

Talkin' 'Bout First Generation

An investigation into the needs of, and challenges faced by first generation University students at the University of Southampton

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Contents:

	Page
Foreword	5
Introduction	6
Executive Summary	7
Objectives	9
Methodology	10
Literature Review	11
Interview Results	13
Survey Results	22
Analysis & Discussion	27
Summary & Conclusion	31
Project Limitations	32
Recommendations	33
Appendices	34
References	39

Foreword:

Dr. Michael Tomlinson – Lecturer, Southampton Education School, University of Southampton

This report by Heather Pasero is very timely in light of current UK policy drivers around widening participation and access to professional employment; in particular amongst students from less advantaged backgrounds. It is often assumed that 1st generation students study in ‘new’ or ‘widening participation’ HEIs and are largely absent from ‘Russell Group’ institutions. This report presents original and revealing findings about the transitional experiences, challenges and career approaches of students who often have to overcome potentially greater educational and institutional barriers. It also highlights common experiences and concerns amongst most students in the context of a challenging contemporary graduate labour market.

As the report indicates, many 1st generation students have already succeeded in making it to a high-status academic HEI and possess strong levels of resilience and natural talent. They are also motivated to getting on in the job market and proving their worth. But it also reveals various challenges, not least in forming networks, developing cultural capital and identifying sources of information on jobs. The ‘career vision’ and scope developed by their 2nd generation peers would appear to be less developed in this group of students. Most significantly, 1st generation students do not readily recognise and then promote their achievements and skills to significant others, including employers.

The report offers important insights for career services and those working across the university sector in recognising and responding to the challenges facing 1st generation university students so that they can fulfil their true potential when leaving university.

Helen Fuge – Assistant Director of Student Services (Employability), University of Southampton

This research project was developed to explore the needs and challenges faced by 1st generation university students at the University of Southampton. 1st generation students should be admired for their achievements and their ambition yet we have to acknowledge that they are more likely than their peers to drop out of their chosen course or have a challenging transition to higher education because they lack the required social capital (Capriccioso 2006).

This report by Heather Pasero provides an inspiring insight into the experiences of 1st generation students here at the University of Southampton. It highlights their expectations of what Higher Education will do to support their future, identifies the key skills and attributes of these students and, most importantly, discovers the gaps in terms of knowledge, skills and the support offered by the institution.

The objectives and findings associated with this research will enable the University of Southampton to consider actions that can be taken to enhance the experiences of 1st generation and will also support our strategic aims as an institution which focus on the support, retention and success of all of our students.

Introduction

This report will illuminate your ideas about the roads travelled by 1st generation students in Higher Education. You will learn about their first year undergraduate experiences to help us understand how, as Careers Services, we can find creative ways to meet their careers education and employability needs.

Those working in Higher Education supporting non-traditional students should read this report to learn about the inspiring stories shared by 1st generation students and the barriers they and their parents have faced to move towards the valued entity of education. In this report education is very much seen as the road to success and self-improvement and is universally valued by all of the 1st generation students as a means for mobility in occupational areas, financial achievement and knowledge enlightenment.

The needs and issues of the 1st generation students were put into context by the 2nd generation participants, and indeed some of their stories were similar. In fact some 2nd generation students found making friends and settling into university-life more challenging than 1st generation students, which told us much about areas of strength and levels of social and personal resilience. The stories of journeys all students shared, both 1st and 2nd generation, are inspirational.

At Southampton we run a robust pre-entry outreach programme and actively target schools and colleges with the following demographic:

- Living in areas of low HE participation
- No previous family experience of HE
- Young carers
- Looked after children
- In receipt of free school meals
- Students who have experienced considerable disruption due to personal circumstances
- Families in receipt of benefits
- English as an Additional Language
- Black and Minority Ethnic Groups
- Students with a disability
- Students of military families

As an institution that actively targets and recruits students who meet these criteria, who are very often 1st generation, it is a natural progression to then actively seek out how we can best support their employability and careers education to meet their specific needs.

The findings of this report will be circulated to appropriate groups and parties within our own institution to ensure action is taken to move quality and relevance of provision forwards, as well as hopefully influencing the coordination, delivery, content and models of careers support to other HEI Career Services. The overall aim is to ensure our non-traditional students are as best equipped as they possibly can be when they leave HE with the optimum chance of gaining suitable graduate employment or further study and maintaining a fulfilling and successful career of their own choice.

Executive Summary

Focus

This is a qualitative and quantitative investigation seeking to identify issues relating to those students who are the first member of their family to study at Higher Education level. It includes data collected from interviewing 20 first year students, of whom half were students whose parents had no Higher Education experience and the other half whose parents had been to University. The study also included a survey of 23 relevant questions to all year one University of Southampton 1st generation students with 163 responses.

We looked at the current and prior-variables of each group to try and understand the University experience of our students, given social and biographical backgrounds with a view to optimising entrance into the graduate labour market. We are hoping that this understanding can help shape and the careers and employability support we provide to non-traditional students to ensure our offer is accessible as well as serving purpose. It cannot be ignored that graduate applicants who attend Russell Group Universities are more likely to apply to elite firms successfully, (Duberley et al 2015) and this gives us more reason to support our non-traditional minority. Given the work we do via the University Outreach Team to market the University to low socio-economic areas, families in receipt of benefits, no previous family experience of Higher Education, those in receipt of free school meals and care leavers, we have a responsibility to empower in order to move these students onto equally successful and fulfilling graduate destinations. The questions is, how?

Key Findings:

- 1st generation students choose University with the idea that it might lead to a better job.
- 1st generation students have a more 'passive' approach to researching their future career than 2nd generation students.
- 1st generation students need support to develop more 'career vision' looking towards their professional future.
- 1st generation students and Career Practitioners need access to LMI relating to employers actively recruiting students and graduates from a lower socio-economic background.
- For 1st and 2nd generation students there is a lack of awareness of what the Careers and Employability Service can offer them.
- 1st generation students use online resources as a first port of call when researching careers related information.
- 1st generation students need support to cherish themselves and learn

self-awareness and self-reflection skills in order to recognise their unique attributes.

- 1st generation students possess resilience and grit.
- 1st generation students rely on Tutors and academic staff when seeking advice and value them as 'experts'.
- 1st generation students value the advice and guidance offered at university open days.

Objectives

- Identify any specific needs that 1st generation students might have in relation to employability.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the aspirations of 1st generation students.
- Compare the pre and in University experiences of 1st and 2nd generation students.
- Determine ways to support students to best access Careers & Employability Services.

Methodology

Survey

The aim of the survey was to gain a clearer insight into who our 1st generation students are in terms of social and economic identity and what these students do in relation to making career decisions and seeking out careers advice, now and in the future.

We collected data on the students' intentions for seeking out careers support now or in the future. The questions were developed to enable analysis of:

- Home background
- Socio economic status
- Course of study
- Career decision influences
- Career decision factors
- Career aspirations

A survey of 23 questions was emailed to all first year, 1st generation students via the iSurvey system with 163 responses received between November 2015 and December 2016.

The iSurvey software collated the data and can present in both tabular and graph form enabling us to report the survey findings clearly and allowing us to analyse effectively and accurately.

Each participant entered a prize draw with 10 X £100 Amazon vouchers prizes.

