School and College-level Strategies to Raise Aspirations of High-achieving Disadvantaged Pupils to Pursue Higher Education Investigation

Research report

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1. Introduction and background

1.1. Introduction

This report examines findings from research among secondary schools, and sixth-form and FE colleges which was carried out by TNS BMRB and the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE) in 2012 and 2013. The research comprised a quantitative survey of schools and colleges between October and December 2012 and in-depth qualitative case studies with a selection of schools and colleges between March and May 2013.

Aims and Objectives

The primary aims of this research were to:

- investigate the strategies used by schools and colleges to support high-achieving disadvantaged pupils in different year groups to pursue Higher Education and, in particular, to apply to Russell Group universities;
- provide evidence on the extent to which high-achieving disadvantaged pupils are already supported in schools and colleges and identify best practice and where support could be improved;
- assess whether the Pupil Premium is being used by schools and colleges to support these activities.

1.2. Background

Participation in Higher Education (HE) has increased substantially in the last 20 years. Research by HEFCE[1] suggests an increase from 30 per cent participation of 18-19 year olds in the mid-1990s to 36 per cent at the end of the 2000s.

This change needs to be understood in relation to changes in the labour market and rising school attainment over the years. School improvement and Widening Participation policies have no doubt had an impact but it is impossible to attribute this to any one strategy or initiative. A context of government spending on pre- and post-16 education; the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for disadvantaged young people to continue studying; changes to tuition fees, student support and bursaries, and a wealth of raising attainment initiatives such as Gifted and Talented, and widening participation initiatives, including Aim Higher, have all influenced patterns of participation.

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[1] Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England, (HEFCE) 2010

However, despite increased participation, the gap in participation in HE between disadvantaged and other students is well documented. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) reported that in 2011 (based on data from the 2008/2009 year) while a total of 33 per cent of pupils in England went to HE overall, around half that proportion (17 per cent) of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) did so. Furthermore, BIS reported that in 2013 (based on data from the 2010/2011 year) a total of 35 per cent of pupils in England went to HE overall, 20 per cent of that proportion were FSM pupils.

That notwithstanding, the gap has narrowed. Corver[2], in an exploration of HE participation since the mid-1990s, identified (since the mid-2000s) a greater proportional increase (in percentage point terms) in participation in HE amongst young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods than those from advantaged areas. An examination by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) of trends in HE found that participation rates for young people from the most disadvantaged areas increased significantly between 2005 and 2010, with the gap between the participation rates of those from advantaged and disadvantaged neighbourhoods reducing over this timescale[3].

Recent research published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies[4] also suggests that the socio-economic gap in participation is actually narrowing. The paper concluded that one possible reason for a reduction in the gap was that, as participation in HE declined slightly as tuition fees were raised in 2006/7, this decline (perhaps counter-intuitively) was slightly 'more pronounced among those from better-off'. Why this may be the case is unclear but the authors suggested that the changes to student finance policy may be 'more progressive' than originally thought by some parties.

Furthermore, a report by the Institute of Education (Department of Quantitative Social Science)[5] also in 2012 highlighted the lack of social mobility in the UK and US compared with other western economies (namely Canada and Australia). The paper concluded that 'young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in England are five time

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[2] Corver, M (2007) 'Patterns of young participation in higher education: A geographical analysis of England 1994-2000'. PhD thesis. Bristol: University of Bristol.

[3] Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England, (HEFCE) 2010.

[4] Socio-economic gaps in HE participation: how have they changed over time?, IFS Briefing Note BN133, November 2012

[5] Jerrim, J., A. Vignoles and R. Finnie (2012) *University access for disadvantaged children: A comparison across English speaking countries*, DoQSS Working Paper No. 12-1, Institute of Education, London.

less likely to enter university than their more advantaged peers'. The paper acknowledged that much of the difference between socio economic groups may be related to school achievement (although the difference did persist). Other sources[6] suggest that attainment gaps account for *the majority* of variation in attendance and that gaps in attendance by socio-economic factors are substantially reduced once prior attainment is controlled for.

Nevertheless gaps in participation rates persist and these are most noticeable when looking at participation in 'selective or leading'[7] HE institutions in the UK[8]. This is the case for universities that form the Russell Group and this is one of the key driving factors behind the current research. One of DfE's key measures of disadvantage in schools is eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM). HE participation rates among FSM-eligible pupils are particularly low. In fact, according to data published by the Sutton Trust in 2010[9], during 2005-2008, 'at the 25 most academically selective universities' in England, only 2 per cent of the UK undergraduate student intake was made up of FSM pupils. This compared with 72 per cent of 'other' state school pupils and 26 per cent from independent schools. Indeed, the participation of young people from disadvantaged areas in these most selective universities has not increased since the mid-1990s and remains very low: only about two per cent of those from the most disadvantaged areas enter these universities[10].

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[6] Chowdry, Haroon, Crawford, Claire, Dearden, Lorraine, Goodman, Alissa T. and Vignoles, Anna F., Widening Participation in Higher Education: Analysis Using Linked Administrative Data. IZA Discussion Paper No. 4991

[7] The term 'selective or leading' universities has been used in this study, including in the survey questionnaire, as a broad term to refer to those universities where both entry requirements and demand for places are high. As Martin Harris noted, there are different definitions and clusters of such universities, including the Sutton Trust's group of 13 'leading, research-led' universities and 'mission groups' such as the Russell Group, but 'in reality there is a continuum of selectivity and the precise definitions for the groups we use are not crucial' (Harris, M., 2010, What More Can Be Done to Widen Access to Highly Selective Universities? http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Sir-Martin-Harris-Fair-Access-report-web-version.pdf Accessed 15 November 2010, Office for Fair Access). Throughout this report, whilst 'selective or leading' is the main term used, other terms are included where these stem directly from the literature or from the research data provided by respondents.

[8] Jerrim, J., A. Vignoles and R. Finnie (2012) *University access for disadvantaged children: A comparison across English speaking countries*, DoQSS Working Paper No. 12-1, Institute of Education, London; Sutton Trust (2010) Sutton Trust submission to Sir Martin Harris: Widening Access to Selective Universities. London, The Sutton Trust.

[9] Responding to the new landscape for university access, Sutton Trust, December 2010, p.6.

[10] Harris, M. (2010). What More Can Be Done to Widen Access to Highly Selective Universities? http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Sir-Martin-Harris-Fair-Access-report-web-version.pdf Accessed 15 November 2010, Office for Fair Access.

Supporting this position, data from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)[11] show that while there have been substantial increases in participation among the least advantaged 40 per cent of young people across HE overall (compared to the mid-1990s), the participation rate among the same group of young people at the 'most selective third of institutions' remains flat.

More recent analysis carried out by the Institute of Fiscal Studies in 2012 also notes that, when looking at participation rates at the most 'high-status' institutions[12], 'the socio-economic gap is even starker' – young people from the richest quintile were estimated to be almost 10 times more likely to attend these most high-status institutions compared with young people in the poorest quintile.[13] LSYPE data show that young people with parents who were educated to degree level were more likely to be attending Russell Group HE institutions at age 19 than those with parents educated to below A Level (24 per cent compared with four per cent)[14].

Research conducted by the University of Durham found UCAS applicants from lower class backgrounds[15] and from state schools continued to be much less likely to apply to Russell Group universities than their comparably qualified counterparts from higher class backgrounds and private schools[16]. The same study also suggests that Russell Group applicants from state schools and from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds are less likely to receive offers of admission from Russell Group universities in comparison with their equivalently qualified peers from private schools and from the White ethnic group, although the finding has been challenged[17].

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[11] See Harris, M. (2010). What More Can Be Done to Widen Access to Highly Selective Universities? http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Sir-Martin-Harris-Fair-Access-report-web-version.pdf Accessed 15 November 2010, Office for Fair Access, para. 17 and annex C.

[12] The IFS measure of 'high-status' was derived by using institution-level average Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) scores (from 2001). It includes all Russell Group institutions plus all UK universities with an average RAE score exceeding the lowest found among the Russell Group.

[13] Socio-economic gaps in HE participation: how have they changed over time?, IFS Briefing Note BN133, November 2012.

[14] DfE (2011) Statistical Bulletin: Youth Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The activities and experiences of 19 year olds. (http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b001014/b01-2011v2.pdf).

[15] As measured by parental occupation entered on UCAS applications

[16] See Boliver, V. (2013). How fair is access to more prestigious UK Universities?. British Journal of Sociology 64(2): 344-364.

[17] Times Higher Education (2013) 'Small' Russell Group Bias in admissions: Ucas. Times Higher Education, 2 May http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/small-russell-group-racial-bias-in-admissions-ucas/2003594.article, Accessed 28 October 2013.

Nevertheless, the reasons for lower entry of disadvantaged students to selective universities cannot be simply explained by lower achievement. Sutton Trust research about access to selective universities identified a range of factors informing young people's desires to enter selective universities[18]. These included:

- aspirations
- knowledge and advice
- subject choice
- financial concerns
- some teachers in comprehensive schools may misunderstand or hold negative perceptions of elite / highly selective universities

Research on young people's aspirations, however, suggests that low aspirations are not the problem – the issue is those aspirations becoming realised[19]. Comparing young people's ideal and realistic occupations gained through survey research, St Clair and Benjamin's survey research found that they were 'considerably more ambitious than the models of occupations they saw around them'[20]. A recent Viewpoint article written by Menzies for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [21] also claimed young people often have 'high aspirations' but may face barriers to achieve those.

Years of research into widening participation has explored how social class and ethnic background impact on attitudes towards HE, and the value that young people place on HE. An emphasis on culture –social class and ethnic cultures and histories of 'the way people like us do things' – helps us to understand how and why people make different choices. Choices are bounded by these cultural differences. Research by Archer and colleagues[22] found students from lower social class background's narratives about HE were characterised by risk. HE is an unfamiliar landscape for students for whom no one in their family has been and making 'safe' choices are key drivers. For these students, it

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[18] Sutton Trust (2010). Sutton Trust Submission to Sir Martin Harris: Widening Access to Selective Universities. London, The Sutton Trust.

[19] Archer, L., S. Hollingworth, et al. (2010). Urban Youth and Schooling: the identities and experiences of educationally 'at risk' young people. Buckingham, Open University Press. Carter-Wall, C. and Whitfield, G. (2012) *The role of aspirations, attitudes and behaviour in closing the educational attainment gap.* York: JRF.

[20] St Clair, R. and A. Benjamin (2010). "Performing desires: the dilemma of aspirations and educational attainment." British Educational Research Journal 37(3): 501-517, p. 510.

[21] Menzies, L (2013) *Educational aspirations: how English schools can work with parents to keep them on track* JRF Viewpoint

[22] Archer, L., M. Hutchings, et al., Eds. (2003). Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of exclusion and inclusion London, RoutledgeFalmer.

meant safe financial and emotional choices – such as familiar institutions, familiar subjects which they know lead to jobs, and local institutions which do not incur living costs nor remove them from familiar surroundings, existing part time jobs and family safety nets. Research by Reay and colleagues[23] found that choice of a local (non- elite) university was often presented as a positive decision for students from working class backgrounds. Cultural and social 'capital' are important concepts which help us to understand how people have different resources (aside from the economic) to enable them to make the choices they do. Access to knowledge about the vast, and changing, landscape of HE, and relationships with people from professional backgrounds, are important resources which young people from disadvantaged backgrounds need to facilitate their choices, an analysis also supported by Menzies[24].

Menzies[25] suggests moving from a model where the problem is seen as 'low aspirations' and the solution as 'raising them' to a model which focuses on intervening so that pupils understand how to achieve their aspirations (in a context where their achievement is also improving)[26]. In this model it is stressed that information and support is vital: 'young people need informed and detailed help to take the pathways that are likely to lead to fulfilment of the longer-term ambitions'[27] and this is where schools and colleges are key.

The NFER[28] evaluation of Aim Higher – a programme which aimed to raise the aspirations of non-traditional entrants to HE in order to widen participation amongst those groups – found raising students' awareness of HE was regarded as a relatively straightforward process, but that this awareness-raising needed constant repetition to be effective. Raising students' aspiration and motivation to go to HE however, was regarded as more complex as cultural shifts are required. The NFER report suggested work on motivation to go to HE involved:

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[23] Reay, D., M. E. David, et al. (2005). Degrees of Choice: social class, race and gender in higher education Trentham Books

[24] Menzies, L (2013) *Educational aspirations: how English schools can work with parents to keep them on track* JRF Viewpoint

[25] Menzies, L (2013) *Educational aspirations: how English schools can work with parents to keep them on track* JRF Viewpoint

[26] Carter-Wall, C. and Whitfield, G. (2012) *The role of aspirations, attitudes and behaviour in closing the educational attainment gap.* York: JRF and Menzies, L (2013) *Educational aspirations: how English schools can work with parents to keep them on track* JRF Viewpoint

[27] Kintrea, K., St Clair, R. and Houston, M., (2011) *The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations.* York: JRF

[28] NFER (2010) *Evaluation of Aim Higher: Learner Attainment and Progression.* Surrey: NFER

- ensuring that students participated in a variety of activities
- giving students sustained encouragement and support

A number of successful aspects can be gleaned from both the NFER and Menzies' work which can inform this current research. On the basis that attainment, aspirations and motivation to HE are inextricably linked, intervention requires:

- One-to-one relationships with staff
- Student ambassadors or alumni
- Parents on board
- Earlier intervention
- High quality careers advice from an earlier age
- Work experience and work-related learning
- Focused mentoring
- The importance of a key individual with specific responsibilities for coordinating this work.

The success of mentoring, however, is inconclusive, although the research suggests that focused mentoring – that uses specific skills to nurture pupils' existing aspirations and to support these – is more successful than being 'generically inspirational'[29].

Against this backdrop, schools, colleges and universities have engaged in a range of activities designed to raise aspirations and encourage young people from disadvantaged areas to access HE. The Reach for Excellence programme run by the University of Leeds is one such example, with activities such as advice sessions, lectures, campus visits, mentoring and summer schools successfully raising students' aspirations to progress to HE[30]. The Realising Opportunities Programme is a partnership of 12 universities which aims to support disadvantaged young people to develop their skills and potential to study at a 'research intensive' university. Evaluation of this programme is still underway, although there are indications that Cohort 1 students became more informed about their career options and were likely to aim higher, following their participation in the programme. Summer schools run by the Sutton Trust have also been shown to have a significant positive impact, with evidence that they increase applications to HE, particularly to those universities that host these

[29] Cummings, C., Laing, K., Law, J., McLaughlin, J., Papps, I., Todd, L. and Woolner, P. (2012) *Can changing aspirations and attitudes impact on educational attainment?* York: JRF

[30] Lamont, E., P. Mehta, J. Nicholas, H. Aston (2011) An evaluation of the Reach for Excellence Programme: Cohort Three and school/ college links views: A Report for the Sutton Trust. NFER Slough.

summer schools but also to other 'elite' universities[31]. Attending a summer school run by the Sutton Trust also appears to reduce the gap in applications to 'elite' universities between privileged and under-privileged young people[32]. Other initiatives include (amongst other things) a range of school-university partnerships, projects where university students work on a voluntary basis with school pupils, additional tuition activities, web-based courses, careers advice/visits and information sessions for parents/carers.

Although there is, therefore, a wealth of research relating to participation in HE, there has been no definitive audit of strategies and activities that schools and colleges use to raise aspirations. This research sought to gain a better picture of this landscape of activity and to investigate which strategies and activities might provide the key to best support high achieving disadvantaged pupils to pursue HE.

The survey aimed to measure prevalence of aspiration-raising activities and strategies including:

- any activities or strategies to raise aspirations to attend HE generally;
- activities or strategies to raise aspirations to attend Russell Group universities;
- activities or strategies to raise aspirations among high-achieving disadvantaged students to attend HE generally
- activities or strategies to raise aspirations among high-achieving disadvantaged students to apply to Russell Group universities.

The survey also captures the type and range of activities that schools and colleges were using. The 11 qualitative case studies of schools and colleges provides a rich elaboration of this survey data providing insights into promising practice, and providing the tools to better understand what works for pupils in different contexts.

1.3. Methodology

There were three main strands to this study:

Strand 1: A telephone survey of schools - a nationally-representative survey of c.400 schools with a purposive boost sample of schools that were known to send a high portion of high achieving disadvantaged students to HE (FSM-eligible students who had

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[31] Hoare, T and Mann, R. (2012) The Impact of the Sutton Trust's Summer Schools: Summary of findings. The Sutton Trust. http://www.suttontrust.com/public/documents/1full-summer-school-report-final-draft.pdf
[32] Hoare, T and R. Mann (2011) *The impact of the Sutton Trust's Summer Schools on subsequent higher education participation: a report to the Sutton Trust.*

gained level 5 at KS2). For the purposes of the evaluation these schools had to have sent a minimum of 50 per cent of these students to HE in one of the last two academic years and to have had at least 5 high achieving disadvantaged students in that year.

Strand 2: A telephone survey of c.100 FE and sixth-form Colleges. This enabled us to draw comparisons of the support provided by schools and colleges. Both strands 1 and 2 identified examples of good practice for further qualitative case research (Strand 3).

Strand 3: Case studies of schools / colleges – 10 case studies drawn from institutions identified in Strands 1 and 2 as exemplifying good practice and selected to ensure maximal variation (including eight schools and two FE colleges). In addition, a 'pilot' school was identified to test the research instruments and case study methodology. These were not changed significantly following the pilot and so this school has been included in the analysis as the 11th case study.

1.3.1. Strands 1 and 2: A national survey of schools and a survey of FE and sixth-form colleges

This report includes findings from a survey among secondary schools, and sixth-form and FE colleges which was carried out by TNS BMRB between October and December 2012.

In total 558 institutions were surveyed including 459 schools and 99 colleges. The survey constituted a 21 minute telephone interview with a senior member of staff at each institution who was able to provide an overview of the strategies they used to raise aspirations to attend Higher Education (HE) among their students. Typically respondents included head teachers, principals, heads of sixth-form, deputy heads and career and development officers. To help prepare for the interview, all respondents were sent a letter explaining the purpose of the survey and a datasheet (which could be used to collate information). Interviews were carried out by a trained panel of specialist telephone interviews.

The survey questionnaire was designed in partnership by TNS BMRB, The Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE, London Metropolitan University) and the Department for Education. A pilot study was carried out in September 2012 to test and refine the questionnaire prior to the main fieldwork period.

The survey findings provide a broad overview of aspiration-raising activities in schools and college whilst the qualitative research, detailed below provides a more detailed understanding of schools and colleges' plans and management of aspiration-raising

activities and illustrate examples of best practice specifically related to aspiration-raising among high-achieving disadvantaged students.

Profile of population / interviewed institutions in the survey
Before discussing the findings from the survey, it is important to understand more about the institutions that were included in the research. This short section provides an overview of the survey population looking at, amongst other things: type of institution, size (based on number of students), presence of sixth-form, funding status, location (as denoted by the type of district the institution is based in) and the proportion of high-achieving disadvantaged students that went on to attend Higher Education[33].

Throughout the report most analysis focuses on three key sub-groups:

1. Schools with sixth-forms (referred to as 11-18 schools)
2. Schools without sixth-form (referred to as 11-16 schools)
3. Colleges (FE Colleges and sixth-form Colleges[34])

In addition, analysis is presented separately in places for 'boost' schools – those that were identified in either 2010 or 2011 as sending a high proportion (33 per cent or more) of high-achieving, disadvantaged pupils to HE.

Generally the survey findings are presented for these three types of institution separately and *not* for the whole population of schools and colleges combined. This reflects the significant differences in the types of students and age groups the institutions work with and the extent to which HE applications are likely to be a priority for them. It is reasonable to expect, for example, that schools with sixth-forms would be more focused on issues relating to HE applications than those without. As a combined total population, it was decided that the sampled institutions do not represent a single coherent group – analysis at the total population level is therefore unlikely to be useful or insightful.

As discussed below, the profile of these three types of institution are very different particularly in terms of size and location. Consequently, analysis of survey data by size

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[33] For schools only – High-Achieving Disadvantaged refers to pupils who were eligible to receive Free School Meals (FSM) and who achieved level 5 or above in English and Maths at KS2. Schools were defined as sending a high proportion of these pupils to HE if 33% or more went on to attend an HE institution in either 2010 or 2011. At the time of the survey, data on attendance rates for 2012 were not available.

[34] Results for FE and Sixth Form Colleges are presented as a combined figure as the sample of 99 colleges does not support analysis for either type of college separately.

and location are of limited value in isolation. Where analysis is presented by these variables it should be treated with caution.

As shown in Table 1, compared with schools, a relatively large proportion of colleges were located in Unitary Districts (29 per cent of all colleges compared with 17 per cent of schools). The location of schools with sixth-forms also varied from those without; overall a relatively high proportion of schools with sixth-forms were based in London (particularly in Outer London boroughs), whereas school without sixth-forms were more likely than those with to be based in Metropolitan Districts and in *central* London.

While differences in District by institution type are modest there is a much closer relationship between type and number of students. Data for the total number of students were not available for colleges but, as we would expect, schools *with* sixth-forms tended to be a lot larger than those without – around two thirds having more than 1,000 pupils. This illustrates why analysis by school size may be problematic – differences that are apparent on initial inspection by size may be attributable to presence of sixth-form (unless analysis is limited to 11-18 schools).

Notes on the quantitative analysis
There are a number of limitations to the quantitative analysis which are acknowledged below. Firstly the report references strategies to raise aspirations both among students generally and specifically among high-achieving disadvantaged students. It should be noted that while the survey distinguishes between general and specific / targeted strategies, it is not always straightforward to disentangle the two. Indeed the evidence suggests that schools and colleges may work with high-achieving disadvantaged students as part of their wider strategy; i.e. they are not targeted but are included in activities and strategies that the school or college has for all students. This being the case the prevalence of strategies to raise aspirations among high-achieving disadvantaged students may be underestimated.

Table 1. Profile of participating institutions by three main institution types (unweighted figures)

School or college	Total		School		School – no sixth Form		School – with sixth Form		College	
School	459	82.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
College	99	17.7%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**558**	**100.0%**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**

District	Total		School		School – no sixth Form		School – with sixth Form		College	
Inner London	41	7.3%	37	8.1%	17	10.6%	20	6.7%	4	4.0%
Outer London	53	9.5%	44	9.6%	2	1.2%	42	14.1%	9	9.1%
Met	121	21.7%	106	23.1%	43	26.7%	63	21.1%	15	15.2%
Unitary	108	19.4%	79	17.2%	31	19.3%	48	16.1%	29	29.3%
Shire	235	42.1%	193	42.0%	68	42.2%	125	41.9%	42	42.4%
Total	**558**	**100.0%**	**459**	**100.0%**	**161**	**100.0%**	**298**	**100.0%**	**99**	**100.0%**

Whether has a sixth-form	Total		School		School – no sixth Form		School – with sixth Form		College	
Yes	298	64.9%	298	64.9%	-	-	298	100.0%	-	-
No	161	35.1%	161	35.1%	161	100.0%	-	-	-	-
Total	**459**	**100.0%**	**459**	**100.0%**	**161**	**100.0%**	**298**	**100.0%**	**-**	**-**

Number of pupils	Total		School		School – no sixth Form		School – with sixth Form		College	
1000 or less	204	44.4%	204	44.4%	116	72.0%	88	29.5%	-	-
More than 1000	245	53.4%	245	53.4%	44	27.3%	201	67.4%	-	-
Unknown	10	2.2%	10	2.2%	1	.6%	9	3.0%	-	-
Total	**459**	**100.0%**	**459**	**100.0%**	**161**	**100.0%**	**298**	**100.0%**	**-**	**-**

School type / funding status	Total		School		School – no sixth Form		School – with sixth Form		College	
LA maintained	250	54.5%	250	54.5%	119	73.9%	131	44.0%	-	-
Academies	209	45.5%	209	45.5%	42	26.1%	167	56.0%	-	-
Total	**459**	**100.0%**	**459**	**100.0%**	**161**	**100.0%**	**298**	**100.0%**	**-**	**-**

Type of college	Total		School		School – no sixth Form		School – with sixth Form		College	
FE College	70	70.7%	-	-	-	-	-	-	70	70.7%
Sixth Form College	29	29.3%	-	-	-	-	-	-	29	29.3%
Total	**99**	**100.0%**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**99**	**100.0%**

Proportion of pupils eligible for FSM	Total		School		School – no sixth Form		School – with sixth Form		College	
Low (10% or less)	186	40.5%	186	40.5%	50	31.1%	136	45.6%	-	-
Medium (25% or less)	168	36.6%	168	36.6%	69	42.9%	99	33.2%	-	-
High (Over 25%)	95	20.7%	95	20.7%	41	25.5%	54	18.1%	-	-
Unknown	10	2.2%	10	2.2%	1	0.6%	9	3.0%		
Total	**459**	**100.0%**	**459**	**100.0%**	**161**	**100.0%**	**298**	**100.0%**	**-**	**-**

High proportion of high-achieving FSM pupils went on to HE	Total		School		School – no sixth Form		School – with sixth Form		College	
Yes	79	17.2%	79	17.2%	29	18.0%	50	16.8%	-	-
No	380	82.8%	380	82.8%	132	82.0%	248	83.2%	-	-
Total	**459**	**100.0%**	**459**	**100.0%**	**161**	**100.0%**	**298**	**100.0%**	**-**	**-**

Whether has aspiration raising activities for high achieving disadvantaged students	Total		School		School – no sixth Form		School – with sixth Form		College	
Yes	242	43.4%	202	44.0%	82	50.9%	120	40.3%	40	40.4%
No	316	56.6%	257	56.0%	79	49.1%	178	59.7%	59	59.6%
Total	**558**	**100.0%**	**459**	**100.0%**	**161**	**100.0%**	**298**	**100.0%**	**99**	**100.0%**

1.3.2.   Strand 3 – Qualitative case studies

The qualitative research carried out by the IPSE research team was intended to complement the survey work and provide a more detailed understanding of schools' and colleges' aspiration-raising activities and strategies and illustrate examples of effective and innovative strategies specifically related to aspiration-raising among high-achieving disadvantaged students. Case study schools and colleges were selected from a sample of survey respondents that indicated they delivered 'aspiration-raising' activities, and expressed an interest and willingness to participate. In most cases some additional information about the specific aspiration activities undertaken was provided. The schools and colleges were selected using a number of criteria so as to maximise the diversity and range of experiences, strategies and activities documented. Factors taken into consideration during the selection process included:

- geographic location;
- size of institution;
- presence of a sixth-form;
- proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM);
- schools with a high proportion of FSM which sent a relatively high proportion of students to HE;
- types of 'aspiration-raising' activities delivered, and evidence of good practice;
- extent to which activities were targeted towards disadvantaged pupils; and,
- groups of pupils targeted (including age/year groups, and/or specific activities related to other pupils characteristics including gender or ethnicity).

A shortlist of ten institutions with five substitutes was drawn up by the research team. The final selection included four London schools - a slightly higher proportion than initially intended. The importance of including schools with a high proportion of FSM students who also send a relatively high proportion of students to HE resulted in this London bias, reflecting the geographical issues, and in particular the 'London factor' in rates of applications and acceptances to university (discussed in Chapter 2).

Each case study school or college was visited for a day by a member of the research team. During the visit, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff identified as having a role or responsibility in relation to aspiration raising (usually two or three per institution) as well as focus groups with students. The staff interviewed worked in a range of positions and areas, some held more traditional posts as heads of sixth form or careers advisors, whilst others had newer roles and responsibilities that focused more specifically on aspiration-raising or which were aligned with specific programmes or schemes within the school or college. The composition of focus groups was determined by schools and colleges, with a request that the groups included students who had participated in aspiration-raising activities.

The semi- structured interview schedules reflected the aims of the study set out in section 1.1. Questions took into account the role of the target interviewee and were tailored to the particular case study context - with information from survey responses, and other relevant data about the institution (e.g. from Edubase, pupil attainment figures, Ofsted reports, and relevant sections of the institution's website which related to aspiration-raising work).

In addition, every effort was made to collect relevant institutional data and material related to aspiration-raising activities, for example school or college policies specific to aspiration-raising interventions, documentary evidence from activities, and data on destinations and transitions into HE. All fieldwork in schools and colleges took place between February and May 2013. As noted above, for the purposes of this report and analysis the pilot case study has been included. In total, the research team conducted 31 staff interviews and spoke with 119 pupils in 21 focus groups across 11 case studies. Amongst the 21 focus groups, the majority of students we spoke to were first-generation into university and three of the schools (all in London) had very high proportions of FSM. In terms of achievement, it was difficult to ascertain whether the students in our focus groups were high-achieving as well as disadvantaged. This is because the selection of students for the focus groups was made by the schools and colleges rather than the research team. However, from the field notes and observations, it was evident that in the majority of focus groups, there were some HAD students, and in a number of specific cases, namely Inner London Boys, Inner London Comprehensive and Inner London Academy, some groups were composed mainly or entirely of HAD students. In the case of colleges, FSM status was not used, although at Southern College, the staff assumption was that the majority of the students at vocational site where the focus groups were conducted were disadvantaged. As the majority of students in focus groups at both colleges were enrolled on vocational courses (which are not often viewed in the same light as more academically orientated courses), 'high-achievement' was more difficult to discern and classify.

In terms of ethnic diversity amongst the focus group participants, in 13 out of the 21 focus groups, White British students were in the majority, 7 focus groups were predominantly Black and minority ethnic and one was a mix of ethnicities. All the BME majority focus groups were in London schools. The mean number of participants in the focus groups was 6.

The table below highlights the 11 case study schools and colleges, and their key characteristics in relation to the main selection criteria.

Table 2. Characteristics of qualitative case studies

No.	Location	Type of institution	Sixth-form	Proportion eligible for FSM
1	Inner London Boys	Boys' Secondary	Yes	High
2	Inner London Comprehensive	Mixed Secondary	Yes	High
3	Outer London Boys	Boys' Secondary	Yes	Medium
4	North East Catholic	Mixed Secondary	Yes	Medium
5	West Midlands Catholic	Mixed Secondary	Yes	Medium
6	Inner London Academy	Mixed Secondary Academy	Yes	High
7	North West Comprehensive	Mixed Secondary	No	Medium
8	East Midlands Comprehensive	Mixed Secondary	No	Medium
9	Midlands FE college	Further Education college	Not applicable	Not applicable
10	Southern FE College	Further Education college	Not applicable	Not applicable
11	South East Academy	Mixed Secondary Academy	Yes	Medium

Qualitative data analysis

All interviews were fully transcribed. Qualitative analysis was carried out in two main ways. Holistic case studies were written up analytically for each school / college incorporating interview data, destination data (where this was available), Ofsted reports and other documentary evidence. Transcripts were then coded using NVivo, an industry standard computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. The data was first analysed using a coding frame developed from the survey analysis. This was then modified as themes from the qualitative data emerged – particularly those relating to the perspectives and understandings of students which were necessarily absent from the survey. Members of the research team then compared and validated their coding and interpretation. The analysis focused on the overall aims of the research project and specifically the research questions defined by the DfE. In terms of identifying effective practice, this was largely determined by interviewees themselves who were asked to provide evidence for their claims.

