences on decision-making potentially leading to Higher Education (HE) and Russell Group (RG) university participation.

What We Did

- Analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England – a large nationally representative survey of young people born in 1990/91 surveyed annually from ages 14-21. We analysed responses of the 2200 respondents who scored in the top 25% at GCSE, to understand what predicted whether they went to a Russell Group University.
- Contemporary case studies of over 40 young people with at least 5 A/A* GCSEs from 5 schools and colleges in Birmingham and the South West, as they progressed through Y12 and Y13 and made decisions about their future education and careers. The institutions were in the bottom 40% in the UK for average attainment at age 18 but vary widely in terms of how many young people progress to HE.

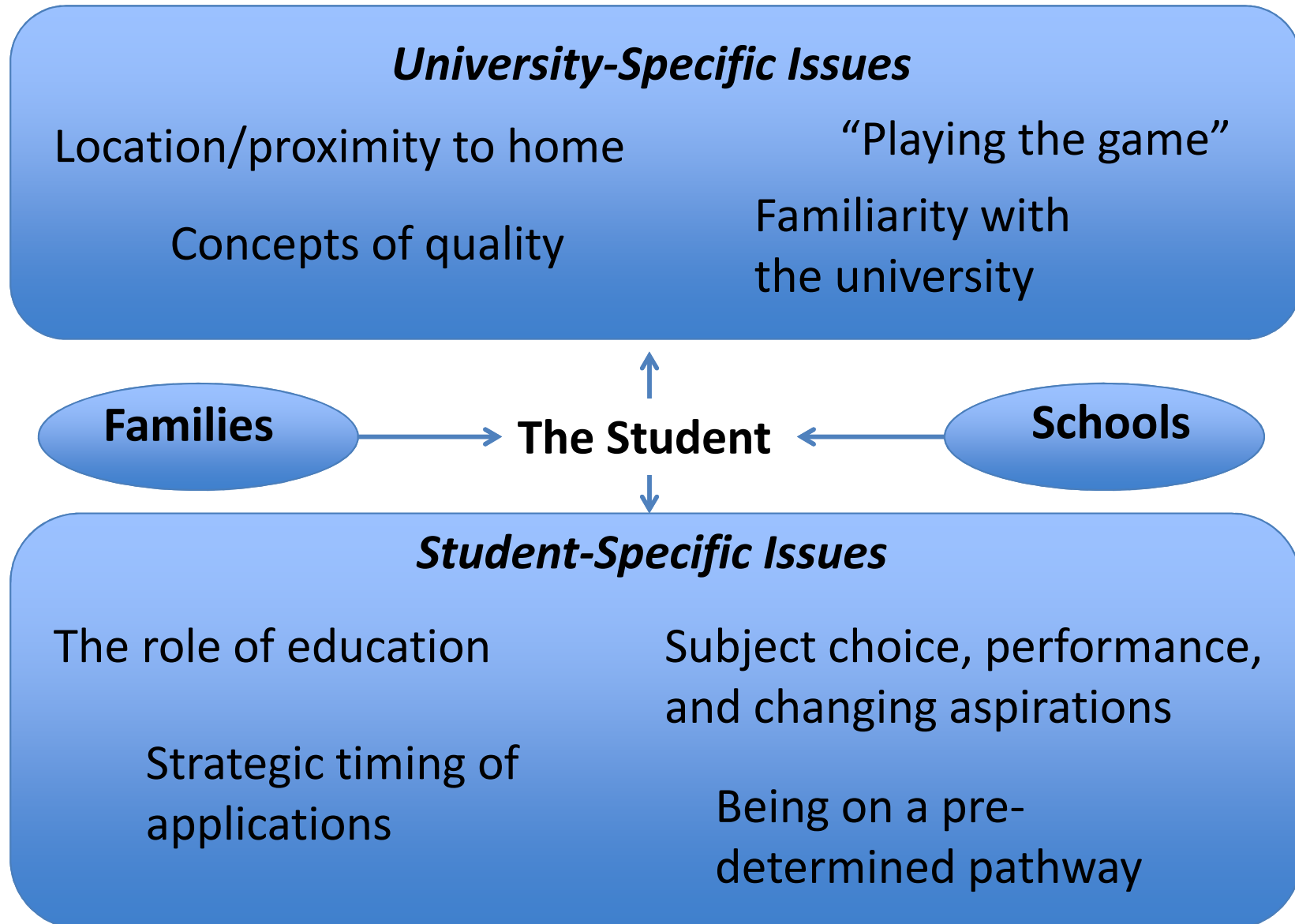
Quantitative Analysis

- Around 32% of our LSYPE sample went to a RG university.
- Around 22% of our LSYPE sample were in “low-performing” schools, but only 15% of those attending RG were from these schools.
- What differences are there between those who went to RG and those who didn't?

Characteristics of Students who went to Russell Group Universities

- Parents more likely to have a degree, and be in a professional occupation
- Students more likely to be motivated by future salary, but not a specific profession
- ***Their 8 best GCSE grades were higher (As and A*s) – even if they had fewer GCSEs overall.***
- ***They tended to study more subjects at A-level***
- ***They were more likely to study facilitating subjects at A-level***

Case Studies: Key Sources of Influence



Families

- Many students were of the first generation in their to go to university, but turned to other relations or family friends for advice.
- Early thinking was often modeled on others' experiences.
- Students were unaware of the range of opportunities available, so it was hard for them to think critically about the discrete pieces of information they received.
- University was often seen as “training for a job”.

Schools/Colleges

- Range of subjects offered – in particular facilitating subjects
- The opportunity to experience different universities, and understand what they are like.
- The “normalisation” of university.
- Teachers as a source of information.
- **Schools have a role to play in socialising students into the concept and language of university.**

So What Can Schools Do?

Sustained future-focused relationships with school staff could help students access holistic support at “crunch points” in decision making.

A focus on quality, comprehensiveness and consistency of advice and information may help students in their decision making. Supporting students to become familiar with universities through visits can help them see university as “a place for them”.

Schools may benefit from relationships with HEIs to help:

- define the role(s) of teacher(s) with special responsibility for HE;
- provide support for other key players such as parents and subject teachers;
- offer timely, appropriate advice to students.

Footnote...

The fact that we, as researchers, were from a university and interested in students' decisions will have had an impact on them. Similarly, the process of being asked to reflect on, and articulating their decisions around university will have impacted on their application process. Was this a good thing?