Interviews

A set of 8 questions was composed to ask in a one-to-one confidential interview setting. In all we interviewed 10 1st generation first year students and 10 2nd generation first year students. The same questions were asked to each group, and the interview audio was recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The students were recruited on 'first come first served' basis after email marketing to all first year students. As with the survey questions, great consideration was put into composing the interview questions with a view to understanding via in-depth conversations in a safe environment, the perspective of 1st and 2nd generation students. This interview method enabled us to gain a more detailed and nuanced comprehension of the student experience according to the criteria of the project.

The students who took part proved to be extremely generous in sharing their experiences, giving the project much rich data.

The data was entered into qualitative software Nvivo for analysis by method of keywords identified by the software eg Aspirations, friends, finances, housing, parents and careers service.

Each participant received a £20 Amazon voucher.

Literature Review

The Shock of the Jump – FE to HE

With the challenges of domestic, cultural, relationship, social and academic change and adaptation to contend with, the first semester of University can be an emotional journey (Christie 2009). Students who have chosen to attend University at an institution with relatively high entry requirements have moved onto higher-level study because they were perceived and are still perceived to be studious, a perception that cuts across and over shadows class differences, (Reay et al 2010). Whilst this might be true it is also important to consider the influence of cultural capital and habitus, (Bourdieu 1984), and how these influence the level of stress and potential distress the transition might trigger. How can this be supported in order to interject with timely and appropriate employability support during the 'settling-in' period if we are to support employability throughout the whole of the undergraduate study programme? (Leese 2010).

The 'Career Vision' of the Educated Working Class

'Career vision' is the ability of students to develop 'strongly individualised narratives' (Tomlinson 2007) around their future career progression'.

2nd generation students engage with the prospect of University with 'certainty' (Reay 1998), as they see a template before them, in the form of their immediate family having trodden the Higher Education path. It is this path that provides 'vision' via cultural and social habitus (Bourdieu 2006). In contrast 1st generation students are literally paving the way, as they go, developing a new vision from scratch. Via HE enrolment, they have already embarked on a pathway that suggests a move away from their social background. Whilst the parents of 1st generation students influence the decision to take this ticket for social mobility, (Lehman 2009), their children also need the skills to navigate the path successfully.

The future career vision of students from a low socio-economic background is based on themes of equal opportunity, being appreciated at work, good employer leadership style, and good work/life balance and job security. Whilst higher socio-economic background students look towards a future with high starting salary, high level of personal responsibility, international interaction/opportunity, status and prestige and attractive location. (Greenbacks et al 2008, The Bridge Group 2016). Using this intelligence we can provide support to our 1st generation students to help them gain a better insight into the graduate labour market and look to a future where they will be cherished for who they are. (Manley 2016)

Content is King, Marketing is Queen

Whilst it is important to get the content of our delivery right, it is also vital that we make students aware of the offer via skillful and targeted marketing.

By definition the Careers and Employability Service is part of a Higher Education service-industry related model, (Canterbury 2000). Whilst The University of

Southampton Careers Service offerings are designed and promoted to satisfy the customer, it is important to use this research project to gain a valuable insight into our student perceptions of Careers Services, and if customer satisfaction is being achieved. Should we make products more tangible and target services to pre-entry groups with unique needs and design products to meet the various group needs? (Ghosh et al 2008). Reaching prospective students thinking about applying to Southampton who are unaware of support they might want or need, with empowering careers information, advice and guidance would also serve to gain long-term benefits in terms of graduate destinations and retention. This kind of customer satisfaction can create student loyalty towards the organisation, and positively impacts academic performance. (Guenzi, P. and Pelloni, O. 2004). Gaps in information (Constantinides et al 2011) are marketing opportunities for us to reach students and make them aware of the Careers Service offer before they enrol as students by 'tempting' them with new ideas and providing 'vision'.

Interview Results

The following interview results were the conversations of note that defined key issues and were chosen because of the rich content that tied in with themes of the student experience within the interviews' scope.

Friends and Housing

The majority of first and 2nd generation students interviewed had found it easy to build good friendship networks quite quickly and easily:

1st gen: I've found making friends a massive thing at University and in the first two or three weeks I had a really solid friendship group, and like stayed with them. Sometimes you make friends and never see them again but I've been friends with people in my flat, my sports team and from my course, so that's really good.

2nd gen: All of my flat mates, we all kind of get along and from day one, we kind of met with other flats. There are 8 flats within our block and we all kind of regularly meet and there's always people coming in and out. We meet at University and kind of afterwards, it is good in the aspect that from the first, it has been welcoming, so that has helped.

This was mainly achieved through their housing or University Halls, with looser friendship connections via lectures and their course.

There were a couple of examples of 1st generation students reporting differences in their housing groups in particular. There seems to be some anecdotal evidence from 1st generation students of the financial concerns of paying for utilities and food that might not be of as much concern for those in a more financially stable position. Also evidence of discrimination and/or snobbery.

1st gen: 'I did have some small issue with my flat mates due to the fact that you know that I'm not English, I'm Romanian. I have been here for 11 years so I'm also British. They just based their opinion on stereotypes. I'm Romania but I'm not Romany, you know people confuse the two together I'd say. So they blame me for things, for stealing things because I'm Romanian and I don't know if it's a joke but one of them keeps calling me gypsy.'

1st gen: There is just one other and me who are 1st generation and the other three come from very middle class backgrounds, and you can feel that in the house and there is a difference. The other three have very medical backgrounds, whereas I and the other person have a very working class background. We have very different attitudes toward money and living costs.

Some 2nd generation students found difficulties making friends. One had attended a boarding school and the other had attended the same private school from primary school right through to sixth form:

2nd gen: 'I think I just didn't, well at school I had a really good group of friends that I was always around and after moving out of that, I sort of didn't find a group of friends that I sort of bonded with properly and I just sort of, I was on my own for a bit, so. But yes, it's sorted now, I've got a good group of friends now. I didn't really expect it, I just sort of thought that I didn't expect it to be as much of a change because I'd never changed school before, so it was a really big change for me. From primary school, all the way up to A-Levels, I just didn't change schools'.

Some friendship/housing groups seem to embrace each other's differences:

1st gen: Everyone is from different backgrounds so that's quite cool. With my flat-mates we have people who have grown up in places like Croydon and places like that, disadvantaged areas. Also people who are like, daughters of bankers who live in the middle of the countryside with massive gardens, and I'm stuck in the middle somewhere. We're all really close now and you see the differences between everyone and everyone is really accepting, which is quite cool, and I didn't expect that.

1st gen: Yeah, it's good. I was quite scared to start off with because I was obviously forced to live with them, but everyone gets on well and we're going to get a house next year as well, which is good.

Some 2nd generation student found the transition to domestic independence a challenge:

2nd gen: I mean, I'd say I've got used to kind of the whole process of being at University in terms of kind of doing things on your own. You won't have support in terms of parents, say your food is cooked for you or you know, your laundry is done, everything, and that kind of responsibility, which you have to do, I've kind of got used to that side of things.

2nd gen: I'm living in halls at the moment and obviously that situation initially wasn't the greatest, because once you've moved in you realise your room was smaller and your bed was smaller and you know, you had to go somewhere else to do your laundry, and the laundry would often break down.

Finance and Working

As discussed in the previous section there have been differences in the perception of attitudes towards money. Via the interviews we found there is more anxiety and concern about finances amongst the 1st generation students than the 2nd generation students, although neither seemed very well off or able to completely relax about money.

1st gen: In terms of finances now, because I was working full time and I've always worked. I worked through Portsmouth and I work now and I run the Tutoring as a business and I declare it all officially, so I'm repaying a loan, I'm paying my own rent.