2. Prioritising aspiration-raising

Summary of Key Findings

- There is almost universal agreement in schools and colleges that it is more important to think about all possibilities that are available to students, not just applying for HE. Case study findings support this view - staff generally try to focus 'right' kind of future for individual students.
- Despite this, the majority of surveyed institutions agree that encouraging pupils / students to apply for HE is one of their highest priorities (with particularly strong agreement in 11-18 schools (70 per cent) and colleges (73 per cent). This finding was also supported by the case studies (although given case study schools and colleges were selected as examples of best practice this would be expected).
- While aspiration-raising is seen as less of a priority in 11-16 schools this is largely because their students do not enter HE directly and, as such, these schools are focused on a wider set of post-16 destinations. Nevertheless most 11-16 schools state they are trying to increase the number of students who go on to HE.
- In this context, raising attainment and progress are seen as important precursors to raising aspirations for HE in some schools and colleges. This can be important in terms both in terms of meeting minimum grade requirements but also in terms of raising students' aspirations more generally.
- Prioritisation of aspiration-raising varies by geographical location, with London schools making this a particular priority. Similar 'London Effects' have been observed in other research. In this case the difference appears to relate to the relatively high proportion of disadvantaged students in London schools and colleges as well as their close proximity to a large number of HEIs (including selective or leading universities).

2.1. School and college priorities

Before discussing the prevalence and type of aspiration-raising in schools and colleges this initial section looks at attitudes towards Higher Education (HE) in schools and colleges and the extent to which encouraging applications to universities and other HE institutions was a priority for participating organisations. These

priorities need to be understood in the context of over a decade of Widening Participation policy which has aimed to increase participation in HE. However, what was evident from both the survey and case study data is that different institutional positionings shape the ways in which schools and colleges set their priorities in relation to raising aspirations. Schools with sixth-forms (here after referred to as 11-18 schools); schools without sixth-forms (11-16 schools); sixth-form colleges and Further Education colleges are driven by different priorities and different targets. We discuss the findings in this context.

The survey included three attitudinal statements which respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with. As shown in Figure 1, the majority of schools and colleges prioritised encouraging applications to HE. However, although the majority of respondents in schools and colleges agreed that they were trying to increase the number of pupils / students who apply for HE, respondents were almost unanimous in the view that it was more important to think 'about all possibilities that are available to pupils\students, not just applying for HE'.

Case study data from across different types of institution supported this sentiment, where it was felt by staff with a variety of roles that their job was to support students into the 'right' kind of future for them as an individual, and that HE might not always be suitable:

> I do feel that university, higher education is a good way to go but it's not for everyone (Inner London Boys: head of sixth-form)

> Although the government are looking for the statistics or the numbers of students going into higher education, we are focussing on what's right for our students. I think that is really important. (Inner London Boys: head of vocational learning)

> We are very much about doing what they [the students] want – it's about them, it's their choice, we're not going to funnel them into something that's possibly not going to be the best choice for them. We respond to their needs. (Midlands FE College: head of student services)

> We don't just dwell on the universities, we do make them aware of the foundation degree route, you know if they can do those at colleges […] because particularly some of the vocational students, it still seems to be too big a leap to go to universities, but actually to go to college and do a foundation route seems to be manageable. (North East Catholic: head of sixth-form)

Thus staff in schools and colleges were keen to assert that impartial advice and support should be their focus, supporting individual student's needs, rather than a prioritisation of HE specifically. That is not to say, however, that staff were critical of the idea of raising aspirations to HE. As Figure 1 shows, the majority of survey respondents indicated that they did prioritise encouraging students to apply to HE, and were trying to increase their numbers; a commitment that forms the basis of discussion in the next chapter. Nevertheless, discussions about raising aspirations for HE were often qualified by the need to see the broader picture.

There were differences in attitudes and priorities by type of institution. The proportion of survey respondents who agreed that they were trying to increase the number of students who apply for HE was lowest among 11-18 schools (70 per cent agreed this was the case compared with 83 per cent of 11-16 schools and 82 per cent of colleges). However, very few respondents (just seven per cent) from 11-18 schools disagreed that this was the case either – indeed the main difference between 11-18 schools and other organisations was the relatively high proportion of respondents who said they neither agreed or disagreed with this statement. This pattern is likely to be because 11-18 schools already have relatively high numbers of students moving direct to HE compared with 11-16 schools (meaning this type of work demands less of a priority).

Figure 1: Attitudes towards aspiration-raising within institution

Encouraging pupils\students to apply for HE is one of our highest priorities
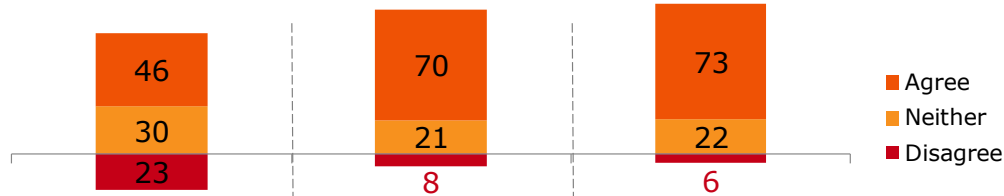
It is more important to think about all possibilities that are available to pupils\students, not just applying for HE

We are trying to increase the number of pupils\students who apply for HE
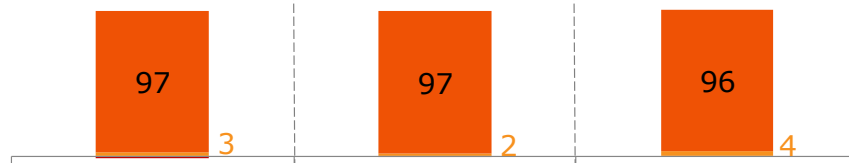
11-16 Schools | 11-18 Schools | College
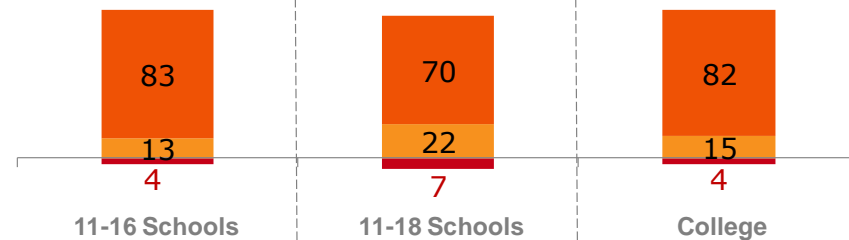
Base: All respondents (161, 298, 99)

As shown in Figure 1, views on how much of a priority encouraging pupils / students to apply for HE also varied by type of organisation. As we might expect, those in 11-16 schools were less likely to agree that encouraging applications was one of their highest priorities compared with those either in 11-18 schools or colleges. This reflects the fact that 11-16 schools do not teach prospective applicants in the two years immediately prior to starting HE.

The case study research revealed the nuances of how institutional logics affect these prioritisations. 11-18 schools have a certain imperative to encourage students to 'stay on' in the sixth-form, driven in part by a financial necessity to populate their sixth form. In fact, one of the 11-16 schools participating in the case study research (an East Midlands Comprehensive) had lost its sixth-form due to inadequate student numbers to sustain it. The imperative to sustain a sixth-form at least partially sets priorities for student transitions through sixth-form and into HE. In contrast 11-16 schools do not tend to be tied in to specific post-16 arrangements. Thus the statement 'it is more important to think about all possibilities not just applying for HE' takes on a different meanings in these different contexts. 11-16 schools, for which

the key transition point is age 16, tend to think about the expansive landscape of post-16 options including vocational options, apprenticeships, BTECs, A-Levels and employment, all of which may or may not lead to HE, while for 11-18 schools, the 'real' key transition point is at 18, where HE is an immediate possibility.

These rationales were apparent in two 11-16 schools that took part in the case study research. In both schools, neither of which sent a high proportion of High-Achieving disadvantaged pupils into HE, interviews with staff revealed that aspiration-raising for HE specifically was not a priority. These schools were aware of their positions as one step removed from HE and felt that their role as a school, responsible for children between the ages of 11-16, was to ensure that students kept their options open with regards to the possibility of HE. As one participant put it *'...in order to make sure that those doors don't close for them really'* (North West Comprehensive: assistant head), as opposed to direct encouragement to apply for HE:

> *We do more the step of between that and further education so it's more our focus is on further education but what you're doing in further education gives you the access into higher education. (East Midlands Comprehensive: Careers Coordinator)*

At this school the sentiment that: *'it is more important to think about all possibilities that are available, not just applying for HE'* clearly dominated staff narratives. An important influence being the 'non-linear' pathways that some students took to HE, as the assistant head explained:

> *I would say we're increasing the numbers going into university but the majority that are going have been created through another route, an alternative route. (East Midlands Comprehensive)*

This participant told the story of a student who had been excluded from the school but then later went to college and took an HND, re-sat her exams and was now planning to go to a local Post 1992 university to study for a degree in Public Services. They described this as '*a very untraditional way of doing it,*' elaborating that had the student been expected to take a linear path she would not have wanted to apply:

> *...when she was here if you said university to her she'd have said no, not a chance. Because she would have seen it as being A-levels and she wasn't able to do A-levels so it was closed to her. (East Midlands Comprehensive: assistant head)*

In this instance, encouraging students to apply to HE was therefore less of a priority than being open to all the possibilities available to students.

In the responses to the survey, a high proportion (82 per cent) of colleges, like 11-16 schools (83 per cent), also indicated that they were trying to increase the number of

students who apply for HE. What was apparent from the case study research, however, was the significance of the vocational/academic divide in relation to this. One FE college in the Midlands which, like most FE colleges, had traditionally focused on vocational education and training, found themselves differently located in this aspirations-raising landscape:

> I think we're quite separated from [raising aspirations for HE] because our level 3 [A level and equivalent] provision is really quite small. […] Level 3 is a really small part of that and it would be very skewed data for us to say 'well we got this number in'. That's not representative of where we are as an establishment. (Midlands FE College: head of student services)

Evidently the proportions of students working at a level eligible for entry to HE informs the extent to which colleges can prioritise HE. At this Midlands FE College, a local prestigious sixth-form college attracted most of the potential A-level students, resulting in relatively few studying for A-levels at the FE College where many of the courses offered were professional qualifications aimed at those already in employment. Although the proportions studying at level 3 were therefore relatively small at this college, it was noticeable that students on vocational level 3 programmes were mostly assumed to be aiming to go directly into employment rather than HE. As the head of careers and the student services manager at the Midlands FE College together claimed:

> It's about positive progression in general. As long as they don't end up NEET. I think that could be more of a concern than how many go to university, it's that policy of destination whatever shape or form that takes with that student. (Midlands FE College: head of careers)

This may in part have reflected local demographics and an economic imperative for students to work, coming from both students and their parents. The lack of consideration of HE for this group of students was in marked contrast to the Southern FE College included in the case study research.

This Southern FE College had higher proportions of students studying at level 3, but the organisational structure of the college and the vocational/academic divide, influenced the prioritisation of HE aspirations-raising. This FE College has its own sixth-form centre, located in a separate town away from the main vocational FE site. There were clear differences between the demographics of the two towns, the students at these sites and their expected trajectories. The gifted and talented coordinator at the sixth-form site referred to their site as a '*coherent sixth-form campus for students looking for a sixth-form experience and teaching principally A-levels'*. The student demographic here was predominantly white and middle class and the coordinator worked with the most gifted and talented students on their Oxbridge and Russell Group applications. In contrast, the staff at the FE site, where

most students were presumed to be disadvantaged, talked of struggling to get their students to consider HE with the priority being to make sure they succeed on their current course:

> *I think we need to get them to the end of the course because that's the problem if they don't get to the end of the course then they don't get the grades and they'll never be able to go [to HE]. (Southern FE College: Curriculum Leader)*

While 20 per cent of students at sixth-form site obtained places at Russell Group universities in 2012 , with an average of two students gaining Oxbridge places each year, the FE site did not record Russell Group or Oxbridge entries as the numbers were negligible. As with the West Midlands Comprehensive case study, discussed above, non-linear routes were also identified at this Southern FE College site:

> *Last year quite a few of our students out of the group didn't go [to HE], didn't apply because they said 'oh no I'm not going, I can't afford it or I won't get the grades'. So quite low aspirations. But since then we have contacted them all because I wanted to know what's happened to them– out of interest – and they've applied this time because they've had a year out and they've been working in care homes or in admin and they're saying actually 'no, I've really decided that I do want to go'. (Southern FE College: Curriculum leader)*

The curriculum leader went on to explain that the college had then helped these returning students with their applications. There was clearly a strong focus on university access for those on level 3 vocational courses at this site, in direct contrast to the Midlands FE College.

2.1.1. Raising attainment as a precursor to raising aspirations to HE

Attention to raising levels of attainment and progress also formed a necessary precursor to a focus on raising aspirations beyond school for some case study institutions. In particular, both of the 11-16 schools emphasised this:

> *The school's had a need to get on board and address … broader issues around inclusion and progress and therefore it has worked to our advantage to start to really make sure we're getting a handle on those issues. (East Midlands Comprehensive: head)*

> *What is vital for us is to ensure that between them coming to us at point A and when they're leaving us at point B that there is sufficient progress and in fact we want more than sufficient progress […] what we're trying to do to lift them really [academically] and to raise aspirations. (North West Comprehensive: assistant head)*

There was a sense from both schools that levels of attainment were key. In a practical sense, obtaining the required GCSE results to progress to A-levels (or equivalent level 3 qualifications) was an obvious priority. However, as the assistant head at the North West Comprehensive case study was keen to assert, improving learning will have knock on effects on students' aspirations to attend HE:

> *The vital thing – and call me old fashioned – but if we can get greater academic success for all we will improve access to the university for all. (North West Comprehensive: assistant head)*

This focus on 'raising grades' as a priority was also articulated in some 11-18 schools, including the West Midlands Catholic case study, ('because the sixth-form wasn't performing as successfully as it could have been') and at the Inner London Boys case student, where the lead on a project designed to get more HAD students into Russell Group universities explained that 'boosting their grades' was a key aspect of this. As the head of aspirations at the Inner London Academy explained:

> *Of course the aspiration is important, […] But equally you know they're not going to get places at universities be they Russell Group, 1994 Group, you know any university nationwide they're not going to get there without getting the grades. And they're not going to succeed there and beyond […] without the grades and without that fundamental kind of literacy and numeracy.*

2.1.2. Geographical location and aspiration-raising

The preceding sections detailed how the prioritisation of aspiration-raising work varied by type of institution. There is also some evidence to suggest that variations by district (which denotes local authority type) are important (Table 3).

Table 3. Attitudes towards HE aspiration-raising by district

	London (inner and outer)	Met	Unitary	Shire	Total
Encouraging pupils\students to apply for HE is one of our highest priorities					
Agree	78%	64%	62%	59%	**63%**
Neither agree nor disagree	16%	20%	23%	28%	**24%**
Disagree	7%	15%	11%	13%	**12%**
Don't Know	0%	1%	4%	0%	**1%**
Base	*94*	*121*	*108*	*235*	***558***
It is more important to think about all possibilities that are available to pupils\students, not just applying for HE					
Agree	95%	99%	95%	99%	**98%**
Neither agree nor disagree	4%	1%	5%	1%	**2%**
Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	**0%**
Don't Know	1%	0%	0%	0%	**0%**
Base	*94*	*121*	*108*	*235*	***558***
We are trying to increase the number of pupils\students who apply for HE					
Agree	79%	82%	75%	72%	**75%**
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	15%	19%	22%	**19%**
Disagree	7%	4%	6%	7%	**6%**
Don't Know	1%	0%	0%	0%	**0%**
Base	*94*	*121*	*108*	*235*	***558***

Although differences by district within the survey responses should be interpreted with caution (type of school and college vary by district, and base sizes are relatively small), there is some evidence that attitudes towards raising aspirations to apply for HE do vary by district. As shown in Table 3, schools and colleges in London (inner and outer) were more likely to agree that encouraging students to apply was one of their highest priorities and that they were trying to increase the number of students who apply for HE. In fact 78 per cent of those in London agreed this was the case – higher than the average in any of the three types of institution (see Figure 1). DfE data[35] reveal that, of schools sending a high proportion of 'high achieving disadvantaged' students to HE, London schools are over- represented, where disadvantage is measured by Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility.

A London factor has also been identified in other research. Demack et al[36], in a secondary analysis of data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England

[35] Available through the National Pupil Database (NPD),
http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/national-pupil-database
[36] Demack, S, A. Stevens and C. McCaig (2012) 'Dreams' & 'Realities' in University Access:

(LSYPE) from 2003/4 and 2009/10, found a London advantage in access to both non-Russell Group and Russell Group universities. However, assuming comparable GCSE levels, they reported that young people from the North West and West Midlands were more likely to be at a Russell Group university by age 19-20 than those from London. The Sutton Trust[37] also reported regional differences in patterns of application and acceptance rates, with the top 14 authorities for the proportion of students applying to (all) universities all being in London. This London effect was also less pronounced, however, in relation to applications to 'the Sutton Trust 30', with affluent areas in the south of England (including three London authorities) generating the most applications to these universities.

There are a number of complementary contextual explanations for London's success in applications and acceptance in general. London schools are likely to have higher numbers of disadvantaged students, but also London schools have seen a disproportionate rise in GCSE attainment as a consequence of their involvement in the London Challenge and City Challenge programmes in the past decade[38]. Furthermore, research by Hutchings and colleagues[39] suggests London schools have narrowed the attainment gap more at GCSE, relative to the national picture between FSM and non-FSM students. In short, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in London, as measured at KS2 and KS4, has been higher than elsewhere in the country for over a decade and schools in London have higher proportions of disadvantaged students[40]. It is likely that this success in raising attainment would have impacted on students' aspirations and post-16 choices and may in part explain why we found that entry to HE for HAD pupils is greater in London.

All four case study London schools sent a high proportion of HAD pupils to HE. The case study research however also suggested that London schools' unique location in the country's business capital informed a specific context for raising aspirations which utilised these connections. In three of the four London case study schools, participants talked about strong links with London-based Blue Chip companies, including banks, financial services, IT corporations and international law firms. These

Mapping social differences in Higher Education aspirations and participation in England. Nuffield Foundation, London.
http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Demack%20SGS%2039214%20Final%20Report_2.pdf

[37] Sutton Trust (2011). Degrees of Success: University Chances by Individual School. London, The Sutton Trust.

[38] Hutchings, M and Mansaray, A (2013), A review of the impact of the London Challenge (2003–8) and the City Challenge (2008–11), Ofsted, London

[39] Hutchings, M., Greenwood, C., Hollingworth, S., Mansaray, A. & Rose, A. with Minty, S. & Glass, K. (2012). Evaluation of the City Challenge Programme. London, Department for Education.

[40] Cook, C. (2013) 'Are London's schools top of the class?' Presentation at the Centre for London breakfast discussion 18 April 2013. Slides available at http://blogs.ft.com/ftdata/2013/04/18/the-london-schools-mystery/ , accessed April 2013.

were formalised links, for example through companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) priorities or as the target of social enterprise activities specifically aimed at raising aspirations. Such schemes tended to provide mentoring for students from professionals in these corporations and/or paid internships providing access to the world of professional work. It also appears that London schools have greater access to an array of schemes aimed at raising aspirations run by charities, social enterprises or universities themselves. All four London schools had access to at least two such schemes.

The case study research also revealed that labour market opportunities in the immediate geographic location impacted in different ways on some schools and colleges' prioritisation of HE against alternative routes into employment. A strong local manufacturing or service economy with jobs requiring lower qualifications appeared to act as a pull into employment (particularly for working class students). This is discussed further in section 5 in relation to perceived barriers and challenges to raising aspirations. Such local employers and businesses however, also informed school and college links with employers, and therefore informed school priorities. In the case of one East Midlands Comprehensive (in relation to non-linear routes into HE), the school's priorities were driven by external forces relating to local labour markets, and availability of competitive education and training. The head at this school asserted:

> My vision for the school is that we are putting ourselves right at the centre of the local community because it is a really thriving and ambitious area and the city has got a very strong local economy and local industrial base and actually that in itself is something that's quite unique in the north of England so we're trying to build up strategic links now with different employers. (East Midlands Comprehensive: head)

In coordination with the local authority this head teacher had therefore strategically adopted a broad careers focus which they felt made best use of these local circumstances and opportunities for their students.

As is discussed later (in Chapter 4 - in relation to raising aspirations to Russell Group and other selective or leading universities), the location of universities relative to schools and colleges also impacted on their perceived feasibility among students (both in terms of practical and imagined options).

The focus of this chapter has been on the extent to which schools and colleges prioritise aspiration-raising. In Chapter 3 the focus is on the strategies and activities schools and colleges adopt to raise aspirations for HE.

3. Aspiration-raising Strategies and Activities

Summary of Key Points

- Nearly all surveyed schools and colleges reported at least some activities to raise aspirations among students – with activities most often delivered through one-to-one and small groups.

- The range of activities measured by the survey was diverse but with a particular focus on guidance about the application process, inviting speakers/visitors into the school or colleges, visits and residential trips and (to a lesser extent) mentor and ambassador schemes.

- Case studies identified key strategies used by schools and colleges in their aspiration raising work that were felt to be particularly effective. These included a focus on guidance, information and advice; specific support for aspirations for HE; and an emphasis on students gaining experience of university, through trips, residential visits and summer schools.

- Working with students' parents was also deemed to be very important, particularly given some of the social and cultural challenges that are evident (discussed in chapter 5).

- Case study data suggest there is sometimes 'fatigue' among students where activities (particularly visits and trips) are too generic. Staff and students both highlighted the importance of tailored and targeted activities – for example visits which are focused on activities and learning in the specific subjects students are interested in.

- Activity prior to KS4 remains limited –schools and colleges tend to concentrate activities in the run up to exams at the end of the Year 11 and in the final two years before pupils / students leave. This is an area that could be improved given that other research has highlighted the need to raise children's aspirations and achievement from an earlier age to ensure they have a fair chance of participating in HE.

- Identifying 'disadvantage': schools tended to identify disadvantaged pupils using eligibility for FSM, whereas colleges were more focused on socioeconomic and geographical definitions – including postcode. However, case study research reveals that 'disadvantage' is understood by staff to be more complex than eligibility for Free School Meals.

- There was widespread acknowledgement in case study institutions of the gap in participation in HE between disadvantaged and other students. These schools and colleges had a range of measures to address this (targeted specifically at disadvantage students).
- More generally (across all surveyed schools and colleges) aspiration-raising activities with high-achieving disadvantaged students were reported in 50 per cent of 11-16 schools, 39 per cent of 11-18 schools and 40 per cent of colleges.
- The range of activities with high-achieving disadvantaged students reflects wider strategies that schools and colleges employ – but with a slight skew towards more tailored and/or one-to-one work (including more mentoring schemes). Offering a more tailored, personal approach was deemed particularly important by case study respondents when working with this group.

This main section of the report looks at the strategies and activities used by schools and colleges to raise aspirations for students to apply for HE. It also includes analysis of activities and strategies which are targeted specifically at students disadvantaged backgrounds (including FSM-eligible students). Strategies to raise aspirations to apply for Russell Group and other selective or leading universities are dealt with separately in chapter 4. This chapter starts by looking at the prevalence of aspiration-raising work generally and how schools and colleges set about defining both high achievement and disadvantage within their context.

3.1. Prevalence of aspiration-raising work

Overall, nearly all sampled institutions in the survey indicated that they did some kind of work with students specifically aimed at raising aspirations to apply to Higher Education. This could include work across the whole school or college, year groups or any other specific groups of students, including disadvantaged students[41]. In colleges 98 per cent of respondents said they were doing some kind of work, with a similar proportion in schools (97 per cent).

While the prevalence of aspiration-raising activities was marginally lower in 11-16 schools the difference was minimal (94 per cent of 11-16 schools said they did some kind of work in this area).

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[41] Work specifically with students from disadvantaged backgrounds is dealt with later in this section.

3.2. Defining disadvantage and high achievement in schools and colleges

The research was specifically concerned with strategies to raise aspirations among disadvantaged students. While the Department's main measure of disadvantage is eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM), the survey included a question to capture how schools and colleges themselves defined *disadvantage* within their setting and the case study research also explored how schools and colleges interpreted the term.

As shown in Figure 2, responding to the survey, a wide range of definitions were used and there was considerable variation particularly between schools and colleges (less so between 11-16 schools and 11-18 schools). The analysis in Figure 2 only includes responses that were selected by 10 per cent or more of participating schools or colleges.

Figure 2. Definitions of disadvantage among schools and colleges

11-16 schools

FSM-eligible	Lower socio-economic backgrounds	Looked after children	SEN	Postcode	EAL	EMA		No answer	Don't Know
70%	20%	23%	24%	8%	9%	2%		2%	8%

11-18 schools

FSM-eligible	Lower socio-economic backgrounds	Looked after children	SEN	Postcode	EAL	EMA		No answer	Don't Know
73%	24%	20%	17%	8%	12%	13%		2%	4%

Colleges

FSM-eligible	Lower socio-economic backgrounds	Looked after children	SEN	Postcode	EAL	EMA		No answer	Don't Know
5%	44%	16%	13%	38%	4%	15%		2%	7%

Base: All respondents (161, 298, 99)

In schools responding to the survey, FSM-eligible was the most common definition of disadvantage, with no significant difference in response between 11-18 schools and 11-16 schools. Other frequently-used definitions in schools were lower socio-economic groups, looked after children and Special Educational Needs (SEN) (all used by around one in five to a quarter of surveyed schools).

In contrast, colleges were most likely to define disadvantage through lower socio economic groups (44 per cent of all colleges said this was the case) or by postcode (38 per cent). The latter suggests that geographical definitions are more common in colleges than they are in schools. This probably relates to the use of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) in calculating funding for Further Education. This naturally leads colleges to focus on students' postcodes (from which IMD can be derived).

Eligibility for, the now discontinued, EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance), was also used in a reasonably high number of colleges (15 per cent) and 11-18 schools (13 per cent). Interestingly those speaking English as an Additional Language (EAL) were most likely to be selected in 11-18 schools (12 per cent) particularly compared

with colleges (where only four per cent of respondents said they used EAL as a measure of disadvantage).

Other definitions that were used by smaller numbers of schools and colleges included:

- Home carers
- Ethnic minorities
- First generation to university
- Armed services / military families
- Refugees, travellers, and new arrivals within the UK
- Single parent families

Unless otherwise stated, the survey questions relating to aspiration-raising activities among high-achieving disadvantaged students focused on however the school or college itself chose to define 'disadvantaged'. In terms of 'high achieving', for the purposes of the survey this was defined as having gained level 5 at KS2.

Definitions of 'high achieving' in the case studies were not discussed in detail but were assumed to include standard measures of attainment in school examinations and tests.

The case study data support the findings of the survey with regards to how disadvantage was defined by schools but also provides a more complex picture. Staff interviewed, were well versed in the use of FSM data, but several also discussed the use of post code data, Pupil Premium, and Indices of Deprivation. Such definitions of disadvantage tended to be driven by external agencies such as the DfE and EFA, Aim Higher or the criteria of other specific schemes.

On the whole staff in the case study research were aware of the correlations between FSM and low attainment, and had a commitment to addressing this. This suggests that the *narrowing the gap/closing the gap* campaign has had some purchase in schools and colleges. However, the attention to FSM related to *monitoring* attainment, and awareness of the potential for this gap to impact on progression and destination was more embryonic. While attainment appeared to be measured in relation to FSM across the board for schools, this was not yet the case for aspirations and destinations. This point is discussed in more detail in chapter 6. This meant that specific monitoring of aspirations and destinations of high achieving disadvantaged students was not taking place in any systematic way.

One measure that was frequently mentioned in the case study research (and which was used by Aim Higher) is whether students were the first generation in their family to enter HE. This appeared to be a non-stigmatising indicator, and it was recognised,

that regardless of financial circumstances, students whose parents had not been to university had more limited knowledge of the HE landscape and the application process.

Nevertheless, data on first generation into university was not recorded in any systematic way in schools or colleges included in the case study research. In terms of aspirations and destinations of their students, staff tended to make qualitative judgements, on a case by case basis, based on their knowledge of a range of factors in students' backgrounds. In short understanding disadvantage was qualitative and tended to involve multiple or intersecting factors.

What was evident, however, was that the schools with high proportions of FSM students (the three London schools), and the FE colleges (with the exception of the sixth-form centre at the Southern FE College) tended to see themselves as having mostly disadvantaged students. This being the case they did not distinguish students on the basis of levels of disadvantage. For example the Director of post-16 learning in one of the London school case studies (with a high proportion of FSM) explained:

> *I think we're possibly the highest in the borough on free school meals so all of our students; in the old Aim Higher agenda all of our students would have been eligible for all of those kind of activities. We have very few middle class students here so it doesn't make a difference to me in terms. (Inner London Comprehensive: Director of post-16 learning)*

The proportions of FSM students, and the relative disadvantage compared to other schools therefore set the context for this school, which had come to see itself as having a cohort of disadvantaged students.

Even schools with more modest proportions of FSM-eligible students recognised that FSM was not the only indicator of disadvantage. For example, both the North East Catholic and East Midlands Comprehensive mentioned that the nature of the labour market in the local area meant that, while their schools did not have high proportions of FSM-eligible students, they estimated that only small proportions of parents had been to university themselves. Thus, there was less of a history of HE attendance within the catchment area.

There was some recognition among case study participants that while disadvantage does correlate with lower attainment on average, this is not always the case. For example, the Director of sixth-form at the North East Catholic School claimed:

> *I think by nature a lot of our students even the more academic ones can be from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds, it's not really a distinct correlation.*

Furthermore, one of the London schools claimed that their FSM-eligible students now outperformed non-FSM students. Indeed, research shows London schools do well for FSM pupils and students from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.[42]

All these factors clearly framed the strategies schools and colleges used to raise aspirations for disadvantaged students in these different schools (discussed later in this chapter). The case study research team recognise these complexities and analysis is conducted in a way which is expansive rather than reductive, paying attention to the specific local circumstances, and the relative nature of disadvantage in these contexts. Later in this chapter we discuss the overarching approaches schools use and the different strategies they had developed in these differing contexts.

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[42] Hutchings, M., Greenwood, C., Hollingworth, S., Mansaray, A. & Rose, A. with Minty, S. & Glass, K. (2012). Evaluation of the City Challenge Programme. London, Department for Education.

3.3. Delivery mode for aspiration-raising activities

The survey of schools and colleges offers insight into *how* institutions deliver aspiration-raising activities both in terms delivery mode and which year groups they work with.

As shown in Table 4, the survey shows that schools and colleges were more likely to deliver aspiration-raising activities through one to one and small group work than through whole school or class work. This suggests that a more focused approach tends to be favoured where possible. That said, work with whole classes and whole school gatherings were also common – although not so much in colleges where work with whole college gatherings was relatively uncommon; in fact less than half (43 per cent) of respondents in colleges said that they did this. This may reflect the fact that gatherings of all students are less common in colleges than they are in schools (where assemblies are still the norm). Otherwise variations in delivery mode between schools and colleges and between 11-18 schools and 11-16 schools were small (see Table 1).

Table 4. Delivery mode of aspiration-raising activities

Which of these they work to help raise aspirations includes	TOTAL	11-16 School	11-18 School	College
One to one work with individual pupils\students	**93%**	86%	95%	98%
Work with *small groups* of pupils\students	**94%**	91%	94%	98%
Work with *whole classes*	**86%**	89%	83%	94%
Assemblies or other *whole* school / college *gatherings*	**82%**	81%	89%	43%
Base	**558**	*161*	*298*	*99*

3.4. Prevalence of aspiration-raising activities by Key Stage and Year

Figure 3 summarises prevalence of activities by year group and Key Stage. Survey data by Key Stage are presented on the right hand side of the figure and represent 'net' results – i.e. any work with students in these Key Stages regardless of specific Year Group.