2nd gen: I have quite a bit of financial support from my parents as I don't get a massive loan, so I get the minimum student loan for NHS which is £2500, plus a £1000 bursary from the NHS and then my parents pay my accommodation. Just because I couldn't afford it anyway.

The common issue that was commented on was the landlord and or letting agencies asking for a large deposits in advance of the next academic year to secure the accommodation of their choice. In some cases this could be huge amounts.

1st gen: I live in Halls at the moment and I've just signed onto a house for next year with my friends. The only downside to that was that I couldn't get a guarantor. Which meant that I had to pay too much rent upfront, which meant that for the whole of this semester I've been one thousand pounds minus because I had to pay that extra money which I wasn't prepared for but, I guess you get through these things.

2nd gen: I've got to pay £500 for my deposit for the house this year, and I don't have the money at the moment at all, but luckily I'm getting £1500 from the University bursary, and luckily that's enough to get my deposit sorted but I have been in my overdraft the entire time I've been here.

One 1st generation student who was interviewed worked full-time whilst studying full-time on a medicine course, using the evenings and weekends solely to earn money, whilst other worked part time in catering, retail or the University. Surprisingly whilst for some of the 1st generation students working was a necessity one said:

1st gen: No, there's no financial need, it's just a killing time thing.

And another 2nd generation felt working would affect their study too much:

2nd gen: I don't think I could actually keep up with the work if I had a job, If wasn't going over it in the evenings, I don't think I could.

Researching courses/institutions and pre-entry advice & guidance

Most of the 1st generation students did their pre-entry research online, using the university website/league tables/'Which' University and DLHE information, with one taking part in the Access to Southampton widening participation scheme. More of the 2nd generation students attended an open day with many of them visiting numerous institutions.

1st gen: Just looking on line and reading the magazines and stuff about the course I was trying to do to see if I would actually like it.

1st gen: The A2S summer school added a lot of my decision, because there's a lot of benefits that are on the A2S scheme. A2S also gave me more understanding of the university. I visited quite a few other Universities as well, some of them didn't seem as friendly, some of them were a bit too far away from home, I thought Southampton was a good compromise, relatively close to home but far away, not too close.

In terms of making decisions about course and institution, support for 1st generation students was mainly gained from tutors and careers advisers at sixth form. 2nd generation students relied on their parents much more to advise them on their decisions.

1st gen: We had lots of help writing our UCAS personal statements and we were given lots of emails with dates of open days when we could visit Unis and we had their references written for us.

1st gen: I think I went to the careers people and they actually advised me to not go into Medicine to go into something else but I had a great Tutor who was great.

2nd gen: I talked to my Mum, she was a Nurse, so sort of talking to her was very, very useful, because it was talking to someone who was a nurse who knows what it's like.

2nd gen: It was mainly parents oddly, I kind of spoke to them. They didn't decide for me, but they kind of had a big input in terms of what they think I should or shouldn't do, but ultimately I made the decision.

Choosing University Study:

The 2nd generation students talked about University being the 'natural thing to do' and

‘the natural step-up’, and rather tellingly wondering if ‘perhaps there are other career paths where you don’t need a degree’, as well as perceptions that, ‘it’s seen as compulsory, the bare minimum to have a degree’.

1st generation students’ thought paths were less organic and more driven by school/college.

1st gen: ‘You do A-level and go to University sort of thing’. I was kind of just following the crowd because I didn’t really know what else to do and my Mum kind of liked the thought of one of her kids going to University’.

1st gen: ‘My family call me the black sheep because I’m not something like a manual labourer. My brother is a scaffolder and my sister is a full time Mum, but I was always book smart, well read and did crosswords sat on the steps etc. etc. so I never really envisaged myself doing anything else, other than academic’.

Why Southampton?

Those 1st generation students who did attend University of Southampton open days spoke of the campus and city having an air of ‘friendliness’ and it being a ‘nice place by the sea’.

1st gen: ‘I chose Southampton, I don’t know, everyone is very open-minded and everyone is really kind, and experiences of other Universities was that they might be a bit hostile type of thing, not everyone is so open, but Southampton is so friendly. I’ve never felt threatened or anything like that in Southampton. I think that is completely unique to the city. I took part in the interview for the students next year and I told them that walking around the environment is really nice and the people are really nice considering the size of the city, it’s so open and like I think there are very few places that are like that.’

1st gen: I wanted places that were by the sea. I love London but I couldn’t study there, it’s too much. I wanted a place that was like a mix, where it was still a city but then also a bit calmer and just not as hectic and Southampton is like that. There’s like the coast and all that, it’s just perfect.

2nd generation students talked much more about Southampton being part of the Russell Group of Universities and reputation.

2nd gen: I chose Southampton, just how it's reputable in science areas and Russell Group, it's just like the best known and the league tables as well. I looked at league tables and I found where the best place to do Biology other than London because I didn't want to go

to London or Oxford and Cambridge.

Parents

Given that the 2nd generation students' parents have attended University themselves, the transference of 'social & cultural capital' is hardly surprising. There are however varying degrees of this capital across the 2nd generation group.

2nd gen: My Dad is a Dentist and my Mum is a Radiographer. Yes both of them have been to University. My Mum has got a Masters and my Dad has got his degree in Dentistry.

2nd gen: My Dad is a Neurologist and my Mum is a Properties Manager. I don't really know her title but she manages properties and she buys and sells them. Yes, my Dad and my Mum went to University. My Dad did Medicine and my Mum did Pharmacology.

In contrast to other 2nd generation students.

2nd gen: Yes, I think overall it's going quite well because I'm the first person in the family to go to University aside from my Mum who's is at University now and is doing Nursing but I think being able to talk to a peer mentor and stuff at University has been really helpful and that's helped me, transition has been really easy.

2nd gen: My Dad is a Postman and my Mum doesn't work at the moment, she used to work for East Sussex County Council as somebody who would help students, college students, and primary school and secondary school, and help them get to University.

One or two of the 1st generation students seemed to have parents who had as much experience of education, albeit through less traditional routes, as 2nd generation students.

1st gen: So my Mum is a qualified Teaching Assistant but she teaches Spanish as well, so, and my Dad he works for Tesco's, so he works for the online side of Tesco's and he's currently doing like an options programme, so he's trying to advance his career, so that means that every few weeks he changes what he does, so he has to have experience doing all of the jobs before he can move forwards, so when I was last home, I think he said he'd done some work on security and before that he was doing some work on computer databases and stuff like that.

This is the most extreme example of lack of social capital in this context.

1st gen: Right now, I have no clue what my Dad does, he's not

around, and my Mum is unemployed. I'm not even sure if they have a secondary school education. My Mum used to run a take away, not stereotypical at all. She was self-employed.

Aspirations

It seems there is less confidence about 'direction' amongst the 1st generation students on non-vocational courses.

1st gen: I'm actually not sure what I want to do.

1st gen: Difficult question.

1st gen: I'm honestly not too sure what I want to do.

1st gen: At the moment, I don't really know.

More 2nd generation were immediately assertive when asked about their aspirations eg:

2nd gen: Well yes, like I say, maybe Law.

2nd gen: Well, when I wrote the employability essay a while ago, I would quite like to go into the charity sector, possibly disaster response.

2nd gen: I've for quite a few years now known I've wanted to get into banking.

2nd gen: At the moment I assume I've just got to work hard and mainly I want to move out to America and work in Aerospace out there.