The pattern of activity varies considerably by type of institution. In 11-16 schools, activities are relatively uncommon prior to Year 9, peaking during Years 9 to 11 in the run up to students sitting GCSEs.

In contrast, in 11-18 schools, activities appear to be more spread out although activity is particularly uncommon prior to Year 9 among these types of school (even more uncommon than in 11-16 schools). Rather, activities tend to be split fairly evenly over Years 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 (i.e. throughout KS4 and KS5). Activity peaks slightly during Years 11 and 12 in the run up to GCSEs – and again during the first year of sixth-form probably as students are required to start thinking about possible applications to HE. However these peaks are not as pronounced as we might expect.

Figure 3. Prevalence of HE aspiration-raising activities by Year and Key Stage[43]

<	Year	> <	Key Stage	>

Schools – no 6th form

Y6 or below	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	KS3 (not spec)	KS4 (not spec)	KS5 (not spec)
24%	31%	60%	64%	66%	7%	5%	19%	29%	1%	

Schools – with 6th form

Y6 or below	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	KS3 (not spec)	KS4 (not spec)	KS5 (not spec)
4%	14%	20%	43%	51%	57%	55%	50%	22%	38%	35%

Colleges

Y6 or below	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	KS3 (not spec)	KS4 (not spec)	KS5 (not spec)
2%			4%	8%	8%	72%	63%	2%	2%	17%

Base: All respondents (161, 298, 99)

Activity in colleges is, understandably, almost exclusively with Years 12 and 13, with activity particularly concentrated in Year 12. This suggests that slightly more work tends to be done with students in the year they join sixth-form colleges rather than during their second year as they prepare to leave the college.

Generally the survey findings suggest that most institutions focus aspiration-raising activities in the run up to students taking GCSEs (or equivalent Year 11 qualifications). Notably this is the time that students need to start thinking about post-16 subject choices, which will affect the types of HE course they can apply for in

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[43] Note: A small proportion of 11-16 schools indicated they worked with Key Stage 5 students. Our assumption is that a small number of respondents included work they did with other local schools and colleges (although prompted to talk specifically about their own institution).

subsequent years. The focus of activity also continues during Years 11 and 12 (for colleges and 11-18 schools) as students are required to think about whether they should apply to HE and, if they do, the types of courses and institutions to apply for. Conversely, there is much less activity prior to Year 9 across all institutions.

In contrast, work with students in schools during their more formative years is much less common. This may be a concern given that The Office for Fair Access (OFFA), has suggested that children as young as seven should be encouraged to think about studying for a degree when they leave school. In relation to this, OFFA [44]recommended that universities do more to help raise children's aspirations and achievement from an earlier age to ensure they have a fair chance of participating in HE.

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[44] How to produce an access agreement for 2014-15, OFFA, January 2013

Table 5. Aspiration-raising activities used in schools and colleges

All activities used to raise aspirations to apply to HE	BOOST SCHOOLS	ALL OTHER SCHOOLS	11-16 School	11-18 School	College	TOTAL
Inviting people into the school / college						
Inviting speakers into your school / college	97%	93%	89%	96%	96%	94%
Visits from university lecturers / other HE staff to your school / college	77%	81%	<u>66%</u>	88%	**96%**	82%
Ex students to talk to current students	9%	8%	3%	10%	4%	7%
Advice on application process and/or subject choices						
Guidance on subject choices to maximise chances of getting a place	91%	89%	80%	95%	93%	90%
Guidance on the UCAS application process or system	71%	71%	<u>25%</u>	**96%**	**98%**	74%
Specific support for students who want to study certain subjects e.g. medicine:	3%	2%	1%	3%	-	2%
Interview practice/mock interviews	6%	2%	1%	3%	2%	2%
Visits out						
Visits to universities or other HE Institutions, including trips to open days'	94%	90%	82%	95%	89%	90%
Visits to Higher Education fairs / promotional days	88%	88%	<u>77%</u>	94%	91%	88%
Residential trips - where pupils\students can stay at a HE Institution	74%	60%	47%	68%	54%	60%
Partnership working						
Informal or formal partnerships with specific HE institutions	85%	86%	80%	89%	96%	87%
Offering work experience placements	80%	79%	72%	83%	76%	79%
Work with businesses such as employer mentoring schemes to raise aspirations	71%	63%	65%	63%	60%	63%
Work with Sixth form colleges giving talks/support/information	3%	1%	3%	1%	-	1%
Mentoring / ambassador schemes						
Mentoring schemes for pupils\students	86%	75%	70%	79%	67%	75%
Student ambassador or mentor schemes - where current HE students work with your pupils\students	71%	62%	57%	66%	69%	63%
Mean number of activities (TOTAL)	**12.5**	**12.2**	**10.5**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**12.3**
Base	*79*	*380*	*161*	*298*	*99*	*558*

Table 5. Aspiration-raising activities used in schools and colleges

All activities used to raise aspirations to apply to HE	BOOST SCHOOLS	ALL OTHER SCHOOLS	11-16 School	11-18 School	College	TOTAL
Other / miscellaneous						
Discussions about HE as part of timetabled lessons	76%	80%	74%	83%	**91%**	81%
Holding careers or HE events / fairs	77%	79%	77%	80%	**96%**	81%
Events for parents - for example parents' evenings focused on Higher Education	71%	76%	<u>49%</u>	**90%**	84%	77%
Taster courses / workshops / summer schools / lectures	3%	4%	5%	3%	4%	4%
Student Finance England (to raise awareness about finance) / finance evenings	0%	3%	2%	3%	6%	3%
Aim Higher University Access scheme	0%	3%	4%	2%	-	3%
Individual/One to one sessions with students	0%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%
Careers guidance lessons	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Focus Group/Day sessions	3%	0%	0%	1%	2%	1%
Staff training/study days/courses	0%	0%	-	0%	2%	0%
Others	18%	18%	16%	19%	31%	19%
Don't Know	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Mean number of activities (TOTAL)	**12.5**	**12.2**	**10.5**	**13.1**	**13.1**	**12.3**
Base	*79*	*380*	*161*	*298*	*99*	*558*

3.5. Types of activity across all Key Stages and Year Groups

Survey respondents were asked to select from a list the types of aspiration-raising activities that were used at their school or college. Respondents were also invited to spontaneously mention any other types of activity they used (that were not listed within the questionnaire). The results from this question are summarised in Table 5 (including both prompted and spontaneous answers). A more detailed consideration of the approaches which were considered to be effective in schools and colleges is presented at the end of this Chapter, drawing on evidence from the 11 qualitative case studies.

Generally the types of activities used were very similar between schools and colleges and between 11-16 schools and 11-18 schools. On average both schools and colleges used around 13 different types of activity listed in Table 5 above. As might be expected, the number of activities was slightly higher on average in 11-18 schools than in 11-16 schools – which had on average only 10.5 different types of activity. To a large extent this difference can be attributed to the UCAS application process for HE. These activities are obviously not directly relevant to 11-16 schools as they do not coach pupils through the application process.

The most prevalent types of activity in both schools and colleges included:

- Inviting speakers into your schools / college
- Guidance on subject choices to maximise chances of getting a place
- Visits to universities or other HE Institutions, including trips to open days'
- Visits to HE fairs / promotional days
- Visits from university lecturers / other HE staff to your pupils / students
- Discussions about HE as part of timetabled lessons
- Holding careers or HE events / fairs
- Offering work experience placements
- Events for parents – for example parents' evenings focused on HE
- Guidance on the UCAS application process or system (although this was understandably less prevalent in 11-16 schools)
-

The table above divides type of activity into five broad categories, all of which were important strategies for schools and colleges alike. In particular, all types of institution drew heavily on input from speakers or visitors from outside their school or college. Visits out (including visits to HE institutions) and advice on subject choices and/or application processes were also common (particularly in 11-18 schools – but also in colleges). While different forms of partnership working were also relatively common in all types of schools and colleges (including working with employers, other colleges or HE institutions) partnerships with specific HE institutions were more prevalent in colleges than in schools.

Notably, work with parents (including open evenings to discuss HE with students' parents) was also very widespread – particularly in 11-18 schools.

3.5.1. Differences among schools that send a high % of high-achieving disadvantaged pupils to HE

It is also possible to look at the range of activities used specifically by those schools that were known to send a high proportion of high-achieving disadvantaged students to HE (i.e. the 'boost' schools[45]). While the total number of schools in this 'boost' group is relatively small, the findings provide some insight to what they are doing differently to schools more generally.

Overall, schools that sent a high proportion of high-achieving disadvantaged students to HE tended to carry slightly more activities overall and were marginally more likely to use visits and/or residential trips to HE institutions. They were also more likely to have some form of mentoring or student ambassador system in place than schools in general. However, the differences between institutions were generally small (as shown in Table 5) and should be treated with caution as only 76 'boost' schools were interviewed.

3.5.2. Note on partnership working

It should also be noted that while 87 per cent of all surveyed schools and colleges indicated they had some kind of informal or formal partnership with an HE institution, the survey did not ask respondents to elaborate on the nature of the partnerships they were involved in. As respondents were asked to include both formal and informal partnerships, it is possible that some included quite loose working relationships with universities or other HE institutions (for example where a member of staff keeps in touch with a university department they themselves attended or know well). For this reason the exact proportion of schools and colleges who are involved in partnership working with HE institutions should be treated with caution – it is likely that 87 per cent includes some schools and colleges who are not involved in 'partnerships' in the fullest sense.

Partnership working between schools, colleges and HE institutions is explored more fully in the context of the qualitative case studies later in this section.

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[45] As described elsewhere, for the purposes of the evaluation, high portion of high achieving disadvantaged students to HE (FSM-eligible students who had gained level 5 at KS2) these schools had to have sent a minimum of 50 per cent of these students to HE in one of the last two academic years and to have had at least 5 high achieving disadvantaged students in that year.

3.6. Types of activity by Key Stage (KS3, KS4 and Sixth Form / KS5)

In follow up to the questions on aspiration-raising activities *across* Key Stages and Years, all surveyed schools and colleges were asked to indicate which activities applied to which Key Stages. Table 6 presents the findings for 15 activities that respondents were prompted with split by Key Stage (KS). To calibrate the results from these questions all percentages have been rebased to include only those institutions that worked with each of the three Key Stages (KS); KS3 and KS4 data are therefore based on all schools and KS5 (sixth-form) on 11-18 schools plus colleges.

Consistent with findings earlier in this section (see section 3.4), all types of activity were less prevalent during KS3. Less than half of schools that worked with KS3 used each of the listed activities with their students. The most common type of activity at KS3 was guidance on subject choices, which 46 per cent of schools offered at this Key Stage. That said, guidance on subject choice during KS3 was still far less evident than at both KS4 and KS5. Generally the prevalence of activities at KS3 was around half or less of the equivalent level observed during KS4 and KS5, suggesting relatively low levels of activity prior to KS4.

Table 6. Aspiration-raising activities by Key Stage (KS) - across all schools and colleges which teach relevant KS

All activities used to raise aspirations to apply to HE	KS3	KS4	KS5 / Sixth Form
Advice on application process and/or subject choices			
Guidance on subject choices to maximise chances of getting a place	46	**74**	**71**
Guidance on the UCAS application process or system	1	13	**81**
Inviting people into the school / college			
Inviting speakers into your pupils\students	36	**77**	**80**
Visits from university lecturers / other HE staff to your pupils\students	17	51	**73**
Visits out			
Visits to universities or other Higher Education Institutions, including trips to open days'	26	**62**	**79**
Visits to Higher Education fairs / promotional days	14	49	**78**
Residential trips - where pupils\students can stay at a Higher Education Institution	6	31	**52**
Partnership working			
Informal or formal partnerships with specific Higher Education institutions	29	**58**	**74**
Offering work experience placements	2	**65**	**62**
Work with businesses such as employer mentoring schemes to raise aspirations	15	**51**	46
Mentoring / ambassador schemes			
Mentoring schemes for pupils\students	22	**59**	58
Student ambassador or mentor schemes - where current HE students work with your pupils\students	15	35	**50**
Other / miscellaneous			
Discussions about Higher Education as part of timetabled lessons	25	**61**	66
Holding careers or Higher Education events / fairs	30	**67**	60
Events for parents - for example parents' evenings focused on Higher Education	16	45	**74**
Base: All institutions who work with KS (KS3 / KS4 - all schools, KS5 - all 11-18 schools plus colleges)	*459*	*459*	*397*

While activity was considerably increased during KS4 and KS5 there were also some interesting differences in the types of activity used between these two important Key Stages.

Generally all forms of activity increased slightly between KS4 and KS5 – suggesting an intensification of activity as students reach the end of compulsory education. The largest increases in activity between KS4 and KS5 are apparent for visits to HE fairs and promotional days (which almost doubled between KS4 and KS5 from 49 per cent to 81 per cent); events for parents (45 per cent compared with 76 per); visits *from* HE staff to the surveyed school or college (51 per cent compared with 76 per cent); and residential trips (31 per cent compared with 53 per cent).

The exceptions to these widespread increases in activity between KS4 and KS5 were: offering work placements, work with businesses, and mentoring for students all of which were at least as prevalent during KS4 as they were during KS5.

As we might expect, guidance on the UCAS application process was almost exclusively during KS5 – 84 per cent of schools and colleges that work with KS5 said they offered this compared with just 13 per cent even at KS4.

3.7. Whole school and college strategies vs. a more targeted approach

The previous sections have looked at activities to raise aspiration to apply for HE among all types of students in both schools and colleges. Here we consider how schools and colleges use whole school and *more targeted strategies*.

Case study visits revealed that, responding to a decade of Widening Participation policy and an increasingly competitive HE landscape, schools and colleges had developed different approaches and strategies to not only manage increasing numbers of students' UCAS applications, but also to encourage students to consider HE as an option. School strategies were also driven by an awareness of increasing competition:

> *The offers are getting higher, there's less and less room for manoeuvre in terms of offers. You know the days where they would be made an offer of three As and the results come out and they got an A and two Bs but they would be allowed in anyway, those have kind of gone really. And it's that awareness that we need to get our students as prepared as possible because the challenge is getting into those places is getting more and more competitive. (Outer London Boys: head of year 12-13)*

Reflecting schools and colleges' differing priorities (as set out in chapter 1), approaches to this work were organised differently. It is helpful to consider schools and colleges positioned along a spectrum from universal (e.g. whole school)

approaches to more targeted ones. Universal approaches are those that are guided by the principle of providing a common core programme or set of opportunities to raise aspirations for HE among all students. This can be reflected in a school or college establishing a basic entitlement for every student. In contrast, a targeted approach emphasises differentiated provision based on selection by attainment or some other explicit criteria. In reality most of the schools and colleges in the case study research exemplified a mix of both.

The two case study FE colleges embodied a mix of both approaches described above. The Southern FE College featured a split site with a sixth-form centre offering mainly A-levels on one site and vocational provision on the other. The sixth-form centre operated a targeting strategy where students were ranked according to their GCSE scores and highest ranked students were targeted for a trip to an Oxford college. In addition, these students were given: encouragement and guidance to apply to Russell Group Universities, opportunities to study for a Cambridge Pre-U course[46], and in-depth support with HE applications and interviews. At the FE site, where students were taking a range of vocational courses rather than A-levels, a more universal approach was evident, with a high degree of encouragement and structured programmes of activities and interventions aimed at all students on level 3 courses. However none of the universities targeted by the FE site were Russell Group institutions.

All case study schools engaged in some minimal targeting to ensure eligible students had opportunities to access *external* aspiration-raising schemes, such as, summer schools. Through awareness of entry criteria for these types of scheme (which included attainment levels and indicators of disadvantage), schools would refer to their data and support relevant students who met these criteria to access them.

Some schools had also adopted a more structured system of targeting. This was particularly common in the London schools. For example the Outer London Boys school selected the most high achieving students for a regular programme of scheduled activities to raise aspirations specifically for Russell Group universities. Similarly the Inner London Comprehensive school operated a highly differentiated sixth-form, with different pathways for students based on attainment. Depending on the pathway, students had access to a number of university visits, mentoring opportunities, academic support and specialised support for Russell Group and Oxbridge (as deemed appropriate to the pathway). Furthermore, the Inner London Academy had a universal pledge to give all students a basic number of university visits, but also operated a differentiated provision for their sixth-form, targeting both

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[46] http://www.cie.org.uk/qualifications/academic/uppersec/preu

directly through attainment measures and *indirectly* driven by external partners' defined high achieving and/or disadvantaged. As previously discussed in relation to 'defining disadvantage', the London schools were most likely to conceive of themselves as serving disadvantaged students *in general*, so their strategy to focus on high achieving *within an already disadvantaged cohort* should be interpreted in this light.

The East Midlands Comprehensive case study employed a strategy which targeted *disadvantaged* students, but the focus of aspiration-raising was not entirely specific to HE, being related to progression to education and training in general. Their target group was students in receipt of FSM, at risk of under-performing or becoming NEET, 'vulnerable' students and students with SEN. This was seen as a legacy of Connexions work. However the schools stressed:

> *We guide as opposed to target. So the sixth-form open evening that we do we kind of tell some children that they should be going in to listen to the university speaker with their parents but it's open to all and we do that with most things. We run after school study programmes that are to raise aspirations. We target a group of children but it's open to all so any others that want to self-refer themselves to it can go and do it so it's like a homework study group where we do extra sessions. So yeah we try and get the balance to both where we'll hit some people but we don't close anything to anybody. (East Midlands Comprehensive: Raising aspirations coordinator)*

Two institutions offer another example of the mix of approaches and strategies. Firstly, the South East Academy had a structured programme of activities which spanned the life of the sixth-form and was geared towards raising aspirations to attend university. This was delivered in partnership with a local selective university. All students were expected to attend a series of 'compulsory sessions' with the option to drop out only if they later decided not to pursue an HE route. Similarly the Inner London Boys schools had some universal provision in the form of university visits (which were available to all students), but also used targeted students based on 'motivation and commitment' for a specific partnership scheme of mentoring by 'high flying' graduates.

Whilst most staff considered mixed approaches and strategies to be effective, evidence from some students highlighted some negative consequences of a more targeted approach. Specifically focus groups with students indicated that there was perception that targeting reinforced the academic/vocational divide, with more extensive aspiration-raising provisions in place for those identified as academically able. As one student in the focus group asserted:

The problem with the education system is it's like with the gifted and talented like the really bright people that get A's and that, they get all these extra things. They can go here, they can talk about this. They get to go on this trip [..] people they get like loads of support. Then the middle kids are kind of just forgotten about oh they can get on and I feel like someone like me who's quite an average student is kind of forgotten about. (North West Comprehensive: Focus group)

In another focus group, students who were in a targeted group, selected on the basis of their attainment in key subjects, received additional support in respect of aspiration raising and commented:

[Being] in this group] helped me make decisions. They give you good like directions of what you need. And all these things we get, we get so many master classes we can go on. But I don't think they get offered to many other people apart from us.

I think before this I wasn't quite sure I wanted to apply to university […] but now I would be like I want to do this. And there are lots of people I've talked to who have no idea. They want to go to university but they have no idea. I just think it's a bit unfair that we're the only people that are being helped. (Outer London Boys: year 12 focus group)

It might be the case that schools adopted a more targeted approached due to funding constraints, or simply because they believed that it is more effective to do so. However, the students' experiences highlighted above suggest that issues of equity must also be taken into consideration.

3.8. Specific activities for high-achieving disadvantaged students

This section looks more specifically at work with disadvantaged and high-achieving disadvantaged students. The findings are worth considering in light of the discussion above on universal and targeted approaches. Targeting or lack of it in relation to disadvantaged and high-achieving students might reflect a deliberate strategy within a school or college and/or financial constraints.

3.8.1. Prevalence of HE aspiration-raising activities specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students

Those who did any kind of work to raise aspirations to apply for HE were asked whether any of the activities they used were 'specifically aimed at high-achieving disadvantaged pupils / students'. For the purposes of the survey high-achieving was defined as gaining Level 5 or above at Key Stage 2. Figure 4, summarises responses to this question and divides organisations into four groups: (i) those who

did aim work specifically at high-achieving disadvantaged pupils / students; (ii) those who only did more general aspiration-raising work; (ii) those who did no aspiration-raising work at all; and (iii) those who did not know.

Figure 4. Aspiration-raising activities in schools and colleges - specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students
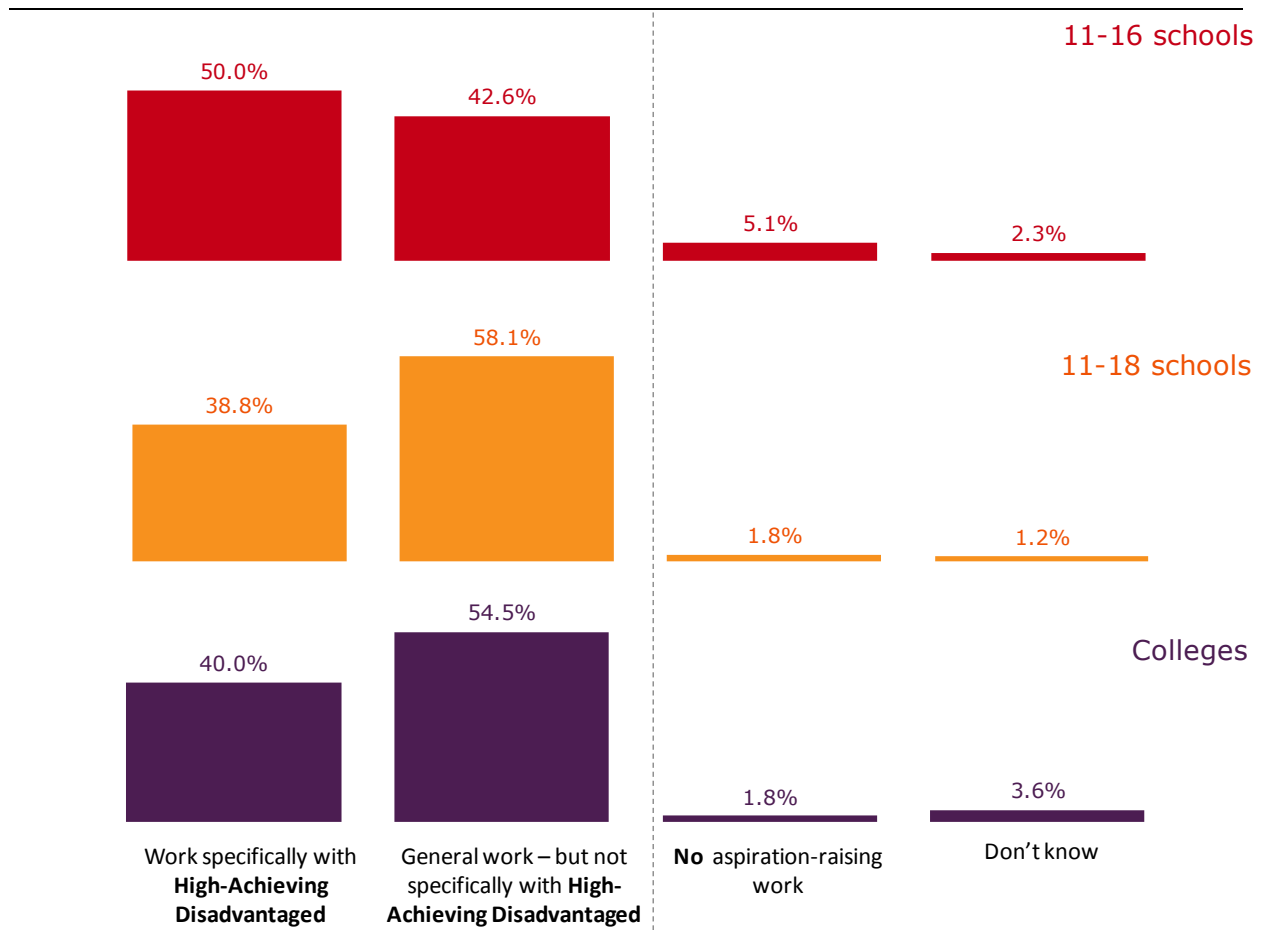
Base: All respondents (161, 298, 99)

As discussed earlier in this section, general aspiration-raising activity was almost universal in schools and colleges, although 11-16 schools tended to be slightly less likely to carry out aspiration-raising work. However, as shown in Figure 4, 11-16 schools were actually *more* likely than 11-18 schools *and* more likely than colleges to do work specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students to raise their aspirations to apply for HE. Half of all 11-16 schools worked specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students, a higher proportion than those who concentrated on more general whole school strategies (i.e. not targeted at high-achieving disadvantaged students).

This pattern is reversed in both 11-18 schools and in colleges – it was more common for these types of institution to exclusively do more general aspiration-raising work than to work specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students (more than half of both groups only did more general work, compared with around four in ten who worked specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students).

This may reflect the stage at which 11-16 schools start to work with students to raise aspirations. As discussed in section 3.4, these schools tend to work with students from a younger age and since high-achieving disadvantaged was defined in the survey through attainment at KS2 they may have been more likely to feel the work they did met this definition.

3.8.2. Reaching high-achieving disadvantaged through general activities

It is important to recognize that while the survey made a distinction between activities targeted specifically at high-achieving disadvantaged students and more general, less targeted work, this does not imply that high-achieving disadvantaged students do not benefit from the latter (or that a whole school approach need not be effective). In fact 80 per cent of all surveyed organisations said they carried out at least some aspiration-raising work at the whole school or college level (e.g. through assemblies or other gatherings). In these cases, high-achieving disadvantaged students will benefit from the work done even if it is not specifically designed for and targeted at them as a group.

3.8.3. How activity with high-achieving disadvantaged students differs to more general work

Those who worked specifically to raise aspirations among high-achieving disadvantaged students were asked to summarise how this work varied compared with the work they did more generally. As this question was asked of just over 200 respondents it is not possible to analyse the findings by sub-group. Instead, unlike the rest of the findings in this report, results for schools and colleges are combined.

As shown in Figure 5, the most common response was that provision was simply more 'targeted' (i.e. no further details were provided). Among respondents who provided more detail, the most common responses related to activities being more one-to-one (including individual mentoring), more personalised, and/or intense or with additional support.

In addition five per cent said that they worked with high-achieving disadvantaged students in 'smaller groups'.

While most who answered the question acknowledged that their provision for high-achieving disadvantaged students was different, 10 per cent who initially said that they worked specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students went on to indicate that the offer was the same for all students; in fact high-achieving disadvantaged students were picked up by their wider programme of activities.

Figure 5. How aspiration-raising activities specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students differs from wider programme of work

It's more (specifically) targeted	34%
More one to one (mentoring)	24%
More personlised/ individual support	16%
More intense/additional support	13%
Offer the same for all students	10%
More focused on raising aspirations/confidence	9%
Taken on visits to Universities (for the students and their families)	8%
Smaller groups	5%
Help with applications/interviews	3%
Give wide range of information to students/parents	3%
More help/input from the universities themselves	3%
References to family members not attending university	2%
Don't want to make them feel they have been singled out/seen as disadvantaged	2%
Other Answer	36%
None	2%
Don't Know	3%

Base: All who work specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students (242)

3.8.4. Specific activities with high-achieving disadvantaged students

As well as asking respondents how they felt work with high-achieving disadvantaged students differed, the survey also captured the exact types of work each school and college did with these types of student. Table 7, summarises these activities for all surveyed schools and colleges.

The most common types of activity among high-achieving disadvantaged students fall into two broad types: (i) visits out and/or residential trips, and (ii) mentoring and/or ambassador schemes. Interestingly, the qualitative case study work indicates that these were common activities for all students (i.e. not just high-achieving disadvantaged). More than a quarter of all schools and colleges made some type of visit or trip either to an HE institution itself or to an HE promotional event. A similar proportion had some form of mentoring or ambassadors scheme in place.

Unlike wider aspiration-raising activities with all students (see sections 3.4 and 3.5) advice on application processes and subject choices were relatively uncommon among high-achieving disadvantaged students. And, among the boost schools (those who send a high proportion of high-achieving disadvantaged students to HE) no institution used this type of work at all. Advice on application processes and subject choices may be areas where schools and colleges expect to include high-achieving disadvantaged students in their wider strategy (although case studies also show that one to one and pastoral support for high-achieving disadvantaged students in relation to the application process is inevitable).

Table 7. Activities used to raise aspirations to apply to Higher Education among high-achieving disadvantaged by institution type

Activities used	BOOST SCHOOLS	ALL OTHER SCHOOLS		11-16 School	11-18 School	College	TOTAL
Visits out							
Visits to universities or other Higher Education Institutions, including trips to open days	**31%**	19%		**29%**	15%	13%	19%
Visits to Higher Education fairs / promotional days	6%	7%		8%	6%	6%	6%
Residential trips - where pupils\students can stay at a Higher Education Institution	9%	4%		5%	3%	2%	4%
Mentoring / ambassador schemes							
Mentoring schemes for pupils\students	11%	10%		11%	10%	6%	10%
One to one mentoring/support/guidance/(careers)advice	6%	8%		7%	8%	11%	8%
Student ambassador or mentor schemes - where current HE students work with your pupils\students	6%	7%		8%	6%	9%	7%
Inviting people into the school / college							
Visits from university lecturers / other HE staff to your school\college	6%	5%		6%	5%	4%	5%
Inviting speakers into your school\college	9%	4%		4%	5%	4%	5%
Previous students to give talks about university life/what you can achieve	9%	1%		1%	2%	2%	1%
Partnership working							
Informal or formal partnerships with specific Higher Education institutions	3%	3%		1%	4%	4%	3%
Work with businesses such as employer mentoring schemes to raise aspirations	3%	3%		3%	2%	2%	3%
Offering work experience placements	0%	2%		0%	3%	2%	2%
Mean number of activities (TOTAL)	**1.3**	**1.1**		**1.2**	**1.0**	**1.1**	**1.1**
Base	*79*	*380*		*161*	*298*	*99*	*558*

Table 7. Activities used to raise aspirations to apply to Higher Education among high-achieving disadvantaged by institution type

Activities used	BOOST SCHOOLS	ALL OTHER SCHOOLS		11-16 School	11-18 School	College	TOTAL
Advice on application process and/or subject choices							
Guidance on subject choices to maximise chances of getting a place	0%	1%		1%	2%	2%	1%
Guidance on the UCAS application process or system	0%	1%		0%	2%	2%	1%
Help with personal statements/CVs	0%	0%		1%	0%	4%	1%
Help with interviews	0%	1%		1%	1%	0%	1%
Other / miscellaneous							
Summer schools	6%	1%		1%	1%	2%	1%
(Extra)Activities/workshops/after college clubs	3%	3%		5%	3%	6%	4%
Gifted and talented programme / work with the gifted and talented	0%	3%		5%	3%	2%	3%
Holding careers or Higher Education events / fairs at your school\college	0%	3%		4%	2%	2%	3%
Events for parents - for example parents evenings focused on Higher Education	0%	3%		1%	4%	2%	3%
Discussions about Higher Education as part of timetabled lessons	0%	2%		2%	2%	2%	2%
Aim Higher (until it folded)	0%	2%		2%	2%	2%	2%
Students are told about/ taken to the Russell Group conference/focus group (all references)	0%	1%		0%	1%	4%	1%
Work with small groups	0%	1%		1%	1%	0%	1%
Bursary schemes	0%	1%		0%	1%	0%	1%
Help with accessing/ using the internet	0%	1%		2%	0%	0%	1%
Sutton Trust	0%	0%		0%	1%	2%	1%
HEAP/High Education Access Programme	3%	0%		1%	1%	0%	1%
Working closely with students who have disabilities/learning difficulties	0%	0%		0%	0%	2%	0%
Scholar scheme	0%	0%		0%	0%	2%	0%
Others	**20%**	12%		16%	10%	20%	13%
Mean number of activities (TOTAL)	**1.3**	**1.1**		**1.2**	**1.0**	**1.1**	**1.1**

| Base | | 79 | 380 | | 161 | 298 | 99 | 558 |

As shown in Table 7, differences in the type of activity between schools and colleges and 11-16 schools and 11-18 schools were minimal. There are however, interesting differences between schools that send a high proportion of high-achieving disadvantaged students to HE (the boost sample) and those who do not.

In particular, boost schools were more likely to include visits to universities or other HE institutions, including trips to open days to encourage high-achieving disadvantaged students to apply (nearly a third of boost schools did this). They were also more likely to run summer schools specifically for high-achieving disadvantaged students (six per cent of all boost schools did this).

Boost schools were also more likely to be doing work that was harder to classify and has been left as uncoded 'other' in the table above. In fact around one in five boost schools gave a response which could not be classified. This may reflect a more diverse programme of activity in these types of school – using a more tailored set of activities. Although, again it is difficult to draw firm conclusions based on the relatively small number of interviews with this group of schools.

Generally, the findings point to boost schools having a more tailored and extensive programme of work specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged pupils. This is broadly consistent with findings from the qualitative case studies (discussed later in the chapter).

3.8.5. How HE aspiration-raising activities with high-achieving disadvantaged students vary by Year and Key Stage

As shown in Figure 6, the prevalence of aspiration-raising activities with high-achieving disadvantaged students by Year follows the same pattern as more general aspiration activities for all students (see section 3.5). Figure 6 presents both sets of data for schools and colleges and the percentages are based on all surveyed institutions.

For 11-16 schools, activities with high-achieving disadvantaged students peak during Years 9, 10 and 11 – during which period around a quarter of 11-16 schools were carrying out activities specifically with this group. There was very little work being done with high-achieving disadvantaged students before Year 9 and no 11-16 schools were working specifically with Year 6 or below to raise aspirations.

As discussed earlier in this section, 11-18 schools were less likely than 11-16 schools to work specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students; their work tended to be more general – working with all pupils across the school. This is reflected in the data shown in Figure 6. 11-18 schools who did work with high-achieving disadvantaged students tended to spread activity across all Year Groups from Year 9 onwards. While there were peaks in activity with high-achieving

disadvantaged students in Years 10 and 11, and in KS5, similar to 11-16 schools, there was very little activity with high-achieving disadvantaged students prior to Year 9.

Reflecting the more narrow age range that colleges work with, nearly all work specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students in colleges fell in Years 12 and 13. In fact prevalence of work with high-achieving disadvantaged students in Year 12 was higher than for any other single year group in colleges and in schools (with 29 per cent of all colleges carrying out at least some work in Year 12.)

Overall, the survey findings suggest there is an opportunity for schools to work with high-achieving disadvantaged students from an earlier age than is generally the case at the moment. As discussed in the introduction to the report, laying foundations with this important group of students is felt to be particularly important – helping to boost their confidence and getting them to think about the full range of options that are available to them.

Figure 6. Prevalence of HE aspiration-raising activities by Year and Key Stage - for high-achieving disadvantaged students[47]

Base: All respondents (161, 298, 99)

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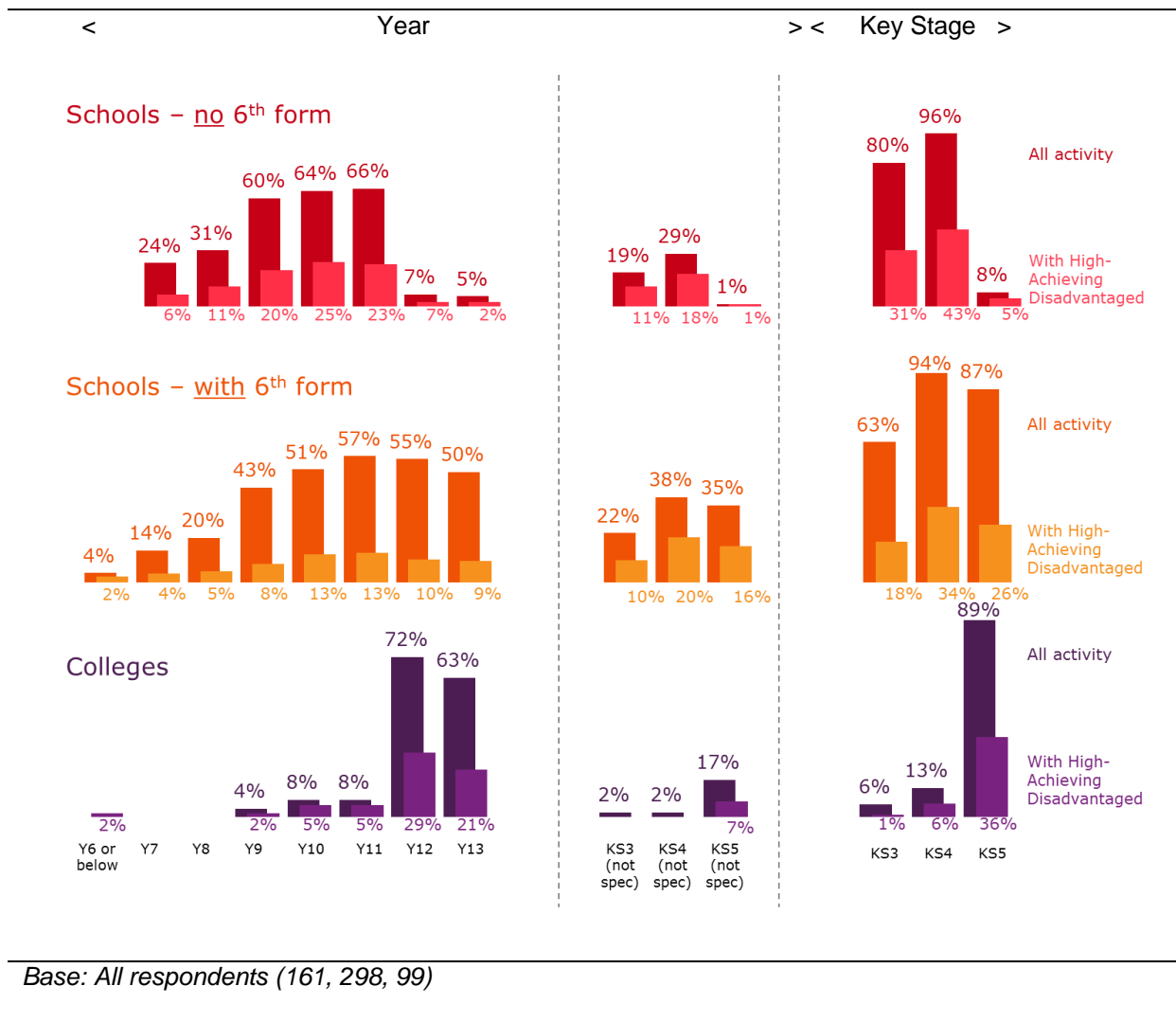
[47] Note: A small proportion of 11-16 schools indicated they worked with Key Stage 5 students. Our assumption is that a small number of respondents included work they did with other local schools and colleges (although prompted to talk specifically about their own institution).

3.9. Aspiration-raising activities: examples of good practice from case study data

The remainder of the chapter looks in more detail at findings from the qualitative case studies. Schools and colleges were selected as case studies on the basis of the work they were doing specifically with high-achieving disadvantaged students. Selected schools and colleges all had substantial programmes of aspiration-raising work and were selected where there was evidence of effective or innovative approaches. The case study data offer insights into what works well and what doesn't work as well with this important group.

The survey findings presented in the previous section show that strategies with these students tend to be more targeted and involve more small group and one to one work. Qualitative case study data is largely consistent with this view.

Generally, it is useful to concieve of aspiration raising activities as consisting of three complementary aspects:

- providing students with information, advice and guidance about HE;
- supporting students in their aspirations to HE; and,
- providing students with experiences of HE.

What is evident is that these tasks involve differing degrees of depth of experience and depth of understanding among students. While there is no magic formula for how to raise aspirations, and to raise aspirations among disadvantaged students, analysis of the case studies suggests that provding a combination of these different types of experience is important in encouraging students to consider higher education as an option, and to consider different university options.

This section of the chapter first discusses the neccessity for school and college activities to provide information, advice, guidance to students in order to raise aspirations, whilst the second section discusses and evaluates the various methods of support for students. The final section explores the impact of activities to provide students with various experiences of HE, including the higher learning that is available through these experiences, which appear to be an empowering experience that impacts greatly on students' aspirations to attend.

3.10. Education, information, advice and guidance in school

A key facet of aspiration raising work is of course providing students with the information they need in order to consider HE. In most case study schools and colleges, staff were acutely aware of students' lack of knowledge about the wider world in general, of which university life is a part of. It was common for staff to talk about their students as being disadvantaged in this regard –having limited access to

knowledge about university including where to go, what to study, how to get in, or indeed what they might do with HE qualifications.

Staff gave examples of students not realising that Cambridge was a city; students not realising the array of subjects you could study beyond the standard school subjects, or (for example) the range of different jobs in the medical profession beyond being a doctor. Indeed as we discuss in the next chapter, students tended to have very varied levels of knowledge about different types of universities. Providing students (and parents) with the information, advising them to make sensible choices which were not going to 'close doors' for them, and supporting students through the process is an essential part of the work that schools do. Providing students with information, advice and guidance was deemed by staff as a vital, precursory aspect of the whole aspiration raising process. This section discusses this work in relation to the key elements which emerged from the case studies. We begin by discussing the strength of a whole school culture of aspiration raising; then discuss the importance of: timetabled programmes of activity; advice on subject choice; finance advice and information for both students and parents; specialist staff in school; the use of external providers; and working with alumni.

3.10.1.   A whole school culture of aspiration raising

A number of case study schools talked about how instilling a whole school culture of aspiration raising was an important yet subtle aspect of their work. As the head of sixth-form at one school explained, the key to their success had been '*slowly drip feeding the idea'*. Three of the four London schools involved in the case studies took this kind of whole school culture approach. The key tactic was seen to be working from an assumption that students at this school go to university:

> You know we do very much have an assumption here that, a student will want to apply for university *... 'we do have this kind of expectation that you will consider it and if you're not going to go you've thought about all the* different *options. We never want anybody just to think it's not for me you know'. (Outer London Boys: head of year 12-13).*

The assumption being, not so that everyone will go to university, but everyone will consider it as a possibility before they rule it out.

The understanding that university is something students have to plan for and work towards sets a general culture whereby even those who decide they do not want to go to university will still have a plan beyond their time at school:

> *There are a few students that haven't applied for university from Year 13 this year, they all know why they haven't done that, they all know what*

they want to do instead. Everybody has got a plan and everybody you know is working towards that, which I think is important. (Outer London Boys: head of year 12-13)

Indeed, as suggested by the head of aspiration raising at an Inner London Academy, creating a culture of life planning, being '*proactive about thinking about their futures,*' was seen as one of the most empowering things for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A similar immersive culture of raising aspirations was evident at the vocational site of the Southern FE College. A student in one of the focus groups claimed '*I think it's really good that even though we're in our first year, even though it's kind of frightening when you hear about universities, but as soon as you join the course, even though it's a two year course, you're hearing about universities*.'

Similarly, a culture of expectation informed the Outer London Boys' school strategy – assuming that students will apply to Russell Group universities and helping them to prepare for the process in a proactive, rather than a reactive way:

What we've done this year, which is different, is to assume that these students will want to apply for these kinds of universities and making sure that they are ready to do so as soon as possible once they're into the sixth-form. Rather than leaving until okay you've got an interview in four weeks time we had better make sure that you actually know it. (Outer London Boys: head of years 12-13)

3.10.2. Timetabled programmes of activities relating to HE

All case study institutions had some kind of timetabled activities, ranging from a minimum of activity once a term up to a regular weekly slot devoted to aspiration raising. 11-18 schools (those with sixth-forms) tended to have a regular timetabled period dedicated to this type of work (such as a Wednesday or Friday afternoon), where a programme of lessons, activities and visiting speakers were planned. In this context, UCAS applications dominated timetabled periods for Year 13. This is consistent with the survey findings which similarly revealed that, in 11-18 schools, work relating to the application process tended to be concentrated in the sixth-form; while 11-16 schools had to carry out this type of work before students left at age 16.

In the case studies, aspiration raising work was reasonably well embedded, and at least half of participating schools had some activity prior to Year 10. At the East Midlands Comprehensive the idea of university was first introduced in year 9 through careers lessons. In the North West Comprehensive the deputy head held an assembly every year, with a presentation with the financial projections of holding a degree: 'This is what life is like to be a graduate. This is it if you're not'. This

presentation was designed to hook into students' desires, by providing a breakdown of the kinds of consumables that students would be able to purchase with certain weekly or monthly salaries. The assistant head claimed that, while he believes the true benefits of HE lie in self-improvement, his strategy in the current climate was to sell the benefits of HE in terms of financial security, rather than softer kinds of gains:

> *I don't try to sell it to them on any kind of slightly wishy washy way [but] how raising your game is important. I actually show them [financial projections for] the rest of their lives.*

Staff at the East Midlands Comprehensive claimed to provide a similar talk for Year 10 students as part of their careers curriculum:

> If you go to university this is the type of earnings you're going to get. If you're going to just do A-levels this is the type of earnings you'll get. If you go in and work at 16 this is the type of earnings you'll get. How much is that costing you over your 40 years of working, that sort of thing to try and make it realistic to them.

Staff at the North East Catholic school had a highly organised and diverse programme of activities, particularly in the sixth form, which included:

- A Futures Day in Year 11 – including a parents' evening;
- Weekly email bulletins about opportunities;
- Careers fairs in school;
- University 'roadshow' ambassador visitors available in break times;
- Open day visits to universities;
- Notification and encouragement to apply to university progression schemes, including summer school programmes for disadvantaged students;
- Oxbridge visits;
- One to one support with applications;
- Financial support to visit interviews; and,
- Mock interview training.

The head of sixth-form at this school felt that what was successful was this multitude of opportunities, constantly available to students: *'I think we sort of drip feed all the time all these various things.'* The same head also claimed that despite a large proportion of students coming from families with no history of HE in their family, and students entering the sixth-form thinking they did not want to go to university, their programme of activities and indeed expectations to take part was having a real impact:

> *We filled up all their spaces because so many of them wanted to go. And the uptake was really good for a whole range of different courses. I think it was just to give them a flavour of what they could be doing because they don't have the family background and the experience to draw on.*

Indeed in the focus groups at this school, two students admitted that when they entered the sixth-form they did not want to go to university but now they definitely did:

I was totally different to what I am now. I wanted to be a policewoman and then I changed in the summer coming up to sixth-form – I didn't really know anything about uni until I came to sixth-form.

I wasn't going to go to university. I just didn't have any intention of going but I changed my mind and just did it [the application] anyway.

A coordinated plan of activities appeared to be most effective. The evidence from case study visits suggested that poor organisation of activities and repetition could stifle their impact. For example, too many talks or lectures about 'going to university' put on by external providers can become tedious for students as information is repeated: '*I think the problem was that the kids we took had already had the university talk and then they just got the Oxbridge and so they'd already heard it so it probably wasn't the best of timing*' (East Midlands Comprehensive). Some staff also stressed how careful management of the process is important as students can also get panicked by 'information overload.' For example the curriculum leader at the Southern FE College tried to avoid encouraging students to attend large generic careers fairs but organised more focused career-specific events (for example having a 'health day' where all information was focused on careers and qualifications and courses related to health).

3.10.3. Advice on applications and subject choice

The quantitative survey indicated that a key aspect of aspiration raising in the lower years of the school was guidance around subject choice. Indeed, during the case study work, both of the 11-16 schools talked about their procedures to ensure students are well equipped to make sensible choices that do not close down options for them at a later stage. For example, both the North West and East Midlands Comprehensive educated students about preferred 'EBacc' subjects when they chose their GCSE options:

When they've made their option choices we will sit down with them and say we see you've chosen this. Let me just be clear with you what the possible ramifications of that could be long term. (East Midlands Comprehensive: head)

I think the guidance interview is good, it's quite an informal chat and gets the students to reflect on what they do, but then it does look beyond the GCSE. That could come into the conversation, or should do, for a lot of students. I think then it's getting them to choose the right options going through that process. (North West Comprehensive: head of year 9)

Students who were felt to be particularly likely to be high achieving *and* eligible to go to university were given greater attention in the context of this guidance. However, both schools also said they had found some students were critical of the range of choices presented and sometimes rejected the advice. Illustrating this point, students in the East Midlands Comprehensive were particularly critical of the way in which their school was coercing them to take EBacc subjects to the detriment of other arts subjects that they wanted to study.

Advice on subject choice, however, proved to be important at every juncture. In general, staff awareness of the prioritisations of selective or leading universities was reasonable. All staff appeared to have a good knowledge of grade entry requirements for different subjects, and subject choice for certain courses. Some, but not all staff talked about how some universities accept BTEC qualifications and one teacher discussed specifically how he had been to a talk about the Russell Group (RG) and discovered that RG did not favour double entry GCSE exams and how this had informed their school's practice. The head of Years 12-13 at the Outer London Boys school claimed that last year, out of all the Year 13 students '*everyone that applied for university bar I think two people got the place at university*'. He felt that this success was due to very close almost 'forensic' advice about which courses to apply for with which grade entries:

> *I think it's because we advise people about what to apply for, how to apply for it, and you know careful consideration of first choices versus insurance choices. The next stage we do with Year 13 is making sure we have a conversation before they make their final choice. We know the student and so we'll know exactly whether or not, you know whether a type of student can have first choices A* A A, second choice is A A A, or they're a student that needs a first choice three As and second A B C. That means everybody when it comes to choice has an option there for them that is one that they've wanted to do. I think that's the careful plotting.*

Focus group research in general found that students had a good sense of what subjects they needed to study for the courses they want to do. Even in the 11-16 schools, students tended to have a clear idea. Some students spoke about the positive impact discussions with staff had had. For example, one FSM-eligible student the in East Midlands Comprehensive, explained that she wanted to be a teacher but originally had no idea what she needed to do to achieve this. This student said that the aspiration raising team at the schools had discussed this with her and they decided together which A levels she would take and to study English at degree level before taking a PGCE.

3.10.4. Addressing concerns about finance

A particular topic of importance that tended to be covered in discussions with

students was concerns about financing their studies at HE. This section focuses on what schools and colleges do to educate and inform students, and sometimes parents, about these issues (in chapter 5, we also discuss broader perceptions to financial risk as a barrier to aspirations). All schools and colleges claimed to inform and educate students about the financial implications of going to HE, but this ranged from ad hoc discussions with individual students about their applications to inviting speakers in to explain in detail to whole cohorts and to parents. These activities were deemed to have varying degrees of success.

On the whole the sentiment from staff was that if students understood the financial support that was available and that they would not have to pay fees upfront, the financial barrier of going to HE, discussed further in Chapter 5, would be somewhat mitigated. Nevertheless, students across the focus groups presented finance as a key barrier to their aspirations to attend HE. One student in the Midlands FE focus group claimed '*a lot of people are worried about the finance*'; while students in a focus group at Outer London boys school expressed concerns that they did not fully understand the financial impacts. Of course the financial implications are particularly important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds as one aspiration raising coordinator at the Inner London Academy summed up:

> *This school is 39% free school meals and so inevitably fears over you know the financial implications of going to university are there.*

The complex landscape of bursaries was thus a key area for education at some schools. Schools and colleges tended to stress that this was an issue that had to be tackled 'right from the start' in order to be able to raise students' aspirations to attend HE. The head of careers guidance at the Midlands FE college indicated that they did '*...a lot of work with the students on finance'* and that this was '*...one of the things that we try and get straight from the start with them you know that they can afford to go if they take the loan'*. Similarly at the Outer London Boys school the head of sixth-form mentioned that: '*what we very much are saying to them right from the start is you know it's trying to break down the idea that you're having to pay the money there and then, you're not*'. This same participant indicated that they used the analogy of a taxation system to explain how repayments would work for them.

It was also apparent that, where schools had educated students about the financial implications of going to university (or other HE institution), students appeared to have fewer concerns, reflecting the findings of other research[48] that identified 'feeling informed about financial support' as one of the factors that appeared to mitigate

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[48] Ross, A. and J. Lloyd (2013). Access for All: An investigation of young people's attitudes to the cost of higher education using the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England. http://www.strategicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Access-for-All1.pdf, The Strategic Society Centre.

financial concerns. At one school, a finance talk with Year 12 seemed to have satisfied students that this was not going to be an issue. As one student who took part in the focus group claimed: *'I don't think finance is an issue'*, and when asked if there had ever been a time that they had been worried they claimed that this was only *'before you learn about these things'*. Instead students explained that a woman had been *'brought in'* to *'do the finance thing'* – explaining the repayment system to them, after which they had no more worries. One student commented:

> *I don't think that I knew much. I think I found out about it in that assembly; that's when I really realised how much of it is true and how much of it isn't because when I first like wanted to go to university I really didn't really know much about the finances or anything so that helped a lot. (North East Catholic: Focus group B)*

Another student at the same school, however, was concerned about the shortfall between potential rental costs and her loan. She claimed: '*I don't think it's the aftermath that is the problem. It's [affording to live] at the time*' (North East Catholic: Focus group A). However, in this focus group students unanimously claimed that this would not affect their decision on whether to go to HE.

Despite the head of sixth-form stating that they tackle these financial concerns '*right from the start*', a student at the focus group at the Outer London boys school claimed that staff had simply told them '*don't worry about it*' but had not explained the finances to them. This seemed to have made students only *more* concerned: '*[we are told] don't talk about it just get the grades we'll deal with that later, money isn't the issue, they've got bursaries it's fine [but] we are not sure who to believe'*. Similarly, at the North West Comprehensive, the deputy head claimed that they planned to run a talk with Year 11 about finances and HE but they had not yet organised it. They felt that '*clued up students will soon work it all out, actually it's not that bad, it's not good but it's not that bad, I think it's scare mongering.*'

Nevertheless, at the Midlands FE College where students' concerns had been taken seriously and addressed on an individual basis, this was valued by those we spoke to:

> *I think finance wise at first I was really put off initially I didn't want to go, I didn't want to pay back, well I couldn't afford it. And it was only until I sat down with her and she went through the whole application process, all the finance. She gave me leaflets, and that's when I realised that actually like you say it doesn't actually have to be paid off.*

3.10.5. Informing and advising parents

Several case study schools and colleges talked about the importance of providing advice and guidance to parents – often who have not been to university themselves

– about HE as an option for their children. Aside from 'options evenings' (which take place at lower levels in the school), a key aspect was to alleviate fears about the costs of university among parents. Staff at the East Midlands Comprehensive; Inner London Comprehensive, North East Catholic and Midlands FE college, had all provided talks to parents about finances.

While the head teacher at the Inner London Comprehensive school claimed attendance to parents evening ran at around 85-90%, the Director of post-16 at the same school claimed it was still difficult to engage with parents, and there was a suggestion from both that, with a high proportion of ethnic minority families, parents tended to have very high aspirations for their children but were not necessarily knowledgeable about how to realise this for their children.

The North East Catholic school case study however, provides a useful example of the benefits of genuinely engaging and educating parents about university and HE - in a local area where many parents have not been to university themselves. This school provided a sequence of events across year groups, starting with a general talk for parents in Year 11 about the options for students beyond Year 11, making parents aware that if their children are achieving at a certain level they are eligible for A levels and university. The school also provided a financial talk for parents to dispel myths about the costs of HE. At the end of Year 12 the school then ran a 'futures day' for students to explore their options beyond sixth-form, including a parents' version of this event in the evening which was an informal session at which parents could ask questions specific to their circumstances. Finally, staff made themselves available to parents to call by phone for advice and guidance, particularly around the time of university applications. This programme of activity which involved parents directly was seen to be effective, as, armed with the information provided, parents' fears and concerns were alleviated resulting in a change in perceptions:

> *The parents came in yes and they actually said we realise we can actually afford to support their daughter through university so it was a change in mindset by giving the right information rather than the perception of what was said in the media*

Reflecting this, one student at the North East Catholic school claimed that '*my mum and dad didn't know*' until they went to the talk.

The deputy head of sixth-form at Inner London boys also felt that their evening event for parents about finance had been successful:

> *That's why that evening is for parents and students because sometimes parents will say we can't afford it and actually that's not the case and they don't understand that you're not paying money upfront and they don't understand; well they didn't understand until they'd had the evening that*

you wouldn't pay it back until you earn £21,000 so the whole area of finance; I think once you break it down as a barrier and show students the reality it's fine and for some kids with all these bursaries out there they'd be much better off than they think

3.10.6. Specialist staff in school

Most case study schools deployed specialist staff dedicated to aspiration raising activities; however, this took various forms. Interviews revealed that this enabled staff to more successfully coordinate work and designate time to the organisation of activities and related paper work.

The North West Comprehensive (11-16) school for example continued to employ their Aim Higher Coordinator who was now titled the 'Raising Aspirations Learning Mentor'. This role however was now only part time, was less well-resourced and also included responsibilities for learning support as well as aspiration raising. The Inner London Academy (an 11-18 school), by contrast, employed a full time aspiration raising manager who admitted their programme took up 75% of his time. The Outer London Boys school had recently created the role of UCAS coordinator, who was a Year 13 teacher and tutor with specific responsibility for UCAS applications. The head of Years 12 and 13 explained how this reorganisation had proved effective:

> *She was brought in this year because last year I was just Head of Year 12, and there was a separate Head of Year 13. This year I'm doing both jobs and so in order to make sure that the UCAS process can happen you know properly she's come in. And actually it's worked very well because that is her main focus. Actually I think this year we've managed to get a whole lot more of these kind of initiatives going that in previous years we couldn't really get to students as well.*

The North East Catholic school organised the responsibility for aspiration raising within a large senior management team which included an overall Director of post-16 provision, then a separate head of Year 12 and head of Year 13 who saw themselves as having distinct responsibility for preparing students for university and seeing them through the UCAS application process in those year groups. They also employed another member of staff with separate responsibility for assessment and monitoring across the sixth form.

Other schools had teams of staff, working in a satellite capacity to senior management. The East Midlands 11-16 Comprehensive had an aspiration raising team consisting of the head of careers education; and two raising aspirations mentors. They felt that this dedicated trio enabled them to support students in their choices in a 'dialogue' as opposed to a one off careers interview:

> *In Years 10 and 11 [we] are obviously trying to engage kids with that and then the support that comes through from the raising aspirations co-ordinator; invariably we do target it but we will then support children through that dialogue around where are they going to go next and what will work for them and what environments work for them.*

The Inner London Boys school had several specialist staff with responsibility for some aspects of careers and aspiration raising. They had a careers adviser, a member of staff with responsibility for 'vocational futures' and someone who managed and ran an external programme specifically for HAD students. At the Midlands FE college, staff felt their specialist staff organisation was effective, with dedicated tutors who were part of their student services team, but based within the academic departments working within an office with lecturing staff.

> *So they link us together really well which means that we are involved, we get the referrals, we know which students need help and so they tie up together quite nicely*

Furthermore, having such dedicated responsibilities enabled the specialisation of staff knowledge and this appeared to be an important factor in terms of offering quality assurance – that students could trust the knowledge they were being given. The director of sixth form at the North East Catholic school stated:

> *I think the students do actually trust the advice that they're given which definitely helps because they know that you've got that level of interest and support for them. They do accept when you have the discussion about these are your realistic grades, these are the ones you should be looking at.*

The same participant also claimed being available and approachable to students was seen to facilitate this trust. This pastoral encouragement provided through relationships with teachers, whose care should not be underestimated, and is something discussed further in the following section on *support for aspirations to HE.*

3.10.7. Working with external providers

All of the case study schools and colleges had at least some input from external providers into their programme of activities. This was most often input from a local university providing talks, workshops or road shows through outreach staff or student ambassadors.

Some universities worked in partnership in their region to deliver this type of work, even across selective and recruiting universities. The East Midlands Comprehensive was particularly positive about a Newcastle University student coming to the school to talk to students about 'university life, finances, fun.' This was valued, as Newcastle

was actually quite far away so it gave students an idea of what it would be like to study somewhere they might not have considered. Equally, the South East Academy had a partnership with a local university where student ambassadors delivered a whole year long programme of activities. What was seen as positive about this was that students who had never been to a university were able to meet real students and ask them questions about what it was like to attend. The London schools tended to have links exclusively with London Universities and Oxbridge. For example, one London school had UCL students come in to run a debating society with sixth formers who were part of a group identified for potential Oxbridge entrance. The school's science department also had links with UCL and Imperial College. The head of aspiration raising at another London school had made efforts to link academic departments at the school with specific academic departments at universities and 'try to have some sort of interaction between them'.

This kind of work was also sometimes undertaken with charities or social enterprises. The London schools seemed to benefit most from work with these types of provider. For example, the Inner London Academy worked with an organisation called *IntoUniversity* that came into the school twice a year to work with students on their personal statements, and to offer support with interviews for Oxbridge. The Inner London boys also worked with a national organisation called *The Challenge* to involve students with different university summer school activities. Inner London Comprehensive had links with an enterprise called *The Brilliant Club,* which matched high achieving sixth formers living in areas of 'low participation' with PhD student mentors and provided a programme of activity focused in a discipline that they were interested in but focused on a subject that they have not studied at school (such as Philosophy).

However, it should be acknowledged that bringing in external providers (as well as university students and staff) to talk to students about HE did not generate as much discussion or enthusiasm among students as actual visits to universities. The general sentiment among students in the focus groups was that such events were informative and useful but they did not always provide students with real, tangible experiences or relationships.

3.10.8. Alumni
Three schools (Outer London Boys, West Midlands Catholic, Inner London Academy) and the Midlands FE College talked about maintaining links with ex-student alumni as a strategy to raise aspirations to HE. The Inner London Academy had an active alumni network where alumni were invited to come back to school at key events in their programme of activities. They hold an informal alumni drinks evening every year and encourage as many students who have completed their first year of university as possible to come back and speak to Year 13 students about

their experiences. Sometimes when visiting universities the Academy would arrange to meet informally with alumni who were at that particular university. The West Midlands Catholic school benefited from long term alumni links as a large proportion of their ex-students return to the city after university to work in professional jobs (including a large number in teaching). There is little data on the impact of alumni links but students at the Southern FE College felt they would benefit from contact with other students who were close to them in terms of experience.

3.11. Support for aspirations to HE

In addition to providing students with an array of information and advice about HE, school and college staff take a central role in providing support to students in the process. As discussed earlier in this section, survey respondents were asked to summarise how the work they did with high achieving disadvantaged students to the work they did more generally. Responses suggested that more one to one work, more personalised and individual support and more intense or additional support were key for these students.

This view is supported by the case study data. Here we discuss the nature of one to one support found in the case study research and the importance of the pastoral element of this support. The section concludes with a discussion of findings on mentoring as a form of support for students to aspire to HE.

3.11.1. One to one support

All case study institutions had some kind of one to one provision, whether this was careers interviews, drop in advice, or support with university applications and interviews. Most 11-18 case study schools talked about supporting students one to one with writing their personal statements and with interview preparation. Staff at both the Outer London Boys school and South East Academy also talked about providing guidance to students writing personal statements and providing detailed feedback on unlimited drafts, often sitting one to one with students to make sure they got it right. Outer London Boys evidenced their success stating that they had feedback from universities that their personal statements were of a very high quality.