Future advice / University of Southampton Careers Service:

There seems to be an awareness of the Careers Service amongst both groups of students, but perhaps without a clear idea of exactly what services in particular are available or indeed relevant to them, as well as how to access them.

1st gen: Not really no. I probably should. I wasn't really sure how to. I received loads of emails from you but I'm not really sure how to go about. I never knew anyone else going to any of the events and it would just be awkward.

1st gen: I only just discovered yesterday actually that you have

internships, so I'll go talk to the reception about that later, so today will probably be the first time. I haven't been aware of it really, and yes, that's it. I wasn't really aware of it. I think I get emails but it kind of gets spammed out with a lot of other emails, and it's hard.

2nd gen: No, I wasn't really sure what they did or if they were more for the second and third year students and nearer to graduating, that's what I thought it was mostly for.

2nd gen: As of yet, I have not used it no, but I know that the University itself, because of the position it is in and links and connections it has it's kind of in a position where it set you up in various ways.

Study, lectures & assignments

Both the 1st generation and 2nd generation students talked about the 'leap' or 'jump' from A-level to first year undergraduate study being something they had to adapt to and a couple of participants stating that it was 'difficult' and 'a shock to the system'. The model of study being much more independent, the volume of work and deadlines were of equal concern to both groups. No students from either group voiced any worrying concern about coping with the work, lectures, assignments and independent study, just that it was noticeable.

1st gen: 'I love it, yeah, it's exciting. I think the transition from A-Level was quite big for me'.

2nd gen: 'I think it's still a bit of a shock to the system at first regards like workload but overall I feel very comfortable with what I've been given and I've enjoyed the University experience. I think a lot of it is the 'open-endedness' of things. A-Level was like; 'this is the question, this is the answer'.

Those of combined subject degrees seemed to have the same worry that deadlines were not staggered between disciplines and could therefore become unmanageable.

1st gen: I guess they have to teach you the things before they can test you, but two weeks ago, they had two deadlines in one week, and it was a tough week for me, and for a lot of people actually. We had three weeks to do an essay but I think I didn't stop in those three weeks, trying to write this essay. I must have had a lot of trouble with it and yes, that did stress me out quite a lot.

2nd gen: 'Certainly when we have assignments, which is 50 % and then they come all in two weeks and the deadlines come together

and I will start to think 'oh no'. Next month I've got one on the 5th, one of the 9th and two on the 10th and 24th is the exam'.

The students' level of commitment, interest and passion for their subjects and learning is impressive and inspiring.

1st gen: 'Yes, I think it's going quite well, I'm definitely enjoying it'.

2nd gen: 'I really enjoy the lectures part of my course'.

2nd gen: 'I love it, yeah, it's exciting'.

2nd gen: 'I'm starting to really love what I'm learning'.

Aspects of learning and study in first and 2nd generation students were completely comparable. Each group and each student seemed to be experiencing something similar in relation to adjustment to HE settling into their subjects and learning model, as well as getting to grips with deadlines.

Survey Results

Over **60 percent** of students surveyed come from a household where the parental occupation or equivalent is in the 4-9 code category, classified as the lower-skilled occupations.

Table 1.

SOC	Students	%
1	23	15%
2	14	9%
3	21	14%
4 - 9	90	61%

Career vision

Over 35% of 1st generation students surveyed did not have a chosen career in mind. Given they are first years, this might not sound too alarming, however, 30% of those who responded to the survey were on vocational or quasi vocational courses.

Table 2.

Do you have a chosen career in mind?		
Yes	105	65%
No	57	35%
Total responses	162	

Around a half of the 1st generation students surveyed said they had a chosen career and had either researched thoroughly or had an idea of how to approach the research. With the other half either stating they did not have a chosen career in mind, had not started researching or had not thought about it yet.

Table 3.

If yes, do you know what steps you need to take to achieve this?		
Yes, I have researched this career thoroughly	40	26%
Yes, I have a general idea of what I need to do	47	30%
No, I know I need to research this	16	10%
No, I have not thought about it yet	10	6%
I said no the last questions	43	27%
Total responses	156	

Just 42% of 1st generation students had started researching before University entry or expected to commence in their first year. With 58% expecting to start researching in the second, third or four year, or did not know when they would start.

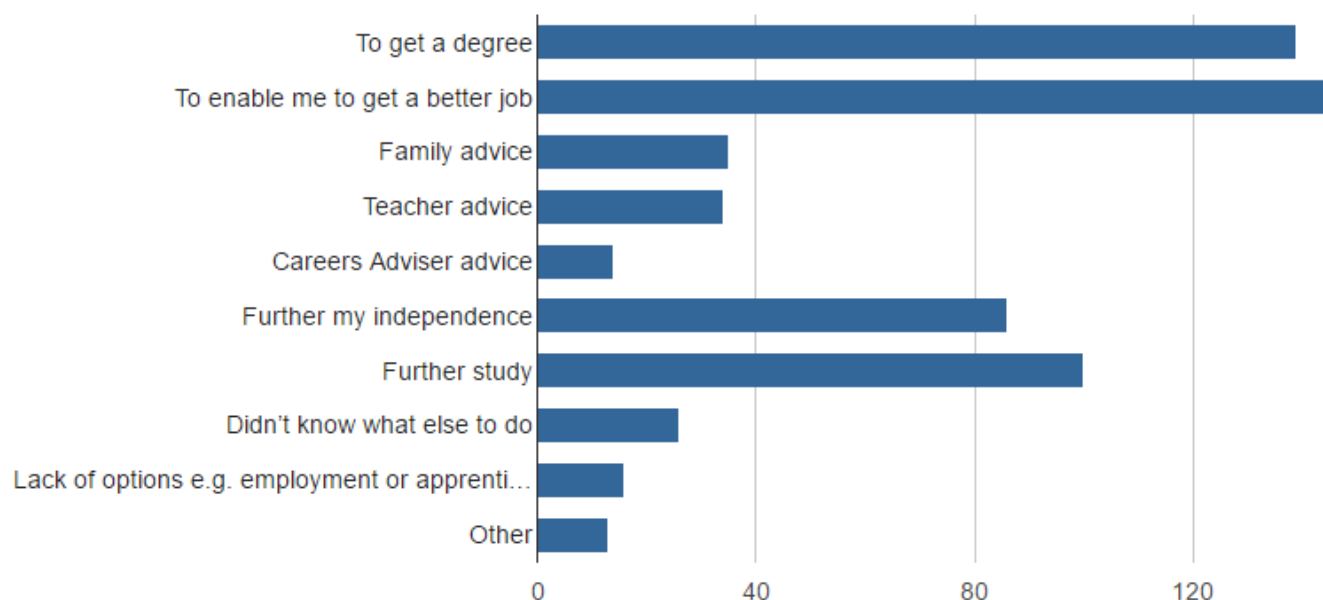
Table 4.

When do you expect to start researching career options for after you graduate?		
Started prior to University	41	25%
First year	28	17%
Second year	60	37%
Third year	14	9%
Fourth year (if applicable)	5	3%
Don't know	14	9%
Total responses	162	

The most prominent motivator for going to University was to 'get a better job'.

Table 5.

Why did you choose to go to University? (select all that apply)

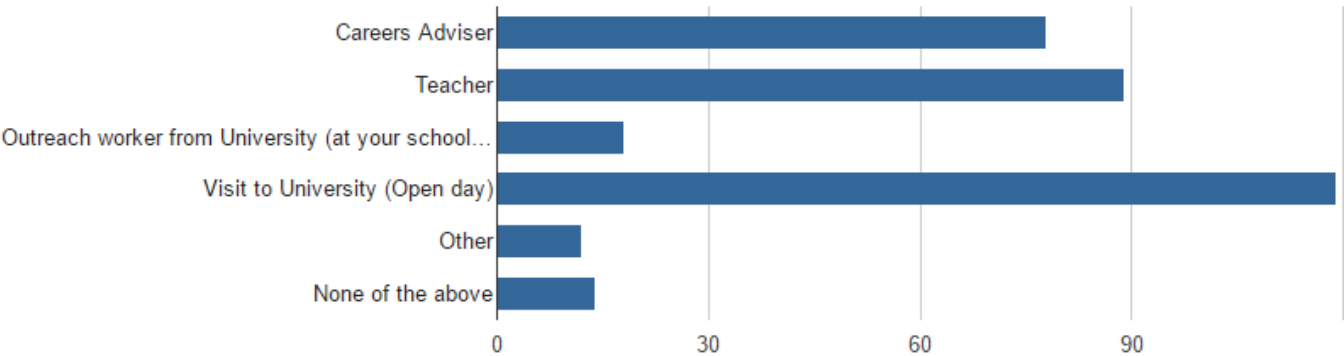


Engagement with Careers Support

The most prominent pre-entry support accessed was via University open days, teachers or Careers Advisers.

Table 6.

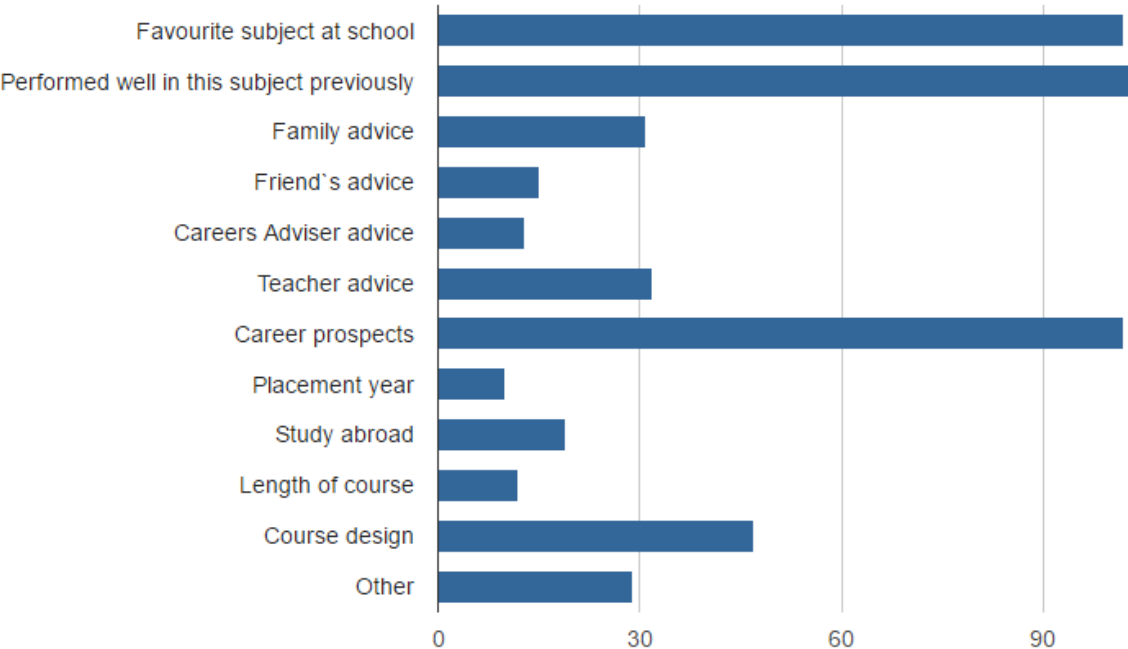
Prior to coming to University what careers support had you engaged with? (select all that apply to you)



Whilst ‘Career Adviser’ was the third most prominent pre-entry support for this group, this support was in the bottom three influencers for course choice. ‘Career prospects’ was a joint second prominent factor as a prime influencer for choice of course.

Table 7.

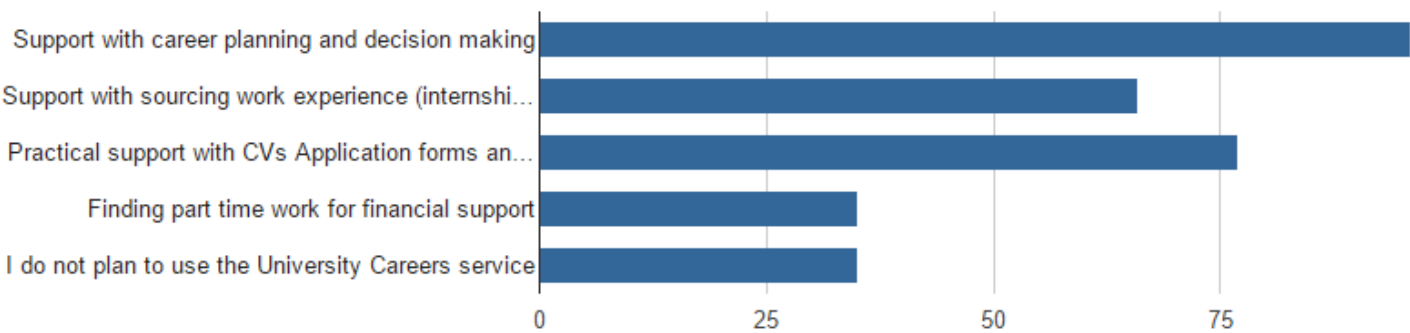
What Factors influenced your choice of course? (select all that apply)



It is encouraging that first year 1st generation students have the intention of engaging with the University Careers Service to support career-planning and decision-making, as the most prominent intention.

Table 8.

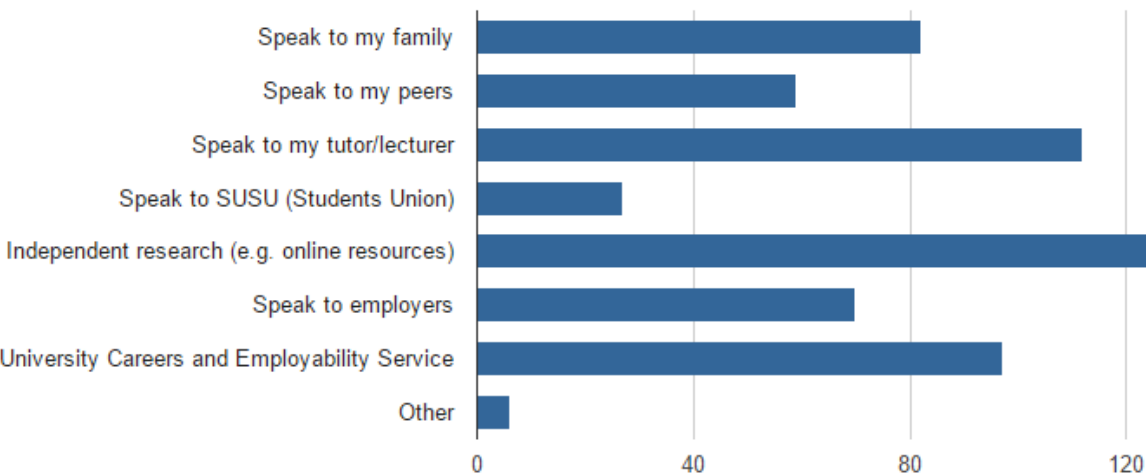
If you have or do intend to access the University Careers and Employability Service, why is this? (Select all those that apply to you)



We can gain much insight into how to approach careers services to 1st year, 1st generation students by knowing they would get help for current decisions via independent research, speaking to academic staff and accessing the University Careers Service.