Several schools talked about how more and more students were being invited to interview and how there was a need to support students to be prepared for this. The North East Catholic school, in Friday afternoon sessions dedicated to aspiration raising work, provided some group sessions on common interview questions; staff here also made themselves available for one to one support where they could provide mock interview training. They also made sure that financial support was available for interviews in cases where students could not afford travel costs.

The head of sixth-form at Outer London Boys explained that in previous years they had found their students were disadvantaged in the interview process as they were unprepared for interviews that they were invited to. They found that because their students were from more working class backgrounds - often with no history of university in their families or even professional work - they needed to provide much more support in terms of preparing students to project themselves well in an interview setting. This school had developed a strategy which not only involved one to one interview training *in advance* of submitting applications and mock interviews prior to the real thing, but also a focus on ensuring that students have a strong range of extracurricular activities from which they can draw on in an interview. This also helped to 'boost' students' applications, in a way that meant they could 'compete with the independent schools'.

At the Inner London Boys school, the head of sixth-form also talked about how, with particular students who needed extra support, knowing their individual needs was really important:

> *I could tell you every single student in Year 11, Year 10 and probably some of the other year groups because I'm involved with them. So kids are known well. Their needs are well known whether it's I need to buy a travel ticket for this kid or this kid has no space at home to work or whatever and that's why we succeed even though our cohort shows real need, we're really successful.*

The school claimed their success was evident in that FSM-eligible students at their school actually now outperformed other (non-FSM) students.

Students taking part in focus groups were positive across the board about the support they received from their schools and colleges. Students at the North East Catholic school felt that:

> *Our sixth-form is better now than it used to be because they help you more. I know someone who went to the old school and he says it was more independent and you try to get yourself into uni whereas now you have a lot of help. (North East Catholic: Focus group A)*

3.11.2. Pastoral support

Pastoral support was seen as important by all staff interviewed at case study. At the East Midlands Comprehensive, the careers advisor claimed that '*actually the best jobs that* [the Raising Aspirations mentors] *do personally I think is that they actually care. The kids really feel that they are bothered you know*'. The mentors concurred with this view:

*I know we're trying to it sounds like we're blowing our own trumpet but …
we are really passionate about the job we do. It's quite hard to, you know
when you go into certain jobs yeah you do a job because it's a job but I
think we're generally really passionate about the young people and where
they go onto now. We don't just literally let them go out you know when
June come and we do track every kid and make sure that they've gone
onto where they said they were and if they haven't we try.*

The pastoral role played by teaching and lecturing staff was also emphasised at the
case study FE colleges, as was the guidance provided by specialist careers officers.
The Curriculum Leader at the Southern College claimed that as well as dealing with
the practicalities of support with UCAS applications their role involved 'quelling
fears', giving students 'informed choices' and 'basically trying to empower them,'
encouraging students that 'they have the ability to achieve'. She mentioned that:

*Having high expectations of them is something they respond to. It
becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy, if you expect them to achieve and push
them. At the beginning of the year they resent that and by the end of the
year they say thanks for doing that because now I have got the distinction
or I really developed and I want to go to university and I feel confident, I
can do it*

Indeed focus group discussions with students supported these claims and as one
student (at the North East Catholic school) put it:

*Staff are always pushing you to do what's best for you, where some
schools would probably just sit back and say just get on with it [ours
doesn't].*

A student focus group at the Southern College also pointed to a high degree of
gratitude towards staff. One older student admitted her initial concerns at going back
to college with lots of younger students but her mind was soon put at rest through
the support of the staff. Other students agreed;

*I was absolutely terrified and then I came in on the first day and it was just
a sea of teenagers and I just thought, but then they are respectful; there's
no pressure, the only pressure you get here is what you put on yourself
with schedules. The tutors are great, they want you to succeed, you know
they want you to succeed, and so you get quite a good buzz. We've had
a lovely time*

*Everyone is nice, the teachers are nice, the staff are nice, and so really
helpful.*

[The Careers Advisor] was really good, again careers were brilliant

They're very patient and also the learning, we've got a learning tutor at lunch time haven't we, a drop in centre. They were brilliant as well they're really good tutors. There is no one you can't ask really is there?

Similarly staff at the North East Catholic School believed that being approachable and always available was key to supporting their students. They felt that their physical availability –with the position of their office in the common room - made them more approachable to students:

Our office is in the common room so they are often knocking on the door asking about 'oh I've got an interview on Thursday what's it likely to be like?' They do know that they can come and approach anybody and get some help.

Students were aware that this type of work often involved their teachers going 'above and beyond' their expected role and putting in extra time to support them. One student at the Southern College talked about being pleased that his lecturer had given him extra lessons on a one to one basis. Another student directly connected this extra support and extra feedback to increasing their chances of going to university:

I find they give you loads of second chances as well, with your work. A couple of times I've handed it in and then been handed it back, they've pointed out what I can change to make it a higher grade, which is really helpful, because otherwise I would just accepted the grade and then I would have ended up not having the right grades to go to university. And so they do really want you to get the best that you can get. It's nice in that way as well.

Support then, not only with the application process for University, but the close and supportive relationship built with students through their learning journey came across as a vital affective process which contributed to aspiration-raising. The care and emotional labour that goes into teaching plays an important role in this respect.

3.11.3. Mentoring

In line with the literature[49], mentoring schemes to raise aspirations for HE received mixed views from case study participants. Most schools used 'learning mentors' to support students in raising their attainment, and four were involved with mentoring schemes specifically geared towards raising students' aspirations to attend HE.

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[49] Cummings, C., Laing, K., Law, J., McLaughlin, J., Papps, I., Todd, L. and Woolner, P. (2012) *Can Changing Aspirations and Attitudes Impact on Educational Attainment?* York: JRF

These either involved a student mentor from a university, or someone in a professional job, being paired up with a student, usually from a disadvantaged background. At the Inner London Comprehensive, for example, every student in the sixth-form had either an academic, business or pastoral mentor from an external organisation.

The West Midlands Catholic school had continued an existing mentoring relationship (from Aim Higher) where students from Birmingham University would mentor students meeting Aim Higher criteria on disadvantage. Furthermore, the Inner London Academy took part in the Higher Education Access Programme for Schools (HEAPS) programme which provides mentors for disadvantaged students. This school, however, had discontinued their relationship as they had found the mentor – a civil servant – did not have enough time to devote to the scheme.

In contrast, Inner London Boys had a much more successful mentoring arrangement with a city law company, where, as part of the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme, company staff would mentor their students. This was an academic mentoring relationship where students who had 'fallen behind' or needed extra support, in for example maths, were supported and mentored by someone from the law firm's finance department. Tutoring sessions would usually be held at the law firm's offices. The company also put on workshops and funded other activities at the school such as debating events. The mentoring aspect of this relationship was deemed to be very successful as it provided students with contact with professional people working in a commercial environment:

> *Our kids are going into the city, going into Westminster, learning how to behave professionally. They go to the tutor's work place and so they get to see those kinds of workplaces which raises their aspirations. They see what's on their doorstep. (Inner London Academy: head of aspiration raising)*

Having access to and experience of the world of professional work was deemed to have an indirect effect on students' aspirations for HE, through students' ability to imagine themselves in these kinds of careers. Similar positive responses were expressed at the Inner London Comprehensive about their mentoring scheme with business professionals. This school worked with the national programme 'careers academy' which provides STEM, business and finance, creative and media professional mentors and internship opportunities in leading companies in London. The head at the school indicated that:

> *The benefits are the internships. I mean they make a big difference because they are working with real people in the real world and it's not a*

mock thing, it's real. And the business mentors, the long term business mentor relationships is a big benefit. Some of those extend way past school. We've got kids now who are graduates and still meeting regularly with their mentor that they had in school. So the continuity is there.

As the head of the project at the Inner London Boys pointed out, providing disadvantaged students with contacts in law firms is a really valuable resource for them. The important point this teacher makes is that these relationships are embedded and sustained, not just superficial or short term. Similarly, the head of aspiration raising at the Inner London Academy emphasised the importance of access to social capital in the form of professional networks:

I think there is a professional world that quite a few of our students are quite uncomfortable in or unaccustomed to you know. A lot of parents here don't have jobs. Our students don't belong to sort of professional networks, which a lot of more affluent middleclass independent school kids you know for example benefit from. You know that exposes them to a world and a language and you know a familiarity, which a lot of our students don't have. And I think it's really important you know we take vast numbers of students, as many students we take out to visit universities we take out to visit offices and you know work environments'.

This resonates with the literature discussed in chapter one, suggesting that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have people from professional backgrounds in their family or social networks[50].

3.12. Experiencing university

Every school and college in the case study sample made sure at least some students went on day trips to universities. As discussed in the following chapter (on raising aspirations for Russell Group), several case study schools mentioned trips to Oxbridge (with varying degrees of formality). It was most common for schools to have established links with most local universities which tended to be Post 1992 institutions. London schools tended to arrange trips to more Russell Group universities by virtue of their proximity. The bulk of visits tended to take place during the sixth-form, although most (including both the 11-16 schools) had taken students from a younger year group on a university visit of some kind.

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[50] Menzies, L (2013) *Educational aspirations: how English schools can work with parents to keep them on track* JRF Viewpoint

3.12.1. University visits

Enabling students to visit university was universally felt to be an invaluable activity to raise students' aspirations to consider HE. The learning mentor at the North West Comprehensive claimed:

> *The biggest thing is getting them out. They're not really aware of what's around them in Britain and they don't sort of see universities, they don't hear, the difficulty is getting students out of school, visiting places, whether it's engineering firms, I don't care where take them, as long as we get them out. Engineering firms, universities, sixth-form colleges, out and it's getting them out.*

This mentor went on to say that their school was quite 'shabby' and that students see universities with great facilities which impresses them *'so if they see other places they think crikey, 'how can I come to a place like this' and you can see them, they get excited.'*

Similarly the Southern FE College found that healthcare students were very resistant to go on the university visit ('we had to force them onto the bus') but once they were there the visit had changed their mind:

> *And off they went and actually when they were there they actually thought wow I could come to university and this is really interesting. And they went and listened to various speakers about healthcare or issues and they really liked that. So they came back full of it and 'I think I could go now' and it's not full of people with two heads, it's actually normal people!*

One student who had been on one of these visits and who took part in a focus group (and was due to go on two more) reported '*they're already getting us to look at universities, which is good, because I didn't think I would go to university, but now I'm almost certain I will be and so that's good.'* Another student at the same school explained that experiencing different lectures in their subject area and getting help to write personal statements *'was really informative and it helped a lot I think.'* The Midlands FE College head of careers concurred that university visits were a necessity:

> *By far and away the most effective thing is the trips [...] I think because they challenge them in different ways. They open their eyes; they dispel myths and so on.*

Similarly, staff at the Southern FE College claimed to have doubled their numbers going to university since they had made links with two local universities where they take students who traditionally would not have considered university to visit. The college also organised for university students to come in to talk to these types of student. In fact the college claimed that all curriculum areas have at least one university visit and one vocational visit attached to them. This type of arrangement

was not isolated with one London school (Inner London Academy) making a pledge that all students would visit at least three universities.

At the North East Catholic School, a student commented that: *'I always wanted to go to uni since Year 9 when some people from Cambridge came in and they did a power point presentation on what it's like at Cambridge and there was a trip down to Cambridge as well and I did that in Year 10'*

While the value of visits is evident, not all visits were evaluated positively by students. The learning mentor at North West Comprehensive talked about the Year 8 and 9 trip to the University of Huddersfield: *'just looking round, they were, their mouths were like wide open at all the facilities and the size'.* However students themselves were very negative about the trip. It was just '*boring and big'.* Boring because they just talked about grades and the library was too quiet. A more extensive discussion of students' perceptions of university is included in chapter five.

Well organised and well-structured days were rated positively while badly run events were seen to put students off (having a detrimental effect). An example of a well-structured day was provided by the Outer London Boys school which had a regular arrangement for Year 7s to visit Kingston University. The university provided a coach which collected students from school, the journey there and back was within the school day, the hosts were welcoming and well-prepared, and the programme of activities was varied and interesting. This was followed with a session the next year where ambassadors came from the university to the school to visit the same cohort one year on, to talk to them about subject choice and career choice.

Visits appear to be particularly successful when they start from an earlier age. Younger students in the focus groups were not very forthcoming about how they found the visits they went on, but teachers had anecdotes of how these visits impacted on students:

> *I can remember three years ago when we went the first time I had these kids who were really so full of themselves and they just thought they were big fish. They're in Year 13 now and we went there and they just turned into little lambs because they just saw; you know they couldn't believe that there were kids that bright and sharp asking all these questions and things and it wasn't them getting all the attention so in that sense it was quite good and it was sort of; you know the kind of questions was; because everything is focused on the subject choices you'll make for Year 12 and what subjects would be a good combination for university. (Outer London Boys: head of gifted and talented)*

What appears to be positive about visiting universities is that for students who have never been to one (or even left their home town) this provided them with a real life experience of what university was like. One lecturer at the Midlands FE College

talked about a student on a health and social care course who had always lived in the locality and none of her family had been to university. When the students were taken to visit Cardiff University, it became apparent that this was the first time this girl had left her local town, let alone go to visit a university:

> *I firmly believe that that was the thing that gave her the wings to fly that experience. The confidence that she got from going to a university not here and having a really good taster day, speaking to the students, gave her the confidence to actually think maybe she could go to university and maybe she could challenge herself to go somewhere else out of [local town]*

A student at the Southern FE college student claimed that visiting different universities expanded their choices and educated them about differences between universities. Indeed a teacher at the North East Catholic school claimed that the visits provided students with the tools to do their own research:

> *I think a lot of the students are not necessarily going to go to those universities but I think by getting them out among these things it just makes them feel more confident with 'oh I can go on an open day and find out, I can ask a question of somebody'*

Similarly, a careers advisor at the Inner London Boys school mentioned that '*I have students now who say to me Miss, Miss, Miss, because of that trip, I now want to.'*

In other instances visits merely confirmed or reinforced with students that they wanted to go to university. In addition, one student claimed that what had been successful about her visit was '*Actually talking to people who were doing what I want to do. That's the only thing*' (Southern FE College), whilst two other students from the same college explained:

> *I thought it lived up to everything I thought it would be.*

> *Yeah it just more confirmed what I thought to be fair.*

Some students in London however had 'university visit fatigue', having been on many visits which they claimed had all said the same thing. A student from the Inner London Academy commented on his second trip to Cambridge with the school: '*Yeah it wasn't really anything new but all in all it was fun'* whilst another at the Outer London Boys school said:

> *Every single one [visits] I have been to is pretty much a tour of the campus and then lectures on student finance and UCAS applications which you get bored. (Outer London Boys: year 13 focus group)*

Despite wariness in some cases, this did not appear to discourage students from going to university. Students spoke very highly of other immersive experiences, particularly summer schools which are discussed below.

3.12.2. Residential trips and summer schools

Most of the case study schools talked about organising for some of students to attend to summer schools or residential visits. These tended to be run by specific programmes such as Sutton Trust. Six institutions mentioned the Sutton Trust in particular, but other summer schools and residential trips tended to be run by specific universities, including Oxbridge.

There is no evidence to suggest that summer schools or residential were any more or less effective than day trips. What appeared to be more important was providing *disadvantaged* students, who might not otherwise ever have first-hand experience of university, with an extended opportunity to visit one. Furthermore, what was deemed important was ensuring the *quality* of the experience.

For some students a residential trip was deemed to have a strong influence, not necessarily on going to university as such, but on *where* they might go. The head of sixth-form at the North East Catholic school gave an example:

> *'[X] last year went to St Andrews through the Sutton Trust and … she wants to go now, she applied there and she's very focused on wanting to go there. Now if she hadn't gone on that Sutton Trust [summer school]I don't think she'd have, she wouldn't have even entertained it, so they are good.*

One student from the same school who had been to the summer school confirmed: *'I definitely want to go now'*. Another student who attended had always wanted to go to Durham University and going to the summer school there helped to confirm this and to alleviate any anxiety about attending. Another different group of students had been at a summer school at Eton and rated this highly:

> *I did things I wouldn't have done in school. You do the subjects but maybe tangents to what you would study in school, it is really interesting'*

> *I thought it was the best thing I could have done. (Outer London Boys: year 13 focus group)*

Students taking part in the focus group at the Inner London Academy had all been to a summer school, with some having attended several at London Universities and/or Cambridge. Case study interviews with staff at the same school confirmed that considerable effort had been made to support students' applications, particularly among HAD students.

3.12.3. Subject focused visits

Subject focused visits or programmes of activity were deemed by both staff and students to be particularly successful in that they tapped into students' passions about their subject and provided them with opportunities to experience learning at a higher level. It was common for aspiration raising activities to be aligned with subjects or academic departments rather than generic. This appeared to provide a greater level of success – acting as a hook to students attaining well in that subject. Through visiting a university it was hoped that students learn about and understand the level of engagement required to study at a higher level and to become passionate about it:

> *Taking 30 of them to an Oxford College and trying to use that to kick start this is what you need to do, this is what they're expecting you to, do reading beyond the course, getting passionately involved with your subject. (Southern FE College sixth-form site: able and talented coordinator)*

At the North West Comprehensive school, the learning mentor also argued that the trips that were most successful were the subject-focused ones where students really got to learn about something they were interested in studying at university. For example, some students had been on a Media Ethics day long course at Leeds which they were very positive about. The mentor at this school commented:

> *It really is getting them out there, it inspires them, it informs them, and usually because they're interested in it, if it's sort of the curriculum areas specific, if it's Science or Humanities they get a real taste and it's that, it's that that gets them interested. […] two of them said 'I can't wait Miss to go to university if we're going to be talking about things like this'. (North West Comprehensive: learning mentor)*

Students seemed to have really enjoyed this, as it was an exercise in deep learning about a real topic that you might study at university. In the focus group students claimed that '*it really opens up what university education is really like*'. Similarly, students at the Outer London Boys school had been to a summer school at Imperial College '*that was amazing because it was specific to medicine*'.

Other visits helped to open up the range of opportunities for students. At the North West Comprehensive, two students had been on a Dux-funded visit to Leeds and what was most striking them was the range of courses available to study at HE:

> *The two students I took last year really appreciated and enjoyed the day. I get a sense that they both didn't realise the range of courses on offer to study at university. I think that was a big eye opener going around and looking at life and starting to get a feel of what university is like and the range of courses, I think that was the key thing they discovered. When they started talking about aeronautical engineering and the diverse range*

of options I think that really caught their attention. (North West Comprehensive: learning mentor)

The learning mentor at this school claimed: *'..I think it reinforced their aspirations. They thought they would like to go to university and I think after that day they knew they wanted to go to university.'* The Southern FE curriculum leader claimed that what is important is '*the actual experience of going to lectures that university lecturers would do and listening to their ideas about things.*' Indeed, access to this kind of higher learning at school or college was also deemed influential in raising students' aspirations around what to study, and to learn more at a higher level.

> *If you elevate their thinking, there's a whole different world out there. Education, I mean I can't underscore that it is still the single most life changing thing out there so educational outcomes will have the biggest impact because you're elevating their thinking. You're making them move in certain circles and at which point it starts to rub off basically. It's unbelievable. (East Midlands Comprehensive: assistant head)*

This recognition, at least in part, informed the Southern FE College's decision to run the Cambridge Pre-U qualification with their students giving students the chance to work in a cross-curricular way and to develop research skills and critical thinking. It was the lecturers' passion for their subject which excited students in this instance and made them want to learn more, as one student explained:

> *So for me the most effective thing is the teachers' passion for what they do and the fact that they get to teach you gives you a real thirst for knowledge because they're so happy to provide you with that knowledge. It just snowballs they're just so happy to teach you and you're so happy to learn it because they're so happy to teach you, it just snowballs from there. You know their knowledge grows and their desire to teach you knowledge because you're getting more and more excited.*

In this chapter, we have detailed the key strategies schools and colleges used in their aspiration raising work, as well as their prevalence, and explored in the case studies students' experiences of specific activities such as university visits and summer schools. In chapter 4, we report on how schools and colleges encourage and facilitate applications and partnerships with Russell Group and other selective or leading universities.

4. Raising Aspirations to apply for Russell Group and other selective or leading universities

Summary of Key Points

- Nearly all surveyed respondents said their schools or colleges talked to students about different types of HE institutions including selective or leading universities. Even in 11-16 schools, 80 per cent said they did this.
- In the case study schools with a well-organised programme of activities designed to inform students about HE, there was in general a high level of awareness of different types of university among students. In the 11-16 schools and the colleges, students' awareness tended to be more limited.
- The Russell Group was one of the most frequently talked about groups within HE – along with selective or leading 'local' universities and Oxford and Cambridge.
- According to the survey, encouraging applications to Russell Group universities was also widespread – 59 per cent of 11-16 schools, 92 per cent of 11-18 schools, and 82 per cent of colleges said they did this.
- At case study schools and colleges, emphasis was placed on consideration of the most appropriate universities for individual students and the course they wanted to do in relation to predicted grades.. High-achieving students were, on the whole, encouraged to apply to selective or leading universities.
- Specific partnerships with Russell Group universities were most common among 11-18 schools. Survey findings suggest more than half of these schools have a formal or informal partnership with one of the 24 universities that comprise the Group.
- In the case studies, the term 'link' rather than 'partnership' was more often used, reflecting what were, often informal connections, between schools and colleges, and HEIs. Examples of more well established links included universities regularly funding travel for prospective students to visit.
- The pro-active work that Russell Group universities do meant that links were often instigated by HEIs. Other links had been established some time ago through Aim Higher. The commitment of individual staff in schools and colleges to develop and maintain such links appeared to be key to their success.
- Despite widespread recognition of the Russell Group, encouraging applications to these universities among high-achieving disadvantaged students was not common – 14 per cent 11-16 schools, 28 per cent of 11-18 schools, and 29 per cent of colleges say they do this.

In all earlier sections of this report, analysis has focused on aspirations to apply for and attend HE institutions generally – making no distinction between different types of HE institutions. This section looks specifically at work in schools and colleges to raise aspirations to apply for selective or leading universities, with a particular focus on the 24 universities that comprise the Russell Group. The survey included questions about work with all types of students before focusing on high-achieving disadvantaged students. The case study interviews with staff included questions about the extent to which schools and colleges specifically encouraged applications to Russell Group and/or other universities. The focus groups with students asked about their views of different types of institutions, what informed these views and which universities they were considering applying to.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the extent to which schools and colleges talked to students about different types of universities, followed by sections on encouraging applications to selective or leading institutions in general and then for high-achieving disadvantaged students. The chapter concludes with a section on partnerships with Russell Group universities.

4.1. Talking to students about different types of universities

Almost all respondents to the survey said they did talk to students about different types of universities including selective or leading institutions. As shown in Figure 7, all 11-18 schools did so and even among 11-16 schools, 80 per cent said they did talk to students about this specifically.

The types and/or groups of universities that were most often discussed were: selective or leading local universities, the Russell Group and Oxford and Cambridge. This was the case across all three types of institution – as shown in Figure 7. In colleges and 11-18 schools these three types of university were discussed in around nine in ten of the surveyed institutions. In 11-16 schools they were discussed in around three quarters of cases.

Colleges and 11-18 schools differed slightly in terms of how much they talked about the Russell Group and Oxford and Cambridge. Generally, 11-18 schools were more likely to discuss both of these and, in fact, Oxford and Cambridge was the most commonly discussed type among 11-18 schools (97 per cent of all 11-18 schools discussed Oxford and Cambridge). This probably reflects the mix of courses and qualifications that these organisations offer – schools tending to be more focused on traditionally academic subjects.

Figure 7. Talking to students about different (including selective or leading) universities
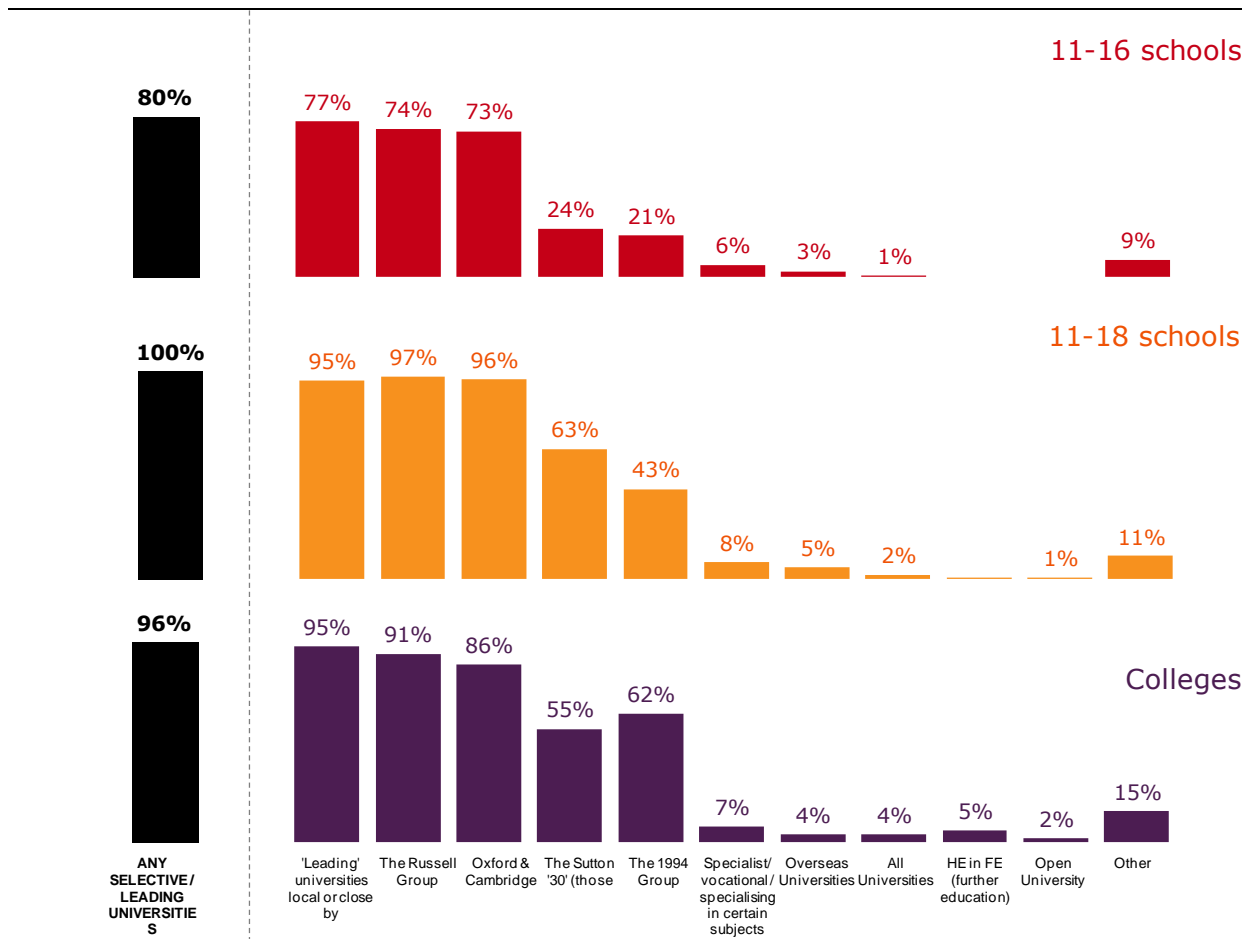
Base: All respondents (161, 298, 99)

Discussions about the Sutton Trust 30 and 1994 Groups were slightly less widespread in all types of institution. The Sutton Trust 30 was talked about in half to two thirds of colleges and 11-18 schools (55 per cent and 63 per cent respectively) and in around a quarter (24 per cent) of 11-16 schools. Discussions relating to the 1994 Group followed the same pattern – being discussed in 62 per cent of colleges and 43 per cent of 11-18 schools but only 21 per cent of 11-16 schools. Interestingly, the Sutton Trust 30 was more often discussed in 11-18 schools than in colleges, whereas the opposite was true for the 1994 Group – which was more often discussed in colleges than it was in 11-18 schools.

It should be noted that all the data in Figure 7 are based on *all* schools and colleges – e.g. 74 per cent of *all* 11-16 schools discussed Russell Group universities with pupils. If the figures are rebased on those institutions who talk about any selective or leading universities the pattern of response is very similar for all types of institution.

For example, 93 per cent of 11-16 schools that talked to pupils did so about the Russell Group – very similar to the proportion if 11-18 schools (97 per cent) and colleges (94 per cent).

It should also be noted here and elsewhere that the nature of the various groups discussed here varies considerably. Some, such as the Russell Group and 1994 Group, are genuine membership organisations made of HE institutions that purposively work together in partnership. Other 'groups' including the Sutton Trust 30 represent a list of institutions that have been identified by an external body (in this case the Sutton Trust) as being leaders in their field. In this context, the findings in Figure 7 do not imply that teaching staff mentioned these groups by name in all cases. In some cases it is possible that teachers spoke to students about specific HEIs that made up these groups without mentioning, for example, the 'Sutton Trust 30' by name. It was also apparent from the case studies that, with the partial exception of the Russell Group, neither staff nor students tended to know precisely which universities were in these different groups, as is discussed below.

There was little difference in how often selective or leading universities were discussed in schools generally compared with those in the boost sample (schools that were known to send a high proportion of high-achieving disadvantaged pupils to HE). The same was also true in relation to discussions specifically about Russell Group universities.

Analysis by district is not presented as variations were small and are likely to be conflated with the distribution of different types of schools and of colleges within district (see information on sample profile in section 1.4).

4.2. Student knowledge of different types of university

In the case studies, whilst all interviewed staff reported talking to students about differences between universities, the extent to which Russell Group and other selective or leading universities were discussed varied. However, this variation was clearly linked to institution type with FE colleges and 11-16 schools having less of a key focus on these institutions than 11-18 schools.

In contrast, case studies in the 11-18 schools showed there was a good level of knowledge on the whole, of at least some differences between universities. For example, Year 13 students at the Outer London Boys school were familiar with the Russell Group, the 1994 Group, redbrick universities and the Ivy League. They explained that knowledge of the latter came from watching films, but their knowledge of UK universities was a result of both sessions in the school sixth-form and of their own research. It was clear that for many students in 11-18 schools, their knowledge stemmed from school activities designed to inform students about differences between universities. For example, the head of aspiration raising at the Inner London

Academy explained that '*every Year 11 student is given a copy of this informed choices document we produce*' and there is a UCAS week for Year 12 students which includes university visits and talks from university staff and students. The Year 13 students who took part in the focus groups at this school had good awareness of the Russell Group, different Russell Group universities, and of the university league tables. A university visit had clearly enabled one student at the North East Catholic school to describe Durham and Cambridge Universities as: '*collegiate colleges [...] where like it's split into different colleges and you live in your college*', something that had particularly appealed to this student. In general, students in this school tended to know about universities that offered the courses they were interested in, suggesting that this had probably been used as a strategy by the school.

In contrast, students' knowledge of different universities was less advanced in the 11-16 schools, although the students who participated in focus groups in these schools were also younger which is likely to have been a factor here. The head of the East Midlands Comprehensive, however, explained that they focused predominantly on links with the local (post-92) university, stating that the Russell Group was not part of their 'vision', '*because I suppose it's far away from them in terms of where they're going to apply*'. Some other members of staff here were not clear what the Russell Group was. A member of the aspirations team, however, mentioned taking 12 students to a talk about Oxbridge, but this was something organised by another school which had emailed all schools in the area to invite them to attend, rather than part of the strategy or an initiative at their own school. This lack of focus on different types of universities and the Russell Group was evident in the responses from students at this school, who had not heard of the Russell Group and whose knowledge of universities was limited to the local institutions and Oxford. These students also appeared to have little awareness of university ranking. When asked how they would group universities, the consensus was to group them by location, with the exception of Oxford which would be '*put Oxford higher than any of them'.*

At the North West Comprehensive, the other 11-16 school in the sample, differences in knowledge between the Year 9 and Year 11 students were apparent. Year 9 students, all of whom were in a Gifted and Talented programme, had very little knowledge of differences between universities, although most wanted to go. Some in this group thought the Russell Group was a place where you go to become a doctor or lawyer and, on the whole, knowledge of different universities was limited. For example, there was discussion within this group about how universities called Metropolitan might be better as it sounds 'fancy'. However, the Year 11 group at this school demonstrated rather better knowledge, prompted to some extent by one student whose mother was an academic and who instigated a discussion about Russell Group universities and university rankings.

The two case studies with FE colleges suggested that discussion of Russell Group and other selective or leading universities tended to be confined predominantly to students on A-level programmes, whilst for those students on vocational courses, the emphasis tended to be placed on informing students about their local universities. To some extent this division was evident in schools too, although at the Inner London Comprehensive, where provision was divided between different pathways and advice about applications to university differentiated by level of attainment, the head explained that the whole cohort was provided with information about different types of university, including the RG, telling them *'this is the reality you know, judge yourself against that. We don't want to steer them to particular places or particular courses'.*

As can be seen in this example, informing students about different universities seemed to be closely tied up with accounts about the extent to which students were encouraged to apply to particular institutions. A fuller discussion of this is provided in section 5.3 below.

4.3. Encouraging applications to selective or leading universities

Those schools and colleges who talked to students about different types of university were asked if they did any work to encourage applications to these types of university. Survey data from this question are presented in Figure 8, and are rebased on all schools and colleges to show the prevalence of this type of activity in the whole sampled population.

As shown in Figure 8, the proportion of schools and colleges that encouraged applications to selective or leading universities closely mirrors those who 'talked to' students about the differences between different types of university. In fact 90 per cent of those who talked to students said they also specifically encouraged applications – by implication it is likely that much discussion in schools and colleges about different types of universities is centred around encouraging applications to selective or leading institutions.

The link between these two measures is strongest among colleges and 11-18 schools – where respectively 92 per cent and 94 per cent of those who talked to students about different types of universities also encouraged applications to these types of institution. The link was slightly weaker in 11-16 schools (where the equivalent proportion was 79 per cent) probably reflecting that these schools often begin work to raise aspirations at an earlier age (see section 3.5) when university choice is less of an immediate concern for their pupils.

Figure 8. Encouraging applications to selective or leading universities

11-16 schools

63%	61% 58% 58%	19% 17% 4% 2% 3% 7%

11-18 schools

94%	88% 92% 89%	58% 40% 7% 5% 1% 0% 10%

Colleges

89%	87% 82% 82%	49% 57% 11% 4% 2% 6% 2% 11%

ANY SELECTIVE / LEADING UNIVERSITIES — 'Leading' universities local or close by — The Russell Group — Oxford & Cambridge — The Sutton '30' (those — The 1994 Group — Specialist/ vocational/ specialising in certain subjects — Overseas Universities — All Universities — HE in FE (further education) — Open University — Other
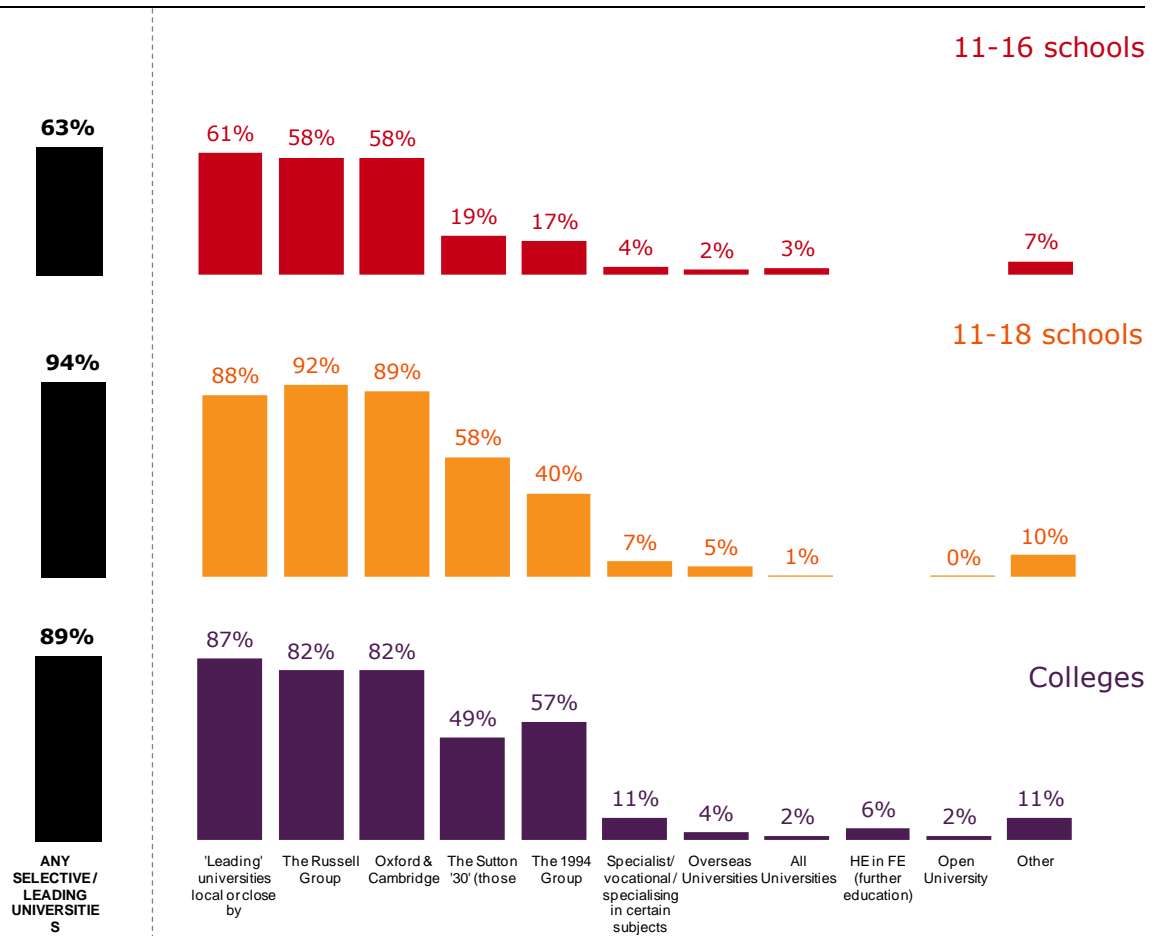
Base: All respondents (161, 298, 99)

Otherwise, the survey data show that work to encourage applications to selective or leading universities is widespread across schools and colleges. Only in 11-16 schools did prevalence drop below nine in ten (63 per cent of 11-16 schools encouraged applications, compared with around nine in ten in colleges and 11-18 schools). In all three types of institution encouraging applications specifically to Russell Group universities specifically was also widespread – particularly in 11-18 schools where 92 per cent said they encouraged applications to members of the Group (making this the most common response – more so, even than selective or leading universities that were in close proximity to the school). It was also very common for schools and colleges to encourage applications to selective or leading universities that were close to their own institution and applications to Oxford and Cambridge.

In line with earlier commentary, encouraging applications to the Sutton Trust 30 and '1994' Group universities was also common in colleges and 11-18 schools (between

40 per cent and 60 per cent of these institutions did so). Again, 11-18 schools were slightly more likely to encourage applications to the Sutton Trust 30 than '1994' Group universities, whereas the opposite was observed among colleges.

Encouraging applications to specialist or vocational institutions, overseas universities or to the Open University was uncommon in all types of school and college.

Amongst the case studies, there were differences in the extent to which emphasis was placed on applications to RG and other selective institutions. The importance of applying to RG universities was particularly stressed in several of the case study schools. For example, at the West Midlands Catholic, where in the previous year 23 per cent of students had gone on to RG Universities, the head of sixth-form explained how students deemed potentially capable of RG entry were worked with:

> *We're very clear with them about, from the outset we tell them where they should be aiming. We give them a minimum grade that they should be achieving; we say right this is the minimum let's exceed this.*

The same participant went on to explain that those they target should also be exceeding a B-grade, pushing them to aim for Russell Group universities because they are seen as more prestigious. At the Outer London Boys school the head of Years 12-13 was keen to emphasise that students need to apply for the best university for the subject they want to study and one that is appropriate to their level of achievement, but he also added '*with the absolute onus on the Russell Group or the most respected in that field*'. Again there was encouragement to consider the Russell Group for those students who might be 'underselling themselves'.

At the Southern FE College sixth-form site, the Russell Group was also emphasised, on this occasion with parents to encourage them to think more broadly than Oxbridge

> *We'd do an HE parents evening and I do a little bit at the end for 'is your child able?' The parents who stay are thinking Oxbridge, but what I do is I give a list of Russell Group universities and say right apply to these.*
> *(Southern FE College sixth-form site: able and talented coordinator)*

In each case, there was a concerted effort to encourage those with appropriate levels of attainment to aim for and apply to RG universities. The main rationale, as noted above, related to the value assumed to be awarded to degrees from these institutions, particularly in the graduate labour market, as the head of aspiration raising at Inner the London Academy argued:

> *You know employers, competitive employers you know paying good graduate salaries will look first to the Russell Group and 1994 Group of graduates. Now in terms of you know enhancing the life opportunities of*

our students I think you know promoting the idea of aspiring to go to one of those universities is a very positive sort of thing to do really.

Nevertheless, some staff were reluctant to place too much emphasis on the Russell Group, stressing the importance of other university options and of considering what is most appropriate for the student. For example, the head of Inner London Comprehensive explained:

We do focus on Russell Group, we do focus on Oxford and Cambridge but we also focus on a broader range of universities as well, local universities and so we work with Middlesex for example. [...] Some will go to Westminster and we don't want to discourage them from going there and so we look at a broad range and also we don't want to be elitist ourselves, we don't want to suggest that some of the universities are second rate although we do actively counsel them about the kind of courses they're doing. [...] if you look at Media for example. Whenever I talk to the head of Media she always says well I want to encourage them to go to Bournemouth because that's where the state of the art stuff is going on.

Others similarly emphasised consideration of the most appropriate university for the course students wanted to study:

I think we just try and suggest to them that they go to university that's best for their specific you know subject that they want to do. I don't think we'd direct them to specific universities well I don't, I don't think any of us do that. (East Midlands Comprehensive: aspirations team)

For me the starting point is actually making sure the student is applying to a university that does the course they want. So for instance in Year 13 we've got about 13 students with an A* target rate within Year 13. One of them hasn't applied to a Russell Group university even though he's got all those A* predictions because it doesn't do the course he wants and that's the most important thing for me; that the student is doing a course that they want to do and enjoys. (Inner London Boys: school deputy and head of sixth-form)

This Deputy and head of sixth-form acknowledged the pressures to increase the percentage going to Russell Group universities but argued:

That's all well and good but there are children, there are individuals behind this and to me that comes before anything because if they don't like university and they don't feel comfortable and bomb out with a debt of £9,000 where are they after a year? Nowhere.

In the FE colleges in particular (with the exception of the sixth-form centre of Southern FE College mentioned above), and from careers staff in general, the

emphasis was on students making their own decisions, based on careful research and consideration of a wide range of factors, with staff reluctant to be seen to be pushing students towards particular institutions. For example:

> *We tend to suggest that students pick the university they go based on research that they've done themselves and a whole load of factors about the course and the content and the modules. Look at the teaching. Go and visit the open day, what did you think, what's the vibe of the university, where would you be living, do you want to be in a big city, do you want to be by the sea. How big the classes, does that matter to you, how are you going to be taught, what's the balance of practical and theory, what kind of jobs do you get at the end of it. I would never say ever to a student this is the best place to go. (Midlands FE College: head of careers and guidance)*

The same member of staff went on to explain that they would show students how to find information about different universities, but said that they warned students about making decisions based on solely league tables, arguing that the importance of other factors, such as those listed above, mean that *'just choosing a university based on its ranking in the league table does not seem like very sensible as your only kind of pointer'*. The careers advisor at the Inner London Boys school went further, arguing that:

> *Higher education is a good way to go but it's not for everyone and we mustn't force young people to make the decision to go if it's not what they want to do but we have to lay out the options in front of them … they should not be forced to go down that pathway to incur a debt if they don't want to. And that's the thing with the Russell Group, sometimes the students are forced or pushed and they shouldn't be pushed because this Russell Group thing is almost like a class system, you know, and I don't like that.*

One finding of a recent report tracking the decision-making of high achieving applicants to HE[51] was that all high achievers in the study '*received encouragement to apply to HE, regardless of whether this was necessarily the right post-16 option for them'*. The example given, however, suggested that 'pressure' rather than encouragement had been used, providing some support to the career advisor's account above. She went on to explain that her son was at a Russell Group university and that *'it's great if you get there'*, but she felt that pushing Russell Group institutions over and above other options was inappropriate. Despite these reservations, however, it appeared that she did emphasise the Russell Group where

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[51] UCAS (2012) Tracking the Decision-making of High Achieving Higher Education Applicants, London, BIS, p. 46.

she felt it was appropriate, with a student in a Year 12 focus group at this school reporting that:

> *Our career advisor she's got a list of the Russell Group and she does try and push us in going to one of these Russell Groups because they, jobs are looking for, you've got the subject, what university you come from and the entry levels are highest.*

She was not alone, however, in challenging the idea that Russell Group universities are necessarily the best, or that they are always seen in that way by employers. The vocational and workplace learning manager at Inner London Comprehensive talked about a managing director of a company who likes to employ students *'from all walks of life*' and argued:

> *...just because you've been to a Russell Group university doesn't mean your skills are different to mine necessarily, it just means you've got maybe a qualification that's better recognised by and also people just see it as better.*

In all the student focus groups, there was some awareness of a differential ranking of universities, even if students were not familiar with the term 'Russell Group'. Whilst there were some mixed views about this, many students felt there were likely to be benefits in applying to Russell Group or other selective or leading universities. Many of the comments centred on the high reputations of these universities and the likely benefits for future careers:

> *It might make a difference, even if it's the same degree in Birmingham as it is in Wolverhampton. It might have more weight being from a Russell Group because you can put down your CV like might be better to employers (West Midlands Catholic: year 13 student focus group)*

Others related reputation to resource levels, teaching and learning at different universities. For example, a Year 13 student from the West Midlands Catholic school thought that Russell Group institutions would have a better careers service, whilst a Year 12 student from the Inner London Boys school thought that because of their reputations, Russell Group Universities would receive more funding from government and so have better facilities. Another student in this group explained:

> *I just heard that they're very dedicated to their students, Oxford you're like your tutor is an expert in the subject and he'll have a group of only about three, to four, five people, you get really well tutored and they're very much there, they're really interested in the students and they've got really high student satisfaction rates. (Inner London Boys: year 12 focus group)*

A sense that *'when you're doing a degree in these universities you learn much more than just usual universities*' and that this would be an advantage when applying for

jobs was expressed by a student at the Inner London Comprehensive. However, this student, who was judged unlikely to progress to a Russell Group Institution and indicated some potential risks associated with attending an institution with such a high reputation:

> *Universities like Queen Mary or UCL, Oxford, Cambridge they have such high reputations that if you went into that then people would expect that you're very, very intelligent or stuff like that. (Inner London Comprehensive non-RG focus Group)*

In general, however, most students and staff appeared to regard the high reputation of Russell Group institutions and the associated benefits as important reasons to apply to them. As one Year 13 student at the South East Academy put it *'if they ask for the top grades it means they get the top people and so it must be the top place to go'.* This student also indicated that league tables were important; despite saying she hated the ranking system.

More generally, there were a few challenges from students about university rankings and the idea that Russell Group universities were *necessarily* better than others. A student at the Midlands FE College argued that the most important differences relate to the classification of the degree applied for rather than the university per se. Another student also challenged the ranking system more directly:

> *I think the rankings are the worst thing sometimes. It's not necessarily true. Like you look at it and it will say it's not that good but when you go there for your course it's not one of the best but yea, it depends what you do (South East Academy Year 13 Focus Group2)*

It was also evident from focus groups with students that Oxford and Cambridge were clearly differentiated from other universities, not only for their reputation as being 'the best', but also retaining an image of being 'posh', 'all top hats and stuff', 'higher class' and 'a little bit snobby'. One group discussed a visit to Cambridge University, aimed at the highest achieving students in the school, that several of them had been on:

> *They told us about it's not like the stereotype about them being all posh and rich and whatever [...]*
>
> *So they tried to get rid of the stereotype*
>
> *Researcher: Did they get rid of the stereotype?*
>
> *I didn't believe it at all cos she was posh. She was really posh. (East Midlands Comprehensive: focus group B)*

A sense that some universities, or universities in general, were not for 'people like us' is discussed further in Chapter 5 (in the context of challenges faced in aspiration raising).

4.4. Encouraging applications to selective or leading universities among high-achieving disadvantaged students

The research also explored the extent to which high achieving disadvantaged students were encouraged to apply to Russell Group and other selective or leading universities, with specific survey questions related to this. As elsewhere, high achieving was defined as attaining level 5 at KS2. These questions were only asked of schools and colleges who did any kind of work with high-achieving disadvantaged students but have been rebased in Figure 9, to include all schools and colleges.

The survey findings show that while many schools and colleges are working with students to encourage applications to selective or leading universities, little of this is targeted specifically at high-achieving disadvantaged students. For example, among all surveyed 11-18 schools, 94 per cent were working to encourage applications to selective or leading universities and 92 per cent to Russell Group universities. The equivalent figures for high-achieving disadvantaged students are 27 per cent and 28 per cent respectively – suggesting that only around a quarter of activity is targeted at this key group of students. This pattern is repeated in other types of institution with similar proportions of colleges working to encourage applications to selective or leading universities among high-achieving disadvantaged students.

In 11-16 schools, around one in five (18 per cent) were working to encourage applications to selective or leading universities among high-achieving disadvantaged students and 14 per cent to Russell Group universities. Although given these types of activity were less common in 11-16 schools with students generally – see section 4.2 – this is to be expected.

As we might also expect, given that disadvantaged students are concentrated disproportionately in certain types of areas and regions within the country –there were large differences in response by district. Specifically, schools and colleges in Metropolitan districts and particularly those in London were among the most likely to encourage high-achieving disadvantaged students to apply to selective or leading, and Russell Group, universities. Nearly half of all schools and colleges in London said that they were doing this compared with a national average of 24 per cent with a similar proportion encouraging applications to Russell Group universities (44 per cent).

However, it seems unlikely that geographical differences are purely driven by the concentration of disadvantaged students in London (and other areas). As shown below, there is a link between the proportion of FSM-eligible pupils and the likelihood of encouraging disadvantaged students to apply to HE, but this link is not as pronounced as by district. Although schools and colleges may be using a much wider definition of disadvantage (as appears to be the case – see discussion in section 3.2) it seems likely that there are a broader set of factors at play.

Figure 9. Work with high-achieving disadvantaged students to encourage applications to selective or leading, and Russell Group universities
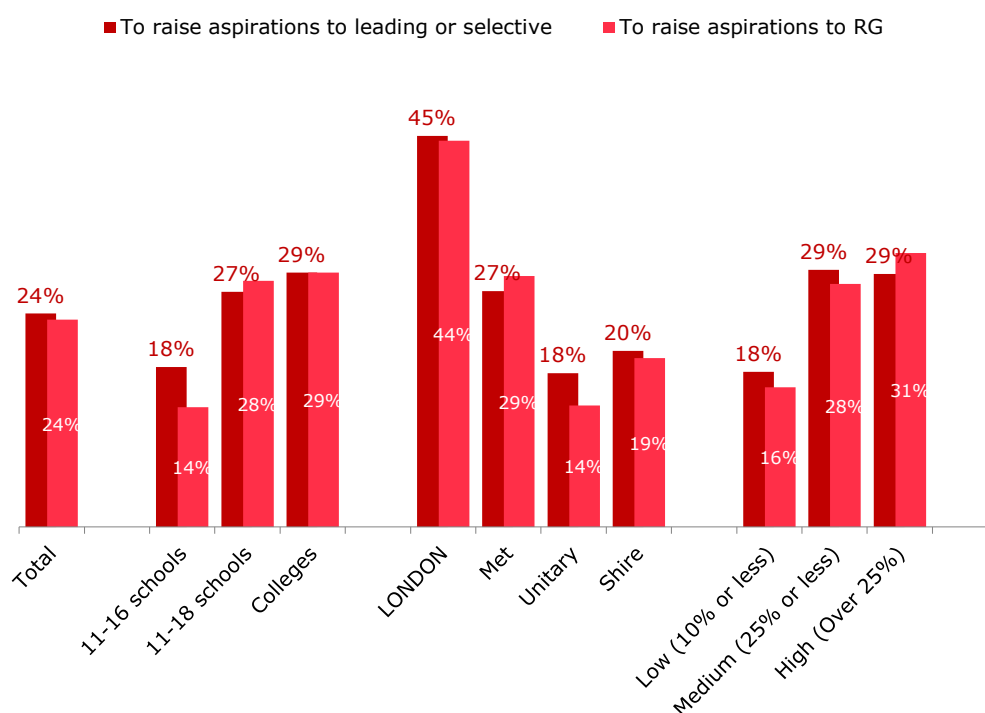
Base: All respondents (161, 298, 99)

The case studies supported the survey findings with little evidence of work supporting applications to RG and other selective or leading universities being targeted specifically at high achieving disadvantaged students. As discussed in section 3.2 above, schools in disadvantaged areas tended to regard most of their students as disadvantaged.

The case studies also suggested that, in terms of encouraging applications to selective or leading universities, level of attainment was seen as the key issue (*'my main focus is just to raise the grades first'*, head of Year 11, North West Comprehensive). Gifted and talented programmes were often mentioned as an

important aspect of this. In some cases, such programmes appeared to be informed by an awareness of high achieving disadvantaged students. For example, at the Outer London Boys school, the head of Years 12 and 13 explained that *'disadvantaged students that have been found as Gifted and Talented obviously they will find their way to the top of the pile in some respects'*. Others were keen to stress a degree of flexibility in the application of attainment criteria in relation to university visits and other activities. So although, at the Inner London Academy, selection of students for a visit to an Oxford College *was* initially targeted solely at top-achieving students, the head of aspiration raising explained that colleagues, would be invited to put forward additional names of students who felt would be interested. For example, in relation to a particular subject, he added:
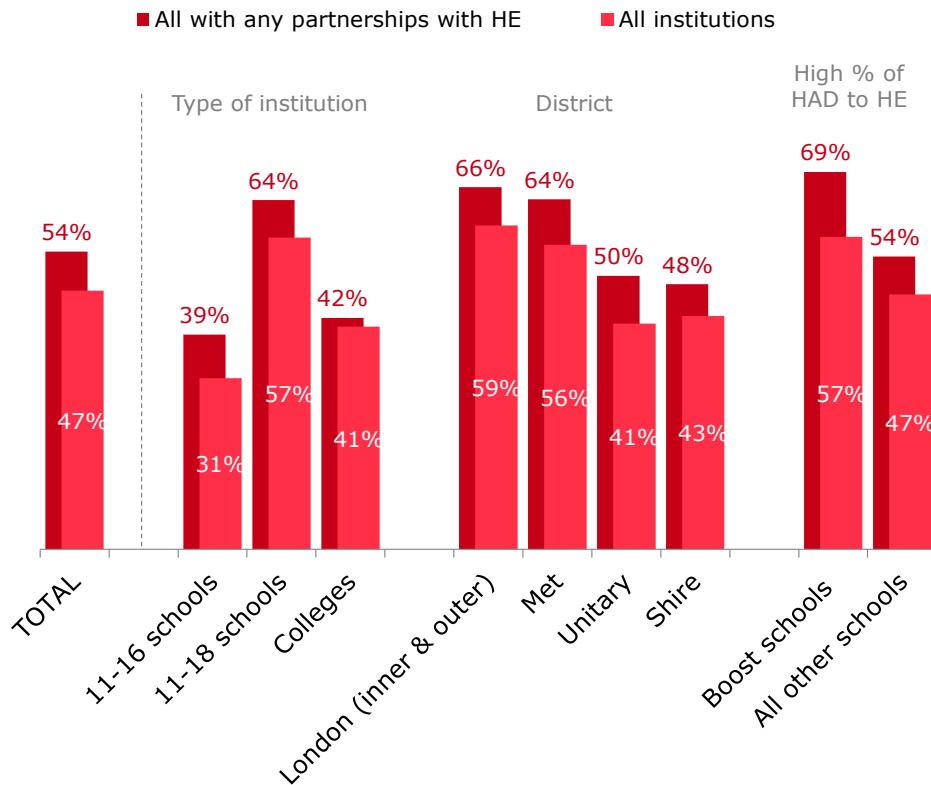
> *I'm always aware that you want these kind of opportunities to be open as much to perhaps underrepresented groups. I mean undoubtedly you know the empirical evidence would suggest that you know if you are on free school meals you are much less likely than you know another student of a sort of equivalent academic ability to progress onto university. Now it would be foolish not to try and promote these opportunities amongst groups you know who are under-represented.*

In some cases, however, selection on level of attainment only, with no attention to issues of disadvantage, meant that opportunities to consider Russell Group universities were largely restricted to middle class students. A stark example of this is was found at the Southern FE College, where only students at the sixth form centre site, who were almost entirely white and middle class, had the chance to visit an Oxbridge College and benefit from additional support and learning opportunities, such as the Cambridge Pre-U.

4.5. Partnership working with Russell Group universities

As discussed in chapter 3, approximately nine in ten schools and colleges in the survey claimed to have informal and formal partnerships with HE institutions (with this being highest among colleges – 96 per cent). As shown in Figure 10, partnerships with Russell Group universities were less common although 47 per cent of all surveyed schools and colleges said they did have such a partnership. The data includes findings based both on *all* schools and colleges and just those schools and colleges who said they had at least some form of partnership with any HE institution (i.e. 54 per cent of all schools and colleges that had some form of partnership, said they had a partnership with a Russell Group university.

Figure 10. Prevalence of partnerships between schools, colleges and RG universities

Legend: ■ All with any partnerships with HE ■ All institutions

Type of institution — District — High % of HAD to HE

TOTAL: 54%, 47%
11-16 schools: 39%, 31%
11-18 schools: 64%, 57%
Colleges: 42%, 41%
London (inner & outer): 66%, 59%
Met: 64%, 56%
Unitary: 50%, 41%
Shire: 48%, 43%
Boost schools: 69%, 57%
All other schools: 54%, 47%

Base: All respondents (161, 298, 99)

Partnerships with Russell Group universities were more prevalent among 11-18 schools (more than half – 57 per cent – had such a partnership) compared with colleges and with 11-16 schools (respectively 41 per cent and 32 per cent). So although colleges were more likely to have a partnership of any kind, 11-18 schools were more likely to have partnerships specifically with Russell Group universities.

This is consistent with earlier analysis in section 4.2, which showed 11-18 schools were also the most likely of three types of institution to encourage applications to selective or leading universities, and to Russell Group universities specifically (94 per cent did this).

There was also some variation in partnership working by district although, as elsewhere, this analysis should be treated with caution given the relationship between district and types of school and college. Generally partnerships with Russell Group universities were more common in London and Metropolitan districts than in other areas of the country.

Partnerships with Russell Group universities were also markedly more prevalent among schools in the boost sample (those that were known to send a high proportion of high-achieving disadvantaged students to HE) than other types of school (57 per cent of all boost schools had a partnership with a Russell Group university – the equivalent of 69 per cent of all who had some form of partnership with any HE institution).

In the context of the case study research, relationships with universities were usually talked about in terms of 'links' rather than 'partnerships'. With the exception of one Inner London Comprehensive where staff indicated that they were '*just about to enquire to do a partnership with Girton College'*. In fact, the term 'partnership' was rarely used in relation to universities, but instead to describe relationships with other schools, with local employers, the use of local facilitators and staff for a specific event, and a 14-19 partnership in a local authority.

The only established formal partnership with universities appeared to be between the Southern FE College and two local post-1992 universities in relation to a newly established Higher Education Centre which offered foundation degrees and HNDs.

Nevertheless, strong relationships were evident at many of the case studies, with schools and colleges naming links with Russell Group universities. Some of these links stemmed from Aim Higher programmes, and staff often talked about how they had personally built on these links or developed new ones. The head of sixth-form at the West Midlands Catholic school explained that links with Birmingham University began through Aim Higher and that excellent personal contacts had been established:

> *Basically he has my email address and I have his. I mean I can ask him literally a day's notice and he will come in and he will talk to the kids. His job is outreach and so I suppose that's his main purpose. Whatever way they do it in Birmingham it's just a great system but always available.*

This member of staff contrasted this with other universities that they have tried to contact where *'you can give them six months' notice and they still tell you they can't do it'.*

In many cases, the links had been established by schools and colleges responding to communications from universities. For example, the head of Years 12-13 at Outer London Boys explains:

> *We have had loads of offers from different universities, I mean so many. You know they're all putting stuff out at different events and we've kind of picked out the main ones over the years that work best for us as a school and that are most appropriate that can offer the best programmes in terms of what we kind of need here.*

He went on to explain the nature of the relationships:

> *We use the universities an awful lot. I mean for example we have students coming in from universities like UCL, Imperial, particularly based around the science subjects, that come in. We get students that come in to work with our students and through that we obviously have relationships with their kind of outreach officers. The same with sort of Oxbridge and things like that. And so we have those kind of lines of communications going. There's some every year that we use to sort of bring people in.*

Staff at the North East Catholic school described a not dissimilar relationship with Durham University, whereby the university supported students through Years 12 and 13 as well as providing a summer school and financial support for equipment and travel to Durham. Those who successfully completed the programme received a bursary and a reduced offer if they put Durham as their first choice.

The importance of financial assistance for visits to universities was stressed by the Careers advisor at Southern FE College, who explained that she used her relationships with some universities to persuade them to cover the cost of a coach to get students there for a visit. Not all staff, however, had strong personal links. The head of careers and guidance at Midlands FE College, who described links with Oxford and Birmingham Universities with trips for students etc, explained, *'although I have contacts with them in terms of arranging the trips, I don't have like a person I could phone. I don't have that kind of relationship with them'.*

In summary, two particular factors stand out from the case study research in developing effective relationships with universities, including with Russell Group institutions:

- The first is the work the universities do themselves to market their activities and make contact with schools – without this, some of the aspiration-raising work that was taking place in the case study schools and colleges may not have happened.
- The second is the work and personal commitment of individual staff at institutions to actively seek out meaningful relationships that will be of benefit to their students.

This chapter has focused specifically on raising aspirations for Russell Group and other selective or leading universities. In the next Chapter, we consider the challenges and barriers to raising aspirations for higher education.

5. Perceived barriers and challenges to aspiration-raising activities

Summary of Key Points

- The financial cost of attending HE was judged to be the biggest challenge in schools and colleges – three quarters or more of respondents to the survey in all types of institution described this as a challenge (much more than any other factor).