Table 9.

How would you get help for your present/future career decisions at University? (select all that apply)

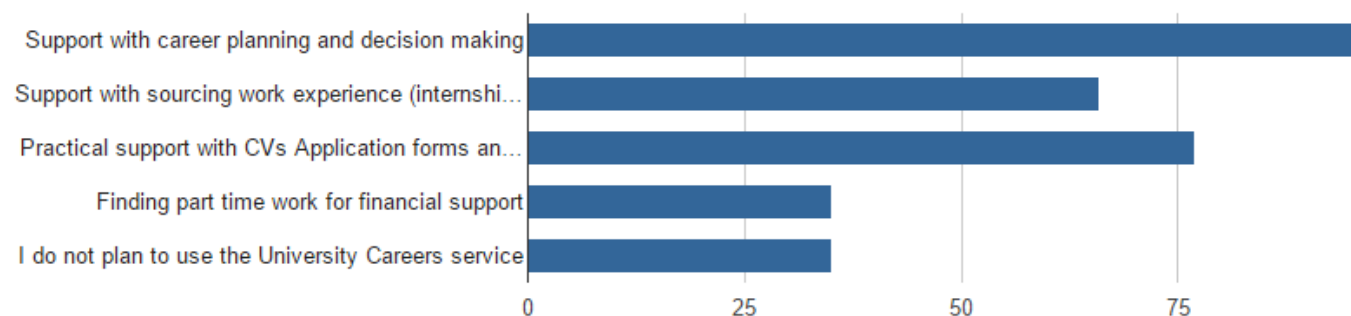


The most prominent response to this question was ‘not applicable’, which we can presume means those who responded intend to make use of the University Careers

Service. That said, it is very worrying that the second most prominent response is that the students do not know enough about the service.

Table 10.

If you **have** or **do intend** to access the University Careers and Employability Service, why is this? (Select all those that apply to you)

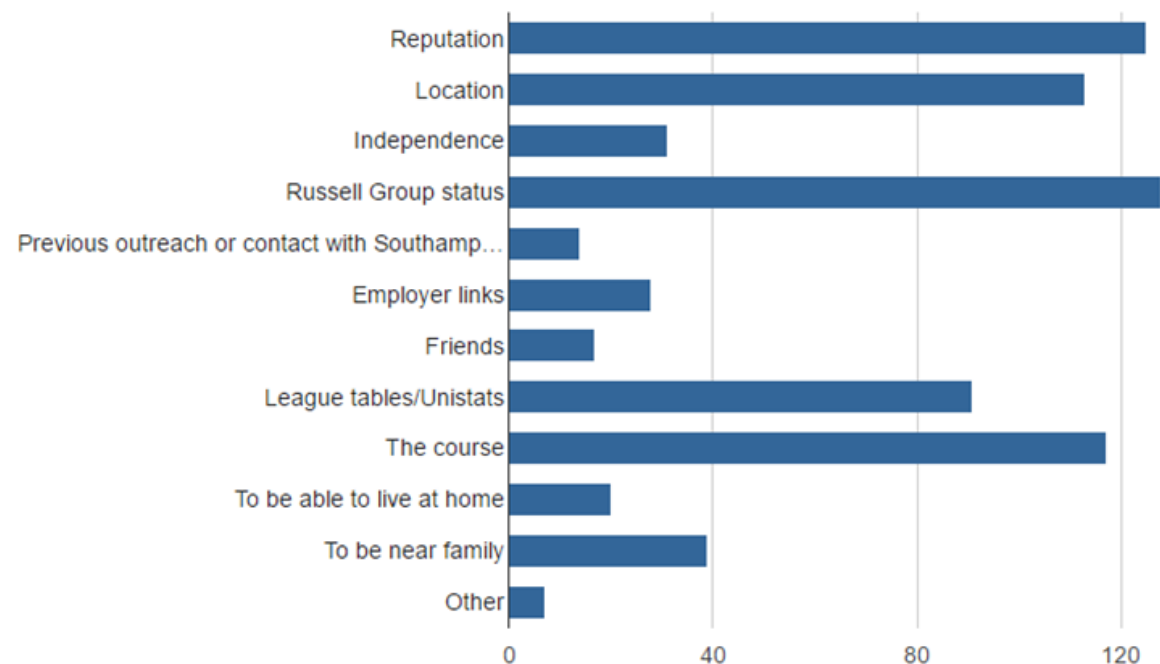


Contradictions between interviews and survey

The survey found reputation and Russell Group status to be a prominent factor in University choice but this was not reported as a factor in the interviews, when 'location' was given as the most prominent influencer for choosing University of Southampton and reputation and Russell Group status was an influencer reported by the 2nd generation group only.

Table 11.

Why did you choose the University of Southampton? (select all that apply)



Analysis and Discussion

The Shock of the Jump from FE to HE

From the interviews I conducted with all 20 students, both 1st and 2nd generation, the most common denominator they spoke about was 'the jump' from level 3 to level 4 study, the climb from Further to Higher Education. It struck me how almost all students I asked 'how is University going?' mentioned the transition of study model and style to have caused them some level of stress or distress. Also, the way they talked about it was concerning and although most stressed that they had overcome what many described as a 'shock', the effect of the genuine worry and anxiety was still evident. I question our methods for trying to engage with this demographic throughout the undergraduate study programme, and how as Careers Services, we can do this without adding to their already high levels of stress as they adapt to the 'shock' of 'the jump'. Whilst it is desirable given these research findings to look at ways to support the whole student journey with Careers and Employability services, it is also important to heed gathered evidence on the 1st year student experience if we are to provide these services in a supportive way via a more nurturing model of delivery.

The shock of the jump that was reported, in particular by 1st generation students, was not just related to academic study. There was a little reporting of being marginalised either directly or indirectly by overt racism as well as thoughtlessness for those who may be less well off financially. Whilst the 'outsider', (Lehman 2009) status is not to be dwelt on as Career Practitioners, it is important to recognise the resilience and strength of character these students have developed due to prior life experience, that enable them to move forwards despite continued negative experiences. When students talked to me about feeling like the 'black sheep of the family' or their fleeing a war-zone with their parents, or not knowing who their father is with such matter of fact bravery, it demonstrated the employability 'skill du jour', 'resilience' and 'grit' in abundance. In fact 2nd generation students talked much more about finding difficulty in adapting to the domestic and practical elements of student life rather than social integration, apart from the two privately educated students, who did not have the social skills and confidence to engage with new people outside their comfort zone, but they also overcame this relatively quickly.

It is these friendship groups, either via course-mates, sports-mates, house-mates, or social groups that helped all students settle in and feel more positive about their undergraduate study. Raey argues that 'the contemporary educational system retains remnants of these past elite prejudices. We still have an educational system in which working class education is made to serve middle-class interests' (Raey 2001), and quotes Robert Lowe, who was representing the views of the vast majority of the middle and upper classes when he argued:

If the lower classes must be educated...they must be educated that they may appreciate and defer to a higher civilization when they meet it. (Lowe 1867 - Primary & Classical Education)

Although this is a throw-back idea to prove a point that there is still a thread of negative

attitude that can be traced back to those who supported the education of the lower classes, albeit to control rather than improve. The very fact that we target widening participation groups to facilitate social inclusion is further evidence, otherwise, it would not be needed or possible. Part of this study's aims was to ensure that a level playing field exists for all students, and perhaps a more robust transition intervention is needed to reduce anxiety and distress during the first few weeks of term.

Investigating non-completion, found distinct differences between the expectations of younger and more mature students: the younger entrants anticipated an 'extremely exciting social life' and mature students, only 'moderate' academic demands. Evidently both social-integration and study support are areas we could support to make students feel nurtured and encourage a desired sense of belonging, no longer outsiders. (Ozga, J. and Sukhnandan, L. (1998) 'Undergraduate Non-Completion: Developing an Explanatory model Higher Education Quarterly)

The 'Career Vision' of the Educated Working Class

The 1st generation students from our survey and interviews with limited future career vision, could be seen as 'ritualist' versus 'careerist' (Tomlinson 2007) with a more passive attitude to their future career. Over a third of 1st generation students surveyed did not have a chosen career in mind. Whilst having a chosen career in mind is not something that Practitioners view as essential, especially so early on in a programme of study, it is perhaps telling that those who responded affirmatively in the interviews were overwhelmingly the 2nd generation students.

To try and understand how we can support 1st generation students to gain career vision and a 'strongly individualised narrative' (Tomlinson 2007) around their future career progression, we should try and understand how to support 1st year 1st generation students to move away from the 'ritualist' or passive model of career vision.

A key need identified by this research is to support 1st generation students in developing a mindset where they begin to define themselves around their aspired careers, and take ownership for their own unique path towards entry into the labour market. It has been argued that the reasons behind this need lie in the cultural and social habitus of social class and that social and cultural reproduction explains the intergenerational persistence of social inequality (Edgerton et al 2014).

Perhaps by seeking to explain the different social and cultural habitus and capital that students from lower socio economic groups inherit, we can find new and innovative ways to support towards a more enlightened career journey and develop the tools equipping us to disrupt mechanisms underlying the perpetuation of social disparities, (Edgerton et al 2014).

Social capital can be viewed as a very useful advantage for 2nd generation students who have established pre-existing and developing networks and knowledge. The interviews suggested that some 2nd generation student's aspirations were of a similar 'status level' to their parent's occupations eg pharmacologist, Radiographer, Dentist or Neurologist.

We can presume that these students have been exposed to their parent's networks and have role models with a 'professional status'. A 1st generation student on the Medicine programme talked about his brother being a Scaffolder and being the only one in his family to read books. How can we bridge this evident chasm of social capital?

In particular the 1st generation students had previously supported their decision-making via much online research as reported in the study interviews, and the survey evidences that the main support for making future career decisions is perceived to be 'Independent research' eg online resources, with speaking to tutors/lecturers a close second, Careers Service third and family fourth. The interviews found that 2nd generation students relied much more on family and wider family networks to support research and decision-making. How can we support 1st generation students whose main motivator for applying to University was 'career prospects', yet have non or limited 'career vision' or direction?

Middle class parents are more 'interventionist' and more involved in the strategic mapping of their children's educational careers and working-class parents are comparatively 'hands-off', (Edgerton et al 2014). Social reproduction (Bourdieu) theory would inform us that that this culture of attitude and action towards life-skill improvement needs to be fostered and developed in our 1st generation students to create a more level playing field. In particular 1st generation students took much advice from College Lecturers and Faculty Admissions Tutors, at Open Days. Perhaps we as Careers Practitioners might look to these nurturing relationships to improve our relationships with students and be in a stronger position to build a greater trust and rapport.

Cultural capital can also mean the notion of engaging in activities linked to particular genres of culture. Some activities such as visiting art galleries or visiting the ballet, may be seen as higher in status generally. Holding a season ticket to a football club or unionism may be associated with lower status. In a modern world, the possession of a certain 'genre' of culture could in fact be an advantage eg Civil Service Fast Stream, where graduate recruiters are actively engaged in efforts to secure socio-economic diversity in their workforce. Equally having 'high-brow' cultural exposure can be of no consequence when applying to opportunities in sectors focused on commerce where profit is the main emphasis. (Erickson 2006)

'But the reality is that many graduates cannot 'cash-in' on their investment in Higher Education and that 'there are still positional differences between graduates on the basis of social class'.

(Tomlinson 2007 – Graduate employability and student attitudes and orientations to the labour market)

Content is King, Marketing is Queen

From the survey 1st generation students and from the interviews 1st and 2nd generation students were not aware of how to access Careers Services and what support was available. If we are to support 1st generation students to have the optimum chance of progression towards a positive graduate destination, given their disadvantage in the graduate labour market and entry to 'top' Universities, a solution must be found to ensure they know our support is available and what that support is.

The increase in communications means that students can receive mixed or contradictory messages from diverse areas of the University (Licanta et al 1996). The students in our interviews often said they had not used the Careers Service, but on further questioning had actually accessed the careers portal or gone to events marketed by careers emails. They were clear that they did not know how to access services and were not aware of the menu of options for them.

Measuring employability and graduate employment has unfortunately become an 'institutional achievement, rather than of the individual' (Cranmer 2006). Careers Services in particular usually provide generic services, although University of Southampton Careers and Employability Service has launched the AGCAS award winning Disability Careers Support workshop, and has recently introduced Diversity Career Mentoring. We could learn from this research project that in addition 1st generation students would benefit from a Careers Service offer that 'speaks' to them as 'individuals', to encourage them to engage. We discovered that 1st generation students value online resources and the expertise of academic staff when it comes to researching careers-related information and advice. Fostering strong employability links with academic staff and gaining a greater understanding of how employability is perceived, could help us present a clearer definition of how greater employability can be achieved and how this can be accessed.

In tandem we can learn much from the majority of 1st generation students who were interviewed and surveyed who turn to online resources as a starting point for careers-related support. How can we market our services online to make a strong connection with our 1st generation cohorts?

Pre-entry, it is vital that we have a clear strategy for how we work with under-represented groups, identifying clear priorities. How can we build stronger partnerships with University Outreach services, academic departments, the student body and indeed parents, in order to gain their support and promote cultural capital practices pre-entry?

The survey reflected that 1st generation students see obtaining a degree as a way to 'get a better job' and perhaps this desire is the key to getting them to buy in to engaging in Careers and Employability Services. 1st generation students who are motivated by the goal of improved employment outcomes are perhaps unaware that achieving this goal involves a very complex set of support needs in addition to the academic success they enjoy. How can we convey the message that engaging in Careers and Employability will increase their advantage of achieving their goal of a better future without adding stress?

Summary & Conclusion

This study has examined the experiences, choices, perceptions and circumstances of a sample of 1st year, 1st generation undergraduate students regarding their family background, university experience and careers support journeys, past and future.

These students have achieved academically despite, rather than because of their circumstances, with many displaying huge amounts of unique and hard won resilience, having faced difficult life challenges, unique to their backgrounds. As far as I could see when the students spoke about their past difficulties, they were not aware of the valuable capital they possess in terms of their grit and triumph against adversity. With taught self-awareness and self-reflection skills, these students can learn to cherish themselves and expect to be cherished and nurtured by future employers seeking to hire resilient graduates.