- The case studies suggest that financial concerns were a much broader challenge than simply the cost of tuition fees. High levels of uncertainty exist in relation to living and accommodation costs and the financial returns of HE, and these were seen to impact particularly on less advantaged students. Educating students about the financial impacts (both in terms of costs and potential longer term benefits) was felt to be an important part of the work that schools and colleges do.

- Other commonly cited challenges in the survey included students not feeling like HE is 'for them', issues related to support from parents, concerns about living away from home, and students favouring other opportunities such as work or vocational qualifications. Although these were mentioned by less than half of schools and colleges amongst survey respondents they were also evident through the case study work.

- The case studies highlighted a number of broader challenges faced by students, including family support, cultural barriers, locality, and attainment levels.

- Challenges related to aspiration-raising among high-achieving disadvantaged students were felt to be similar (with financial concerns remaining the main concern) – although more specific challenges included 'family background' and there being no history of going to HE within the family.

- Case study research among students indicated that some high-achieving disadvantaged students felt that selective or leading universities were not really for 'people like us' and sometimes found these types of HEI daunting.

- Other specific challenges among high-achieving disadvantaged students raised by staff in the survey included a lack of motivation to attend (13 per cent of all respondents mentioned this) and lack of confidence (12 per cent).

- The case study data also suggested that institutions themselves may face barriers in terms of funding their aspiration raising work (funding is also discussed in the chapter 7).
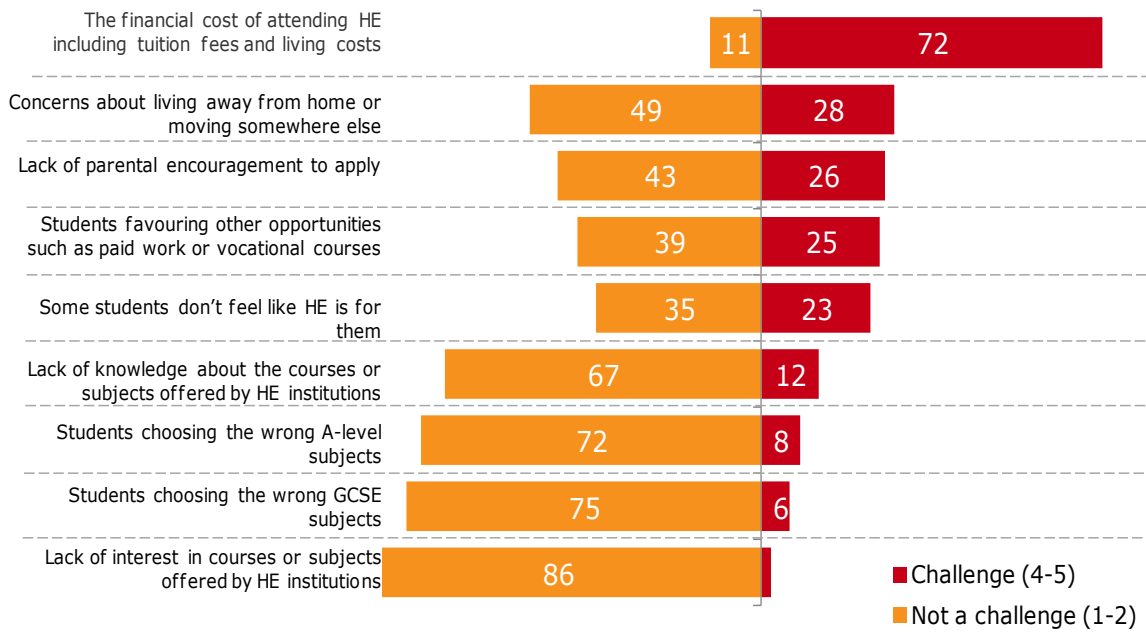
This chapter looks at perceptions of challenges and barriers that schools and colleges face when trying to raise aspirations for HE amongst their students. Analysis includes both survey responses and case study data. Survey responses are used initially to quantify the scale of the challenges faced (from the perspective of school and college staff) whereas the case studies offer a broader and more detailed account (from the perspective of both staff and students).

Analysis is included for both general challenges (which are seen as pertinent to all students) and specific challenges in relation to high-achieving disadvantaged students. However, it should be noted that it is often hard for schools and colleges to distinguish between barriers and challenges in general and those specifically in relation to high-achieving disadvantaged students. This is partly because strategies to raise aspirations are often set at a whole institution level and because some schools and colleges regarded the majority of their students as disadvantaged. It is also because financial concerns are the main issue across all types of students (regardless of whether or not they are disadvantaged). As discussed later in the chapter, for high-achieving disadvantaged students, there was some evidence that cultural issues and concerns about level of attainment were more acute, especially for those aiming for Russell Group universities, but generally their concerns reflected those of the wider student population.

5.1. Perceived barriers to aspiration-raising generally

Survey respondents were presented with a list of possible challenges which may discourage students from applying to HE and were asked to indicate how much of a challenge each one was for their school or college (using a scale of 1 to 5). As shown in Figure 11, scores of 1 or 2 were regarded as *not* being a challenge and scores of 4 or 5 as a challenge. Mid-point scores of 3 are excluded from the analysis. Generally the findings suggest that the types of challenge faced are consistent across all three types of institution but that colleges feel the pressures of these challenges slightly more than schools.

Figure 11. Challenges to applying to HE amongst 11-18 schools

Challenge	Not a challenge (1-2)	Challenge (4-5)
The financial cost of attending HE including tuition fees and living costs	11	72
Concerns about living away from home or moving somewhere else	49	28
Lack of parental encouragement to apply	43	26
Students favouring other opportunities such as paid work or vocational courses	39	25
Some students don't feel like HE is for them	35	23
Lack of knowledge about the courses or subjects offered by HE institutions	67	12
Students choosing the wrong A-level subjects	72	8
Students choosing the wrong GCSE subjects	75	6
Lack of interest in courses or subjects offered by HE institutions	86	

■ Challenge (4-5)
■ Not a challenge (1-2)

Base: All 11-18 schools (298)

Figure 12. Challenges to applying to HE amongst 11-16 schools

Challenge	Not a challenge (1-2)	Challenge (4-5)
The financial cost of attending HE including tuition fees and living costs	7	80
Students favouring other opportunities such as paid work or vocational courses	25	35
Lack of parental encouragement to apply	27	32
Some students don't feel like HE is for them	22	28
Concerns about living away from home or moving somewhere else	42	28
Lack of knowledge about the courses or subjects offered by HE institutions	45	13
Lack of interest in the courses or subjects that are offered by HE institutions	79	8
Students choosing the wrong GCSE subjects	75	6

■ Challenge (4-5)
■ Not a challenge (1-2)

Base: All 11-16 schools (161)

Figure 13. Challenges to applying to HE amongst colleges

Challenge	Not a challenge (1-2)	Challenge (4-5)
The financial cost of attending HE including tuition fees and living costs		85
Some students don't feel like HE is for them	12	42
Students favouring other opportunities such as paid work or vocational courses	25	39
Concerns about living away from home or moving somewhere else	31	29
Lack of parental encouragement to apply	32	28
Lack of knowledge about the courses or subjects offered by HE institutions	43	21
Students choosing the wrong GCSE subjects	59	15
Students choosing the wrong A-level subjects	62	7
Lack of interest in courses or subjects offered by HE institutions	78	3

■ Challenge (4-5)
■ Not a challenge (1-2)

Base: All colleges (99)

Across all types of institution, financial concerns were deemed the most significant barrier (76 per cent of all respondents mentioned this as a challenge with half (51 per cent) rating this is a major challenge). This was followed by a second tier of social, cultural and geographic challenges; relating to moving away from home, parental encouragement and students not feeling that HE is for them. The case study data reflected this analysis. Other 'contextual' challenges identified in the survey, including subject choice, knowledge about courses and subjects offered at HE and lack of interest, were far less significant, a finding that was again supported in the case studies.(76 per cent of all respondents mentioned this as a challenge with half (51 per cent) rating this is a major challenge).

5.2. Perceived challenges to aspiration-raising among high-achieving disadvantaged

The previous section looked at challenges to aspiration-raising students generally. Survey respondents were also asked an open ended question about what they felt the *specific* challenges were when encouraging high-achieving disadvantaged students to apply to HE. As might be expected, many of the factors mentioned replicated those covered in the preceding section (in relation to general challenges to aspiration-raising among all students). Finance and financial worries were the most frequently mentioned challenge (see Table 8), mentioned by almost a half (46 per cent) of all respondents.

Similarly, cultural and familial factors were also evident. A perceived lack of parental interest or engagement was a significant concern, mentioned by around a quarter (26 per cent) of all respondents. While 'family background' and no family history of HE participation were mentioned by around one in eight (13 per cent) respondents.

A similar proportion also mentioned that a general lack of motivation (13 per cent) and lack of confidence (12 per cent) were challenges amongst high-achieving disadvantaged students.

Table 8. Challenges faced in encouraging high-achieving disadvantaged students to apply to HE

Main challenges faced in encouraging high-achieving disadvantaged to apply to HE	TOTAL	11-16 School	11-18 School	College
Finance/ financial worries	**46**	43	49	40
Lack of parental interest/ engagement	**26**	31	25	15
Family background (no history of HE)	**13**	12	13	11
Lack of motivation/ aspiration	**13**	11	13	13
Lack of confidence/ self-belief	**12**	11	13	9
Lack of knowledge/ understanding/ information	**8**	3	11	13
Concerned about getting into debt	**7**	3	10	4
Reluctance to leave home/ move away from the area	**7**	5	6	15
Base: All respondents	***558***	*161*	*298*	*99*

Table 8 shows the challenges mentioned specifically in relation to high achieving disadvantaged students broken down by institution type. Generally, the specific challenges mentioned were quite consistent between the three type of institution, although in colleges respondents were more likely to mention reluctance among high achieving disadvantaged students to leave home (15 per cent).

The case study research similarly revealed that it was difficult to distinguish between general barriers to HE and those specifically related to aspiration raising amongst high-achieving disadvantaged groups. This is partly because some issues, like finance, straddle divisions, and also because at several of the schools and colleges the *majority* of students were regarded as being disadvantaged (at least for those where aspiration raising was seen as an issue). However there was also evidence that some barriers and challenges, such as cultural issues and concerns about attainment, may be more acute for high-achieving disadvantaged students who were considering or aiming for Russell Group universities.

5.3. Three tiers of challenge

Overall both the survey and case study research point to three tiers of challenge or concern in relation to aspiration-raising activity. These tended to be consistent for both students generally and for high-achieving disadvantaged students specifically. These three tiers can be described as:

- Financial challenges
- Social, cultural and geographic challenges

- Other contextual challenges

Each of these is explored below from the perspective of staff and students who participated in the survey and qualitative case studies.

5.3.1. Financial challenges

In chapter 3, we discussed how schools and colleges educate students and parents about the financial implications of going to university. Here we explore staff and students broader concerns about finance and risk in relation to university.

In the survey, as Figures 11, 12, and 13 show, *all types of institutions* rated the financial cost of attending HE institutions as being the biggest deterrent for their students (76 per cent of all respondents mentioned this as a challenge with half (51 per cent) rating this as a major challenge). This was particularly the case in colleges - 85 per cent gave financial cost a rating of 4 or 5, compared with 80 per cent of 11-16 schools and 72 per cent of 11-18 schools. Qualitative case study data also suggested that financial concerns were viewed by both staff and students as the main challenge in this regard, reflecting other research . There is also some evidence that financial costs as a barrier vary with the proportion of FSM-eligible pupils in schools. For instance, limiting the analysis to 11-18 schools, those schools with a high or medium proportion of FSM (25 per cent or more) were more likely to say that financial costs were a 'major' challenge (a score of 5) than those with a low proportion of FSM (less than 25 per cent). Otherwise sub-group differences were relatively small.

The case study data also confirmed that the financial challenges of attending Higher Education were seen as the most pressing concern for staff and students alike. However, staff felt that the challenge was less about the actual costs of going to university than about getting students and parents to understand the intricacies of the financing and repayments system. Common across all case studies were statements from staff such as:

> The biggest challenge I think is getting the students to understand about finance (West Midlands Catholic: head of sixth-form)

> They think it's going to cost them a lot of money and so therefore they're negative on it and they don't understand the ins and outs of the financial side' (East Midlands Comprehensive: assistant head)

> I think a lot of students think you have to cough the £9,000 up at the start of the year' (North West Comprehensive: Learning Mentor).

However, as discussed in chapter 3, all schools and colleges had measures in place to provide students with the knowledge and information about financing their

University education and in the most part, this education appeared to have alleviated some of students' fears and concerns. Indeed, in no focus group did students express explicit concerns about the *up-front costs* of going to University, however in line with previous research[52] there was still prevailing concern about the short fall in living costs; the longer term impact of debt, and uncertainty about the financial returns from Higher Education.

Some students were concerned about the wider costs of living, and these wider costs were a motivation for choosing a local university so they could commute to and from their parental homes. There was also plenty of evidence of student anxiety about costs, an aversion to having what was seen as a long-term 'debt burden' and, for some, the concern about debt forced a concern to consider the financial returns of going to university. Debt ,(raised in at least four of the focus groups across four case studies) was described as 'worrying,' 'off putting,' 'daunting' and by one boy as the only thing that worried his dad who had gone to university (NE Catholic Year 13 Focus group). Another boy mentioned: *'It's quite sad how they make us pay this much, to do something normal like get an education, when university it used to be free. It's not a good feeling.'* (Inner London boys Year 11)

This same focus group at Inner London Boys comprehensive conceived that the burden of the debt generated more pressure to succeed at university in order to be able to capitalise on the cost outlay. A conversation between the group went as follows:

> *Yeah I think money as well because it puts more pressure on you to do good in university and to get a job straight away so that you can start paying off that debt that you don't want to have [...]*

> *For me it will definitely be the money because I know that if I go to university I'm going to be in debt for years so it's kind of worrying and off-putting*

> *Yeah it's probably just money. Going to university - I'm not sure if it's worth it or not.*

One of the groups at Southern FE College (Group B) also associated the enlarged debt with increased pressure to succeed.

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[52] Archer, L., M. Hutchings, and A. Ross, eds. 2003. *Higher education and social class: Issues of exclusion and inclusion.* London: Routledge Falmer; Callender, C. and J. Jackson (2008). "Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study?" Studies in Higher Education 33(4): 405-429.

Other students *also* expressed some scepticism about whether this amount of debt was worth it, or would really pay off in the end. *A year 12 focus group at Outer London Boys questioned the 'statistics'* as to whether it is 'worth going to university.' A Year 11 group at North West discussed this concern as one student had parents who 'hadn't used their degree' and were still paying off their loan. However, another student had professional parents who felt that their University Education was central to their success and job security. Students at Southern FE college discussed concerns about credential inflation and the 'devaluing of degrees'. These are pressing concerns which impact differently on students operating from different starting points. In line with the survey findings, in both the FE college case studies in particular, staff described family circumstances of extreme poverty, 'massive' debt, and daily financial struggle which they saw as inevitably impacting on students' concerns for their future. There is a significant body of research that has highlighted how concerns about debt and the risks of university participation are greater for students from lower socio-economic background and some ethnic groups.[53]. One head teacher (Inner London Comprehensive) articulated that for students starting from such disadvantaged positions where there is 'no disposable income' or 'buffer', '*it's not worth the risk'*. As indicated in chapter 3, students' informational needs around finance were satisfactorily addressed by schools; however, financial concerns go beyond the need for facts and figures. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds were often 'fearful' of debt, and anxious about the potential 'returns' of going to university. These anxieties were framed by real economic pressures for some to already be earning money to contribute to household finances. However, even amongst students in disadvantaged circumstances the overriding sentiment across the focus groups was that the financial worries were not always enough to put them off going to HE if they wanted to. Students gaining places on NHS subsidised courses did not have concerns. At Southern FE college two driven students asserted: '*I want to be a midwife so badly I don't care about the debt;'* and another stated: '*As long as I get the degree I want I don't mind'*. Similarly the boy who discussed his fathers' university debt (West Midlands Catholic Year 12 group) asserted '*the finance is the thing you put aside.'*

In the survey, a significant proportion of respondents identified students favouring other opportunities such as paid work and vocational courses as significant challenges, although this was not seen as important as financial concerns. Students'

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[53] See, e.g. Archer, L., M. Hutchings, A. Ross, With, C. Leathwood, R. Gilchrist and D. Phillips. 2003. *Social class and higher education: Issues of exclusion and inclusion*. London: Routledge Falmer.; Callender, C. and J. Jackson. 2005. Does the fear of debt deter students from higher education? *Journal of Social Policy* 34, no 04: 509-40; Ipsos-Mori. 2012. *Young people omnibus 2012*. http://www.suttontrust.com/our-work/research/item/young-people-omnibus-2012/: The Sutton Trust; Reay, D., M. David, E and S. Ball. 2005. *Degrees of choice: Social class, race and gender in higher education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books

choosing other routes was seen as a challenge by 29 per cent of all respondents and by 39 per cent of those in colleges (more than in schools). This did not, however, emerge to any great extent in the case studies, presumably in part because most of the students who participated wanted to go to university. On the few occasions competition from other destinations was discussed, it appeared that financial concerns were the main drivers. For example, at Southern FE College, the curriculum leader for Health and Social Care explained that students get tempted by the offer of a job (rather than applying for HE) following on from work experience placements:

> *I've lost a couple of students in the last couple of weeks, they've gone off to these work experience providers because they've given them jobs and they've said you can have an apprenticeship and all this and I'm saying to them don't do that, you are much better off in the long run going to university and training to be a social worker because in the long run your pay is probably going to be much better and you've got this ability, so don't rush. But again, it's like [students will say] 'no it's the money'. 'We need money'.*

This participant explained, however, that some students later returned to college for support with applications to HE. At East Midlands Comprehensive, a member of the aspirations team felt that some parents putting pressure on students to move into paid work, saying:

> *We've got a high proportion that want to do apprenticeships and I think partly that's to do with the families that they come from that they haven't got the family finances and Mum and Dad are saying, right we want you to go and get a job.*

This was, however, an isolated comment. In the next section, we discuss the role that families were seen to play in students' aspirations to go to university, along with other social and geographical factors.

5.3.2. Social, cultural and geographic challenge

After financial concerns, the other most significant challenges can be grouped into a secondary tier of *social, cultural and geographic factors* (including the role of the family, the desire to stay local and sense of belonging in HE). It was relatively common for surveyed staff to describe all of the following as a challenge:

- Concerns about living away from home or moving elsewhere (28 per cent rated this as a challenge)

- Lack of parental encouragement to apply (28 per cent rated this as a challenge)

- Some students don't feel like HE is for them (27 per cent rated this as a challenge)

Case study work with staff and students supported the view that there are still significant social, cultural and spatial factors which inform access and aspirations to Higher Education. However, the case study data also challenges some of the assumptions about disadvantaged and first generation students going to HE. In the accounts of staff and students in the case studies, parents and family cannot be conceived of as a significant barrier. Geography though was important, with some students' need to stay local constraining their choices of University and thus Russell Group institutions. There was also evidence from some students that some selective or leading universities were deemed to be not inclusive to students from working class or ethnic minority backgrounds.

Lack of family encouragement

The survey showed that a lack of encouragement from parents was perceived of as a challenge by more than a quarter of school staff responding. Further, a 'lack of parental encouragement' was mentioned as a challenge in relation to aspiration-raising for high achieving disadvantaged students by a similar proportion. 'Family background (having no family history of HE)' was similarly identified as a challenge, albeit by a smaller proportion of survey respondents, something that has been identified in other research[54]. However focus groups with students suggested that family background did not appear to be the barrier it has historically been perceived to be.

The case study data necessarily complicates any simple understandings or presumed causal link between poor or working class family backgrounds and lack of interest or aspirations. Only one member of staff in the case studies reproduced familiar stereotypes of working parents who support their children as compared to non-working parents who offer no 'support' and 'lack motivation'. (Inner London Boys: careers advisor)

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[54] E.g. Reay, D., M. David, E and S. Ball. 2005. *Degrees of choice: Social class, race and gender in higher education.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books; Ross, A. and J. Lloyd. 2013. *Access for all: An investigation of young people's attitudes to the cost of higher education using the longitudinal study of young people in England.* http://www.strategicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Access-for-All1.pdf: The Strategic Society Centre.

Other members of staff conceptualised family and parental support in terms of understanding family histories of education and work in which a lack of knowledge of Higher Education is the crux. As one member of staff put it: *'they don't know much about it'* (Midlands FE College: careers advisor). Another explained that in such families *'no one has any experience of it and often sees higher education as out of reach'* (Inner London Boys: deputy and head of sixth-form). It is important to note again, though, that the vast majority of students across the focus groups wanted and planned to go to university.

Furthermore, having parents who had *not* been to university was not always seen as a problem, with the head of the sixth-form at the West Midlands Catholic school identifying this as a *motivating* factor in some cases, stating that in their school parents who had not been to university themselves were sometimes 'actually more keen' than parents who had.

In no focus group did students claim that their parents or family were a barrier, indeed in at least four of the groups across four case studies students cited parents as a positive and motivating factor, despite having not been to university themselves.

> *None of my family members have gone to Uni and so it just motivates me because they don't all have successful jobs. (Inner London Comprehensive: focus group B)*

> *'Personally my parents are really pushy because they haven't done it and they wish that they did. […] my mum, is sort of harsh on me. It's been a sort of dream that we've both shared that I'd go to university.[…] Obviously your parents are going to be proud, I love that experience' (Outer London Boys Year 12)*

Similarly a boy in the year 13 focus group at Outer London Boys school talked about how his dad, who had not been to university himself, went with him on a visit to Cambridge and they both got excited together. Conversely, a girl in the North West Comprehensive year 11 focus group was excited about and determined to go to university, despite her mum encouraging her to get a 'proper job'. She claimed:

> *I don't want to miss out on that. Doing what you want all day and then learning to stand on your own two feet that's a big important thing for me, getting independence. I'd be the first to go to university in my family and I also want to set an example for my younger siblings. Anything's possible even if you don't have the most money or whatever your circumstances you can still achieve what you want to achieve (North West Comprehensive: year 11 focus group)*

This highlights the importance of not making assumptions about parental or student ambitions and aspirations solely on the basis of their socio-economic and/or cultural background. Nevertheless, there was an awareness that students with graduate parents were at an advantage, able to draw on parental knowledge not only of higher education and the application process, but also of the academic work students are expected to do in school in preparation for university entry. This was not only about knowledge, experience, or cultural capital but also related to economic capital.

Concerns about living away from home

Our research highlights the importance of geography, in particular because Russell Group and other selective or leading universities are not evenly distributed across the UK. For many students, especially those that are high achieving and disadvantaged, aspirations to attend such institutions can present conflicting desires and attachment to home and locality as places of identity and belonging, with new opportunities often far away in different environments. In the survey, concerns about living away from home or moving somewhere new were identified as a challenge by 28% of school respondents (and 29% of those in colleges), although only 7% of respondents identified this as a challenge in encouraging high achieving disadvantaged students to apply to HE. However, in the case study research, staff identified some students' unwillingness to leave home or to travel any great distance to get to university as a barrier preventing some from applying to (or even considering) universities which might be better suited to their interests, intended course of study, or predicted grades. This reflects other research on access to Higher Education[55]. This reluctance was sometimes seen in terms of cultural issues, with young people only wanting to mix with others from their own cultural and/or ethnic community[56], and/or with parents not wanting their children to move away. One respondent felt that this was a concern for some Asian and Somali girls, noting that *'that's the conversation that is difficult'* (director of post-16 learning, Inner London Comprehensive), although students also often wanted to stay at home:

> *I want to stay with my parents, I don't want to move out but I'm just not really that ready yet to like live on my own. And I want to save up also.*

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[55] E.g. Callender, C. and J. Jackson. 2008. Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study? *Studies in Higher Education* 33, no 4: 405-29.

[56] As reported elsewhere - see, e.g. Reay, D., M. David, E and S. Ball. 2005. *Degrees of choice: Social class, race and gender in higher education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books; Bagguley, P. and Y. Hussain. 2007. *The role of higher education in providing opportunities for south asian women*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Yeah because it's cheaper and as well [...]

Just because you like don't move out ... I think you still have the Uni experience living at home. You meet people and you can go out and stuff but you just return home. (Inner London Comprehensive: focus group B)

Similar issues, of parents not wanting their children to move away for university, were evident in other case studies in localities with predominantly white working-class populations. At the Midlands FE College, the head of careers and guidance explained that they had over five universities within an hour's radius of the college, including a Russell Group institution, but that students tend to 'fixate' on the nearest because 'moving away from home is 'a really big thing' and this is a complex mix of part-time work ties, financial security and local family and friendship networks. Although a few students at the Midlands FE College said they would like to move away 'for the independence', most expressed a desire to stay local, and this was aptly described in terms of a 'safety net':

I'm applying to [local university]. I want to move out because I live in [local town]. I just want to stay in [local town] really because I've known it all my life. And so I want to move into the accommodation but then I don't want to live too far away because then you have that insurance of like you know if everything goes wrong and you haven't got enough money and you can't pay the rent you can always go back. And so it's kind of an adventure in a way you meet new people but you've still got that insurance of like the safety net.

Moving away to live, which would inevitably cost a lot more than staying at home, was not a sensible, pragmatic option. Given the concerns of some students about the risks of going to university at all, it is not surprising that some choose to minimise those risks by staying close to home (as the student applying to local university above indicates). Financial reasons for staying at home were also articulated by others, and included not only the costs of moving and living away from home, but also the loss of earnings from current part-time jobs. For some the difficulty of funding travel even to *visit* a more distant university was prohibitive of them ever choosing to attend one far away.

For other students, it was more simply about wanting to stay close to home and family, as illustrated by the following focus group extract:

Me personally I would like to stay closer and go to Birmingham because I'm not independent and I rely on my parents and everything a lot more and so I would rather stay close and then like actually get my course and then go off and be more independent (West Midlands Catholic: year 12 focus group)

Others expressed fears about isolation (as illustrated below). Although, in some cases, these issues were less of a problem if students had family in other places:

> *It's like being plucked out of your home and comfy environment ... and dropped somewhere alien and you've got to deal with it. And if you feel when there's a problem that you can't get any support in the city you're in it can lead to you feeling quite isolated and worried about what's going on. (Midlands FE College: focus group A)*

Conversely, there were students who expressed a desire to leave home and move away. Two students at West Midlands Catholic said that friends or family members who had been away to university had described it as a being a better experience and one student in this group said:

> *Personally I would like to go away and get my own independence and live in another city and making friends and that sort of thing. Not so much that it was too far but I'd like to be away from home, somewhere different, different scenery, different people. I think that's the whole thing in university, to go and experience new things. (West Midlands Catholic :year 12 focus group)*

For some students, however, moving away was not seen as an option for family or personal reasons. As one staff respondent (East Midlands Comprehensive: aspirations team) noted, some *'have bigger things on their plate'* such as being young carers. A student at the Midlands FE College claimed she would love to go away to University but she could not as she was a carer for her mother. Another student at Southern who was a wheelchair user found her choice of university was severely constrained by both transport and university access issues.

Whether to stay at home or move away to university is a complex decision for young people and their families to make, and students' willingness is clearly mediated by several factors, as evidenced above. However, it must also be recognised that many of the young people interviewed had inaccurate perceptions about how far away, or even where many universities they were located (including those they had heard of or were considering applying to). For example, a high achieving disadvantaged student from the Inner London Academy who had made applications to mainly Russell Group universities admitted that he applied to Durham thinking it was not far and had genuinely thought it was just outside London.

Some students (from different regions) also appeared to have misconceptions about the sizes of cities in which universities were located, or the different range and types of institutions in a place like London or Oxford. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular often have not travelled within and outside the UK, and may live geographically constricted lives. This often meant that they are not confident about their ability to cope in new and different environments. This was a

common perception among staff in schools and colleges. However, as indicated in chapter 3, university visits can go some way towards dispelling and correcting some student misconceptions, particularly in relation to distance, both real and imagined.

Not feeling like HE is for me

There was some support among staff in the survey for the statement that students don't feel like HE is for them (around a third described this is as a challenge), particularly among colleges (where students are likely to have a lower socio-economic demographic compared with schools). This was reflected in a small number of staff interviews in the case studies. Despite high aspirations, for some young people the perception of some universities as exclusive and elitist acted as a barrier to their full commitment to apply there. Other research has also identified this as an issue, in particular in relation to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, those from families with no history of HE participation and those from some minority ethnic groups[57].

The learning mentor at North West Comprehensive suggested that for some students in their 11-16 school, HE is very much seen as unattainable and 'not for people like me'. The Inner London Academy: head of aspiration raising also claimed that initially first generation students can be 'intimidated' by it and that there is a lot of 'fear' and 'misunderstanding' that you have to 'get past'.

Another staff respondent explained how he has to point out to high achieving disadvantaged students that they are clever and high achieving as they often hold the misconception that 'posh people' are the ones who are 'clever' and go to University, when they are achieving just as well.(Inner London Comprehensive: director of post-16 Learning).

Some students, particularly in the FE colleges, also expressed views suggesting that they had not seen HE as a place for them when they began their college programme, but the activities, encouragement and support by the college had increased their confidence and dispelled many myths about this. However, across the case studies when Oxbridge was discussed, students often expressed the sentiment that it was a rarefied environment and not one in which they would feel included or comfortable. This reflects the findings of a recent IPSOS-Mori Omnibus survey of 11-16 year olds, in which 27% of respondents indicated that 'elite'

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[57] Archer, L., M. Hutchings, A. Ross, With, C. Leathwood, R. Gilchrist and D. Phillips. 2003. *Social class and higher education: Issues of exclusion and inclusion*. London: Routledge Falmer; Reay, D., M. David, E and S. Ball. 2005. *Degrees of choice: Social class, race and gender in higher education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

universities 'are not for people like me'. This figure was higher among older students (in Years 10 and 11) than among younger students. In addition, those from single-parent families were more likely to agree with the above statement (31%), as were those from 'workless' families (34%). There were also some gender and ethnicity differences, with men being more likely to *disagree* with the statement that elite universities 'are not for people like me' than women (36% compared to 30%), as were minority ethnic students compared with white students (42% compared to 31%). In the current study, there were repeated examples of students expressing the view that selective or leading universities were 'posh'. For example, a student at Southern FE College explained that they had grown up in Chelsea in a large working class family and their only contact with and knowledge about Oxbridge was the Boat Race on the Thames every year (which made these universities feel 'out of their league').

Some students were aware that they were not as prepared to interact in these kinds of contexts as those from private and grammar schools, reflecting other research that has highlighted the advantages private school students often accrue[58]. At West Midlands Catholic School a year 13 student spoke about how, when they were at an interview at Oxford, they had not met anyone who went to a comprehensive school. They felt that private school students had an advantage as they were 'obviously going to get better coaching interviews.' They went on to talk about how a few of them were sent to a HE day at the local grammar school, explaining *'it was quite helpful, but that's just an example of our school having to use the grammar school for further knowledge'*. They talked about sticking out like a 'sore thumb', feeling 'out of place' and 'out of depth' when other grammar school students talked about wanting to be barristers when they didn't even know what they wanted to study.

Concerns among minority ethnic students

In several multi-ethnic disadvantaged London schools, high achieving minority ethnic students talked about feeling like they would not fit in at universities perceived as White middle class spaces. In a focus group in a high achieving disadvantaged boys' schools, a group of minority ethnic students felt that 'ethnicity' was one of the biggest barriers to Higher Education for them. One Asian boy described University as a predominantly White environment[59] in which he felt that people like him would be excluded:

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[58] Bradley, H., et al. 2013. *The paired peers project report (2010-2013)*. Bristol: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/spais/research/paired-peers/report/.
[59] This has also been identified in other research. See, e.g. Archer, L, Hutchings, M and Ross, A (2003) Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of Inclusion and Exclusion, Routledge, London; Reay, D., M. David, S. J. Ball (2005). *Degrees of Choice: Social class, race and gender in higher education*. Stoke on Trent, Trentham Books.