‘Career vision’ in the 1st generation group was worryingly absent with students coming to a dead end when asked about ideas for the future in the interviews and a concerning number surveyed not having a career in mind, even though so many respondents were from vocational or quasi-vocations degree programmes. This research tells us that the core need for 1st generation students is the development of skills to enable forward thinking and the formation of a realistic career plan. Students cannot rely on media-representations or stereotypes to gain a true insight into their future career. We must offer services to help students build a rapport with their chosen sector, occupation or field, before they enter the graduate labour market.

The research reveals a really exciting opportunity to work in a more joined up way with academic staff, the University Outreach Team, the Careers and Employability Service and parents to support pre-entry students. Open days were reported as an extremely influential event when students engaged with academic staff. To foster our current relationships to offer pre-entry and 1st year students added value to support their employability could result in a very dynamic and forward thinking model of early HE careers intervention.

We learn that with early intervention comes the risk of overwhelming first year students, and careers services should work with 2nd and 3rd years as well as academic staff to discover ways to reach out and support students, in an appropriate, timely yet effective way.

As a Careers Service we work so very hard on the content and presentation of our services but this research shows us that many of the opportunities open to students are not communicated to them effectively. With so many ways to communicate, maybe our message is getting lost, but it is our responsibility to find new ways to reach those students who need our services to gain a better advantage.

Amongst all of the conversations I had with both groups of students the passion for their

subjects shone through. For 1st generation students they have come to University to 'get a better job' or 'career prospects', it is our job to ensure that all of their hard work pays off, by giving them the skills to thrive and survive as they approach the graduate labour market.

It is important that we move towards giving 1st generation students the confidence to own their own values, future and story, the story of the educated working class.

Project Limitations

The research shows that students chose University in order to 'get a better job'. How do we support students and graduates from a lower socio-economic background to source employers who are looking to recruit a diverse work-force and cherish them for who they are?

The scope of this research did not look into students' awareness of the labour market and employer perspectives for recruiting students from a lower socio-economic background. Careers support will need a stronger collaboration between Universities and employers to create a new vision, (Bridgstock 2009), the vision of the contemporary educated working class.

Further research may include:

1. How disadvantaged are 1st generation students in the graduate labour market?
2. Are employers committed to recruiting a more diverse work-force?
3. How can we inspire our graduates to realise their strength and to cherish their individuality? (Manley 2016)
4. How can Universities work more closely with employers and students to improve positive graduate destinations for this group?

'Diversity is the force of life that propagates evolution'. (Manley 2016)

Recommendations

- Procurement of mentoring software platform to facilitate building of strong and wide professional network for all students.
- Online interactive transition resources for 1st years, including careers information and advice.
- A more joined up and structured model of working with University Outreach Team, academic staff, parents and University Careers Service to nurture 'career vision' via cultural capital practices.
- Provide students with access to 'friendly' LMI.
- Career Champions - 1st generation University of Southampton students go into schools and colleges with Outreach Team.
- Careers service marketing group take on planning for clear and effective communication of events, workshops, services and resources to disadvantaged groups in particular.
- Further research following the career journey of the 20 interview participants.
- Further research to understand the graduate labour-market in the context of recruiting students and graduates from a lower socio-economic background.

Appendices:

Research Questions – Survey

1. Gender
 - Male
 - Female
2. **Ethnic background** (Participants will be asked to select from a list of ethnicities and options for don't know and prefer not to say.)
3. **Do you consider yourself to have a disability?**
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
4. **Are you a care leaver/looked after child (Select one option)?**

	Care leaver (16+)
	Looked after in Scotland
	In care in the rest of UK
	UCAS defined care leaver
	Not a care leaver
	Prefer not to say
	Not known

5. **Are you a mature student (over the age of 21 when you started university)?**
 - Yes
 - No
6. **Social economic classification** ('this collects the socio-economic background of students aged 21 and over at the start of their course, or for students under 21 the socio-economic background of their parent, step-parent or guardian who earns the most. It is based on occupation, and if the parent or guardian is retired or unemployed, this is based on their most recent occupation', notes from UCAS.)
 - Drop down of occupations for students to choose and I will code them to the SEC1-9 CODES.

7. What are you studying (Drop down menu of courses select option)

8. How many years is your course?

9. Does your course include a placement year?

10. What factors influenced your choice of course (Select all that apply)

- Favourite subject at school
- Performed well in this subject previously
- Family advice
- Friends advice
- Careers Adviser advice
- Teacher advice
- Career prospects
- Placement year
- Study abroad
- Length of course
- Course design

11. Why did you choose to go to university (Select all that apply)

- To get a degree
- To enable me to get a better job
- Family advice
- Teacher advice
- Careers Adviser advice
- Further my independence
- Further study
- Didn't know what else to do
- Lack of options eg employment or apprenticeships

12. Why did you choose Southampton University? (Select all that apply)

- Reputation
- Location
- Independence
- Russell Group status
- Previous outreach or contact with Southampton University (eg Access to Southampton scheme)
- Employer links
- Friends
- League tables/Unistats
- The course
- To be able to live at home
- To be near family

13. Do you live at home during term time?

- Yes
- No

14. How far is the University from your family home?

- 5 miles or less
- 20 miles or less
- 50 miles or less
- 100 Miles or less
- More than 100 miles

**15. What careers support have you engaged with prior to coming to University?
(Select all that apply to you)**

- Careers Adviser
- Teacher
- Outreach worker from University (at your school or college)
- Visit to University (Open day)
- Other
- None of the above

16. What do you think you will do after you graduate?

- Work
- Further Study
- Year out/Travel
- Don't know

17. Do you have a chosen career in mind?

- Yes
- No

18. If yes, do you know what steps you need to take to achieve this? (Select one statement)

- Yes I have researched this career thoroughly
- Yes I have a general idea of what I need to do
- No I know I need to research this
- No I have not thought about it yet
- I said no to question 17

19. How would you get help for your present/future career decisions at University? (Select all that apply)

- Speak to my family
- Speak to my peers
- Speak to my tutor/lecturer
- Speak to SUSU (Students Union)
- Independent research (e.g. online resources)
- Speak to employers
- University Careers and Employability Service
- Other

20. If you do not expect to make use of the University Careers and Employability Service, why is this?

- Don't know-Don't know enough about the service
- Location of the Centre (Highfield campus)
- I prefer to use other sources of support
- Other

21. If you have or do intend to access the University Careers and Employability Service, why is this? (Select those that apply to you)

- Support with career planning and decision making
- Support with sourcing work experience (internships and placements)
- Practical support with CVs, Application forms and Interviews
- Finding part time work for financial support

22. If you are planning to work whilst at University, why is this? (Select all that apply to you)

- To gain work experience
- To gain work experience relevant to my present career ambition
- To support myself financially whilst at University
- Placement is part of my course
- Not planning to work whilst at University

23. When do you expect to start researching your career options for after you graduate?

- Started prior to University
- First year
- Second Year
- Third Year
- Fourth Year (if applicable)
- Don't Know

Research questions – Interviews

How is University going so far?

- Course, living situation, finances, are you far away from home?

2. Are you working or planning on working whilst you are at University?

- Why?

3. What do your parents do for a living?

- Did any of them have a higher education qualification/ have they been to University?

4. Tell me about why you wanted to come to University?

- Why Southampton?

5. What research did you do beforehand to help you come to your decision?

- Who did you talk to, discuss your options with?

6. What are your aspirations?

- What do you hope to do after you graduate and in the future, do you know what you could do/need to do?

7. Who would you turn to for help with your career decisions?

8. Have you used the University Careers and Employability Service?

- If so why, if not why not, what would you use the service for in the future?

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