> *University, it's mainly only seen like white people so it's kind of off-putting [....] I think that going to university these professors or lecturers or interviewers they judge you based on your colour and personally I think if they saw a white person who had white skin, blond hair, your typical white person and a black person I think they would always go for the white person. (Inner London Boys: year 11 focus group)*

Similarly, in a focus group of high achieving disadvantaged students at Inner London Academy, students expressed the sentiment that people think that Oxford and Cambridge are for 'White middle class Eton people' and their visits there (and to Durham) merely reinforced this perception. One student explained:

> *[Durham] wasn't very nice it was very hilly and there was just like no ethnic minorities, which I thought 'oh I don't know'. And the people seemed very – I don't know not very friendly*

Consistent with this view, it is well-established that minority ethnic students are concentrated in particular universities and tend to be under-represented at others, including many leading and selective institutions[60]. A number of factors contribute to this, including levels of attainment, subjects studied, and students' preferences to apply to ethnically diverse institutions and/or to stay nearer home[61]. As noted in the introductory chapter of this report, research conducted by the University of Durham found not only that UCAS applicants from lower class backgrounds[62] and from state schools were less likely to apply to Russell Group universities than their comparably qualified counterparts from higher class backgrounds and private schools, but also that state school, Black and Asian applicants were far less likely to receive offers of admission than their equivalently qualified peers from private schools and from the White ethnic group[63]. Such findings, suggesting bias in the applications process, have been contested, with, UCAS pointing out that the Durham study did not account for choice of degree subject. UCAS found[64] that although there were differences in acceptance rates according to ethnic background, this could largely (though not

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[60] See, e.g. Connor, H., Tyers, C., Modood, T. and Hillage, J. 2004. *Why the Difference? A closer look at higher education minority ethnic students and graduates. DfES Research Report RR552*. London: Department for Education and Skills; Race for Opportunity (2010) Race in to Higher Education, Business in the Community, London, and a response by Cambridge University to this: http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/admissions/behindtheheadlines/ethnicrepresentation.html; .

[61] See, e.g., Reay, D., M. David, S. J. Ball (2005). *Degrees of Choice: Social class, race and gender in higher education*. Stoke on Trent, Trentham Books

[62] As measured by parental occupation entered on UCAS applications

[63] Boliver, V. (2013). How fair is access to more prestigious UK Universities?. *British Journal of Sociology* **64**(2).

[64] Times Higher Education (2013) 'Small' Russell Group Bias in admissions: Ucas. Times Higher Education, 2 May http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/small-russell-group-racial-bias-in-admissions-ucas/2003594.article, Accessed 28 October 2013.

entirely) be explained by minority ethnic students applying to more competitive courses such as medicine and dentistry. What this does not tell us, however, is whether there are differences in acceptance rates by ethnicity for particular subject areas/courses and/or at particular institutions[65], and if there are, why this might be so. Other research has suggested that 'cultural capital' might go some way to explaining differences in acceptance rates[66]. Clearly more research is needed in what is a complex and sensitive area. Nevertheless, what is important here is that the perception of some of the young minority ethnic students in this study was that some universities were less likely to be welcoming to minority ethnic students.

5.3.3. Other contextual challenges

Other challenges highlighted by the survey include lack of knowledge and interest in the courses and subjects offered by HE institutions, and choosing the wrong GCSE and A-levels. These were rated as among the least challenging factors by respondents in all three types of institution. The case study data also revealed little evidence of any of these types of concern among staff or students. As noted in section 3.10.3, staff regarded the provision of information on subject choice as very important, but there was little evidence in the case study data from both staff and students that lack of information on subject choice was seen as a barrier. This may be because information and guidance in this area is now well established in these schools. However, case study research did point to concern about levels of attainment and exam grades, particularly in relation to students aiming for Russell Group universities, and the qualitative data are discussed below in relation to this point.

Attainment and Qualifications

Although 'attainment' did not feature strongly as a perceived challenge in the survey (just two per cent mentioned this as a challenge specifically for HAD students), it did emerge as an area of concern on a number of occasions in the case studies (this was previously discussed in chapter 2 relation to schools and colleges' priorities). Several staff respondents identified attainment as '*one of the key barriers'* (Inner

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[65] Though see Parel, K. and Ball, J. (2013) 'Oxford University accused of bias against ethnic minority applicants', *The Guardian*, 26 February 2013. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2013/feb/26/oxford-university-ethnic-minority-applicants and http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/feb/26/oxford-race-gap-exploring-data?guni=Article:in%20body%20link for a specific analysis of applications for medicine.
[66] Zimdars, A., Sullivan, A. and Heath, A. 2009 'Elite Higher Education Admissions in the Arts and Sciences: Is Cultural Capital the Key?', Sociology 43(4): 648–666.

London Boys: head of HAD into Russell Group programme*) and *'the biggest barrier to social mobility'* (Inner London Academy: head of aspiration raising).

This was seen as a particular issue in relation to disadvantaged students, with some feeling that this had to be the main priority for those students, as one Head of Year 11 explained: *'my main focus is just to raise the grades first'* (North West Comprehensive: head of year 11)).

Amongst those students taking part in focus groups, it was those in high achieving and/or Russell Group or Oxbridge target groups who appeared to be most concerned about grades. As some students at Inner London Comprehensive explained:

> *I think my only fear is not being able to produce the grades. It's okay to think you're smart and gifted and talented when you are in your school but to compare yourself to everyone in the country, everyone else might think they're gifted and talented too and you can't get complacent and you can't keep comparing yourself to people in your school*

> *You have to make yourself stand out from so many other people (Inner London Comprehensive: Russell Group focus group)*

This is, perhaps, understandable as competition for places, particularly for Oxbridge, is intense, and students were very aware of the risks of not performing at the required level or having to retake exams. Year 12 students at Inner London Boys feared that not getting the grades would mean *'limited chances'* or 'you might have to go to an apprenticeship or something'.

As has been noted in other research[67], the pressure on high achieving students can be intense, whilst concerns amongst some working class students about 'aiming high and getting shot down'[68] have also been identified. In the current study, a few staff expressed concerns about raising students' aspirations too much in case they did not succeed at all, with the Curriculum leader at Southern FE College explaining she did not want to put students *'through the process of applying to Leeds or wherever'* and then not to get any offers. Others felt that too much emphasis was being placed on going to university for students for whom this may not be realistic or the best option.

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[67] Walkerdine, V., H. Lucey, J. Melody. (2001). *Growing Up Girl: Psychosocial Explorations of Gender and Class.* Basingstoke, Palgrave.

[68] Allen and Hollingworth 2012; Archer, L; Hollingworth, S and Mendick, H (2010) *Urban Youth and Schooling*: *the aspirations and identities of educationally 'at risk' young people* Buckinghamshire: Open University Press

Yet there are also dangers of limiting students' opportunities through institutional structures and the differential valuing of academic and vocational qualifications. A stark example of this was evident at the Southern FE College, where the division between the vocational and academic sixth-form centre sites meant that high achieving students at the vocational site did not have the same opportunities as their peers at the sixth-form centre (including visits to Russell Group universities). As the curriculum leader at the vocational site explained: '*they have the Oxbridge people and we have the vocational people'*. Although some case study institutions had achieved significant successes in getting students on vocational programmes to university (including the Southern FE College), the importance of being realistic about potential options was felt to limit opportunities for some students:

> *You want them to apply to the right sort of place for them where they get a chance of being interviewed. To be realistic about it. Because some of ours won't be going to the Russell Group. We are fighting that as well because of course the BTech has got this bit of a stigma about it I think compared to A levels. (Southern FE College: curriculum)*

5.3.4. Challenges in supporting aspiration-raising activities

In this closing section of the chapter, we look at the challenges schools and colleges faced in supporting their aspiration raising work.

For some staff in case study institutions, the closure of the Aim Higher Programme presented significant challenges to aspiration-raising work. Three aspects of this were identified: (i) the loss of specific opportunities stemming from university links, (ii) funding for staff time, and (iii) financial support for visits to universities. In relation to the first of these issues, one member of staff explained how their school had been allocated ring-fenced places at a university summer school, but that this ring-fencing had now ended. The school still encouraged and supported students to apply, but of the nine students who applied for a summer school at LSE this year, all were turned down. The reasons for these rejections provided were also not seen as helpful:

> *They say oh they're not going to go into specifics … but it can be one of the following; if your school is a high achieving school, you know, things like that. Or not all the parts in the forms has been filled in. …It was very, very vague and I just think well I've been doing this for the last four years. I've always had people in, got people in but this time you just turned down every kid. (Outer London Boys: gifted and talented coordinator)*

Funding visits to universities was another issue raised by staff. The Careers Advisor at Southern FE College explained that, because of her good relationship with a couple of local universities, she was able to persuade them to pay for a coach to get her students to university open days or similar events, but without this funding such

visits would not be possible. The careers advisor at the Midlands FE College raised similar concerns, explaining that the loss of Aim Higher money meant that: *'getting all of our students to a university has proved really, really difficult'* and that without funding, *'the students that need to go most'* do not go. In consequence, the trips were free, but this was only achieved by going to a local university which they could walk to and by restricting a separate trip to Oxford to a small number of students. The financing of visits to universities was also seen as an issue in some schools, with the head of year 9 at North West Comprehensive saying *'I'm sure we could fill a bus, there would be enough interest in our school I'm sure to go and have a look and visit a university in Year 9. Unfortunately we can only take two.'*

Finally, a few respondents felt that the loss of specialist staff and expertise presented them with additional challenges, as the head of sixth-form at West Midlands Catholic explained:

> *I don't want to be cynical. Connexions has gone, Aim Higher has gone, you know everything is just being taken away. I mean we've got our careers advisor who comes in now as an independent, he does one day a week, you know which is a statutory requirement.:*

In this chapter, we have reported the challenges and barriers faced by schools and colleges raising aspirations for HE amongst their students. Whilst we have discussed several of the barriers and challenges separately, the case studies revealed how many of these were interrelated, with college staff in particular listing a complex range of problems impacting on students, including poverty, mental and physical ill health, disabilities and caring responsibilities. Nevertheless, it was evident from both the staff and student data that the support provided in schools and colleges had encouraged many students to aim for higher education.

In the next chapter, we discuss our findings concerning the reporting and monitoring outcomes for students.

6. Monitoring outcomes for pupils/students by schools and colleges

Summary of Key Points

- While nearly all 11-18 schools and colleges monitored numbers of applications made by students (96 and 99 per cent), less than half (42 per cent) of 11-16 schools do this. This suggests that for schools with no sixth from (11-16 schools) there is a lack of accurate destination post-18.
- Despite survey evidence of schools and colleges monitoring applications, the case studies illustrate that monitoring and evaluation practice within institutions is variable, and generally unsystematic, raising questions about the extent to which such monitoring is used and acted upon.
- Case study data also suggests that schools and colleges' evaluation of the success or otherwise of aspiration raising activities and the impact these have on applications to HE from their students is less well developed.
- Furthermore, monitoring applications from disadvantaged students was relatively uncommon – a third or less of those surveyed that monitor applications generally, did so specifically for disadvantaged students (as low as 10 per cent in 11-16 schools).
- The UCAS tracking system was the predominant method by which 11-18 schools and colleges monitor applications to HE - both generally and specifically for disadvantaged students. Internal monitoring through careers discussions, questionnaires and headcounts were also used by around half of these institutions.
- 11-16 schools tended to be reliant on feedback from the colleges that their pupils go on to attend (42 per cent used this to monitor applications).

This chapter looks at the systems schools and colleges have in place for monitoring the number of students who apply to HE, both overall and specifically amongst those identified as being disadvantaged (including specifically among FSM-eligible students). The Chapter begins with a discussion of the responses to the survey which included a small number of questions about how, if at all, schools and colleges monitored numbers of applications to HE. This is then followed by a brief discussion of qualitative data on the monitoring and evaluation activities that take place in the case study schools and colleges.

6.1. Prevalence of outcome monitoring in schools and colleges

As shown in Figure 14, there were significant differences in the proportion that monitored applications between types of institution. Around two-fifths (42 per cent) of 11-16 schools said they monitored applications (from all pupils) and, of these, only one in ten (10 per cent) said they monitored applications specifically amongst disadvantaged pupils. In contrast among 11-18 schools and colleges only a very small proportion (respectively three per cent and one per cent) said they did *not* monitor applications at all.

The findings in relation to monitoring applications amongst disadvantaged students were similar amongst the three groups; around a third of 11-18 schools and colleges (respectively 32 and 27 per cent) that monitored applications at all said they also specifically monitored applications amongst disadvantaged pupils/students.

It might be expected that 11-16 schools would be less likely to monitor applications made to HE - given that their pupils do not apply to or leave directly for HE. This is consistent with earlier findings which showed that 11-16 schools were less likely to see encouraging applications to HE as a high priority (see chapter 2).

Schools and colleges that did monitor the number of applications made amongst disadvantaged students were asked if they monitored the number that were made specifically by FSM-eligible students. In the case of colleges, the question was asked in relation to students who were eligible for FSM while they were at school (if this was known). Most 11-18 schools (86 per cent) that monitored applications amongst disadvantaged pupils said they did so by FSM. However, the numbers of respondents from 11-16 schools and colleges who were asked this question were very small. It is not therefore possible to present percentages for these institutions. However to give an indication - 5 out of 7 11-16 schools said they monitored by FSM, but only 6 out of 26 colleges said this was the case.

Overall, the survey findings suggest that where *schools* do monitor applications among disadvantaged pupils, this is very often done by FSM. Given that this is one of the main ways of defining disadvantage (see section 3.6) this is to be expected, particularly as schools are able to monitor application by FSM through UCAS (if they subscribe to this service). Methods for monitoring applications among students are discussed below in section 6.2.

Figure 14. Whether schools and colleges monitor the number of applications made to Higher Education generally and amongst disadvantaged students/students
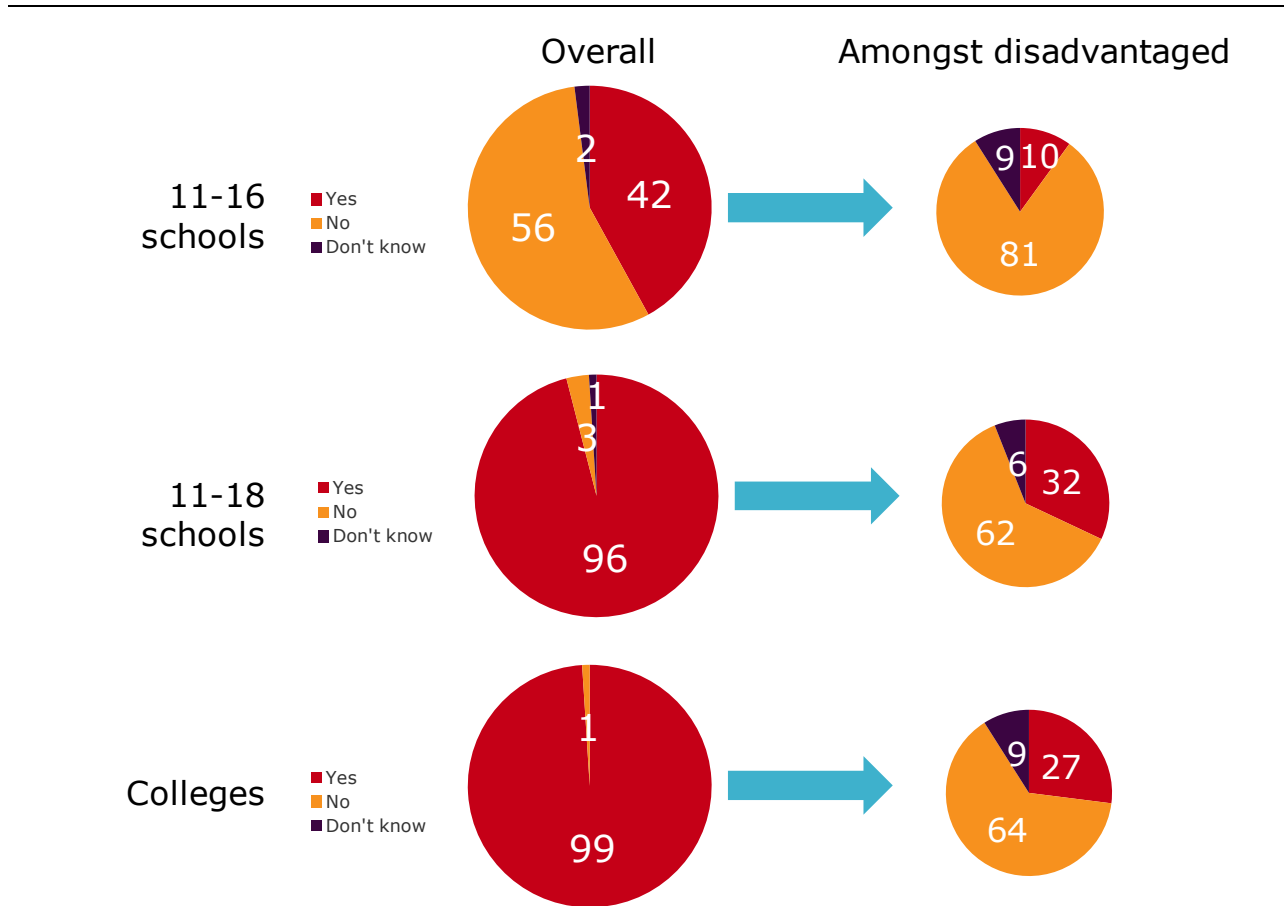
Base: Overall- 11-16 schools (161), 11-18 schools (298), colleges (99)
Amongst disadvantaged- 11-16 schools (63), 11-18 schools (287), colleges (98)

6.2. Methods for monitoring applications to Higher Education

Respondents in schools and colleges were asked to indicate what measures were used to track the number of applications made to HE both overall and amongst disadvantaged pupils. As Figure 15 shows, the methods used by 11-18 schools and by colleges were very similar.

The main significant difference between the two types of institution was use of internal tracking systems which were more prevalent in colleges than in 11-18 schools (20 per cent of colleges used this compared with 11 per cent of 11-18 schools).
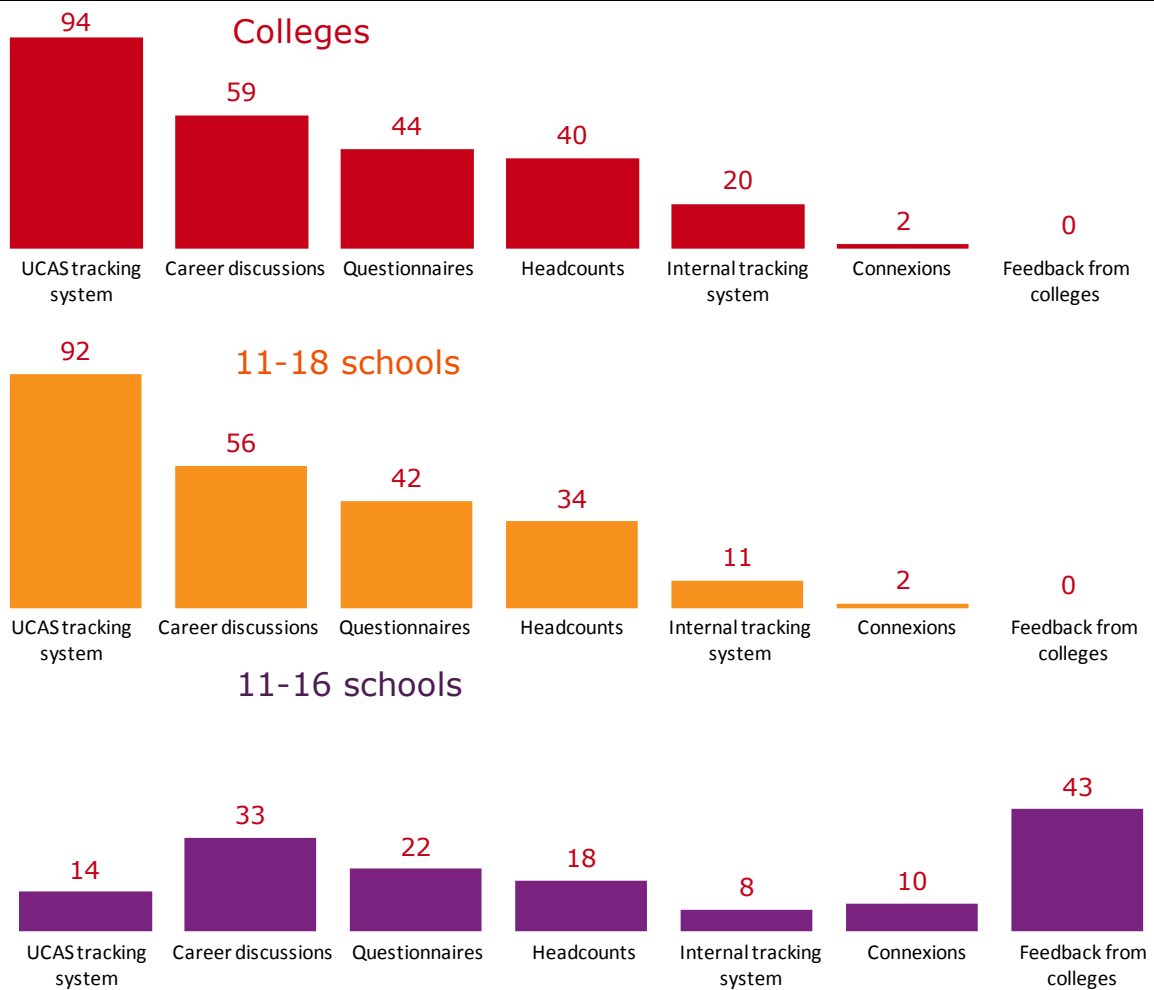
On the other hand, the methods used by 11-16 schools differed significantly from the other two institution types. These schools were less likely to use formal monitoring systems (such as UCAS) - the most prevalent method of monitoring applications among 11-16 schools being feedback from colleges (mentioned by just over two-fifths (43 per cent)). It is not surprising that this is a common method of tracking former pupils, given that pupils in 11-16 schools do not start the application process for HE until they leave their school.

The figures presented in Figure 15 are limited to monitoring methods that were mentioned by at least 10 per cent of respondents in schools or colleges. Other methods mentioned by smaller numbers of schools and colleges included:

- Destination reports and programmes
- Speaking to students on results day
- Tutorial programmes or systems
- Interviews
- Keeping in contact with students via Facebook / email / phone

Schools and colleges that monitored HE applications amongst disadvantaged pupils were asked which methods they used to track these applications. Table 9 shows the results for 11-18 schools only as the numbers of colleges and 11-16 schools that were asked this question are too small to present.

Figure 15. Methods used to track the number of applications to Higher Education

Colleges

Method	Value
UCAS tracking system	94
Career discussions	59
Questionnaires	44
Headcounts	40
Internal tracking system	20
Connexions	2
Feedback from colleges	0

11-18 schools

Method	Value
UCAS tracking system	92
Career discussions	56
Questionnaires	42
Headcounts	34
Internal tracking system	11
Connexions	2
Feedback from colleges	0

11-16 schools

Method	Value
UCAS tracking system	14
Career discussions	33
Questionnaires	22
Headcounts	18
Internal tracking system	8
Connexions	10
Feedback from colleges	43

Base: All who monitor the number of HE applications made: Colleges (98), 11-18 schools (287), 11-16 schools (63)

The results suggest that 11-18 schools rely more heavily on internal systems to monitor applications specifically among disadvantaged pupils than for monitoring applications more generally. For example questionnaires (67 per cent) and internal tracking systems (21 per cent) were more widely used when tracking disadvantaged pupils and, while the UCAS tracking system was used by around half (51 per cent) for this purpose, it was much less widely used than for general monitoring (92 per cent).

In addition the School Information Management System (SIMS) was an important method - used by six per cent of 11-18 schools for monitoring applications specifically among disadvantaged pupils.

Table 9. Methods used to track numbers of HE applications made by disadvantaged pupils - 11-18 schools *only*

Methods used	TOTAL
Questionnaires	67
UCAS tracking system	51
Headcounts	34
Career discussions	31
Internal tracking system	21
SIMS	6
Connexions	2
Destination reports	2
Other	21
Don't know	2

Base: All 11-18 schools who track applications to HE made by disadvantaged students (94)

6.3. Monitoring and Evaluation Practice: The case study perspective

Monitoring and evaluation practice varied across the case study schools and colleges. As the survey data suggests, for the two 11-16 case study schools, the gap that existed between leaving school and joining HE meant that HE destinations data was not available to either school. There was no evidence amongst the case study institutions of data sharing between 11-16 schools and schools with sixth forms or FE colleges. Thus the success or impact of strategies and activities carried out in the school were not monitored in any systematic way beyond access to sixth-form college.

The learning mentor at the North West Comprehensive explained that they did not keep pupil reference numbers beyond Year 11 so there was no system in place to track destination. The assistant head claimed that around 90 per cent of students went on to sixth-form colleges, but then the learning mentor estimated conservatively that around 30 per cent of those went on to university. This may be conservative, but without available data staff had no real sense of what they were raising aspirations for, for whom or by how much. At the East Midlands Comprehensive the head said that Connexions used to keep data on progression which was then relayed to the school. This was no longer happening, so they did not know the post-18 destinations of their students. Four of the other case studies provided us with some aggregate

destination data: the two FE colleges, and Outer and Inner London Boys schools. All of the other case study respondents professed to have monitoring data but this tended to be an acknowledgement that in theory the data existed: '*we'd know from the UCAS*' (Midlands FE head of careers). The extent to which they used the data appeared to be relatively limited. Monitoring who goes to which universities in any systematic way, such as Oxbridge and Russell group, was limited to three case study schools and colleges. One school in particular – Inner London Boys felt they were '*very, very good at evaluating*'. The deputy head of the sixth-form made the point that collecting data without doing anything with it is pointless: '*the issue is what you do with it to make an effective change for the better.*' He claimed that in their school they '*systematically review everything',* and monitored and reported on student destinations. In evidence of their successful use of data, the LEA had praised them on their NEET rate as their tracking systems were so good. At the Southern FE College, the Careers Advisor explained that they used UCAS destination data to identify areas of concern, for example particular courses or curriculum areas with low progression to HE, and then targeted activities specifically at these groups.

In terms of monitoring destinations for disadvantaged students, this was even less prevalent. One member of staff explained that a barrier to this was the continuity of FSM eligibility which does not exist in years 12 and 13, unless it is collected retrospectively (Inner London Academy - head of aspirations raising). Others tended to assume that the majority of their students were disadvantaged, as discussed in Chapter 3. The Inner London Boys school was a notable exception due, in part, to its involvement with an external HAD programme. Being part of a larger external programme with its own developed evaluation systems and expertise, enhanced the school's capacity to explore and use its own data in increasingly sophisticated ways.

> *Yes so it's a lot of evaluation and it's a real advantage being employed by part of a larger charity is that we've got a lot of rapid development and we can do really good impact measurement which is good for everyone. The school wants to know that there is a genuine impact and it should be what we are able to show. (Inner London Boys: head of HAD into Russell Group programme)*

6.3.1. School evaluation of aspirations raising work

On the whole any evaluation of the success of the aspirations raising work they do remained anecdotal and was not systematically recorded. For example staff talked about noticing a change in the young people over time, young people providing ad hoc feedback, or staying in touch with the occasional student alumni. A typical comment was:

Lots of my students who go on to university will keep in touch' (Inner London Comprehensive: business manager)

For the 11-16 schools, ad hoc feedback about college success stories included the extent of their evaluation work. The learning mentor at North West Comprehensive sixth-form colleges admitted: '*they tend to let us know about the ones that are progressing on to the Russell Group or Oxbridge'* but they do not send the data for all students.

In one school, monitoring of students and the evaluation of aspiration-raising activities had previously been carried out under the remit of Aim Higher, and this was something that had now ceased. There was a general sense that evaluation was something that they were getting to 'next' and not something that was built into practice from the beginning. For example, at the East Midlands Comprehensive the head claimed he wanted to evaluate their raising aspirations programme as it was now reaching the end of the first year, and there was some indication from Outer London Boys that they were beginning to monitor which students had access to the different trips and projects by FSM, whereas previously this had been ad hoc.

Nevertheless, there was some evidence that staff did evaluate aspiration raising activities they were involved with, at least informally, with several respondents talking about asking students for feedback after each activity or event. The head of student services at the Midlands FE College, for example, explained that they consult students on a regular basis about their experiences as well as undertaking impact assessments. Staff respondents in the focus groups often had a very clear sense of which aspiration-raising activities were more effective with their students, and in almost all cases, this was also supported by the student data. There were also examples of staff using this knowledge to change the focus of activities. For example, the careers advisor at Southern FE College explained how they focused more on targeted and subject-specific visits to universities rather than general open evenings, following feedback from students. Although often not formalised or recorded, therefore, this 'on the ground' knowledge constituted a valuable source of information in these contexts. A clear danger, of course, is that such knowledge may be lost if key members of staff leave.

In conclusion, this chapter has drawn attention to the difficulties experienced by 11-16 schools in the monitoring of HE applications and destinations for their students. It is also evident that despite indications that 11-18 schools and colleges are engaged in some monitoring of HE applications and destinations, questions remain about the extent to which such monitoring is followed up and acted upon. Monitoring and evaluation practice within institutions appears to be unsystematic.

In final chapter of the report, considers funding arrangements for aspiration-raising activities, with a particular focus on the use of the Pupil Premium.

7. Funding activities and use of Pupil Premium

Summary of Key Points

- The survey did not cover Pupil Premium spending in great detail but findings show that 44 per cent of 11-18 schools and 57 per cent of 11-16 schools were using Pupil Premium to help fund aspiration-raising activity at the time of the survey.
- Similarly the case studies illustrate that the Pupil Premium funding is being used, in some cases, to support aspiration-raising activities and work specifically with disadvantaged students.
- While Pupil Premium is being used in this area, concerns were raised that it did not adequately replace the support offered by the Aim Higher programme.
- Most often, surveyed schools were using Pupil Premium to fund activities with disadvantaged students. This was consistent with emerging findings from the Pupil Premium Evaluation – which shows - despite the majority of schools saying they were already focused on helping disadvantaged pupils, over half agreed the introduction of Pupil Premium had meant they put 'more effort into helping disadvantaged pupils'.
- There was some limited evidence that schools with higher proportions of FSM were more likely to use Pupil Premium for aspiration-raising (although this is limited to 11-18 schools).
- Around a third (36 per cent) of schools that used Pupil Premium to fund aspiration-raising activities said it had allowed them to develop completely new activities. Although, it was more common for Pupil Premium to be used to expand existing activities (55 per cent) or continue those that might otherwise have been stopped (76 per cent).

The final chapter discusses the funding of 'aspiration raising' work. Drawing on the survey data we discuss the extent to which the Pupil Premium is being used by schools to fund aspiration raising-activities. Analysis among schools that do use Pupil Premium, considers the extent to which it is used to encourage applications to HE among disadvantaged pupils. As the Pupil Premium is not available to colleges, the survey questions in relating to this focused exclusively on schools (both 11-16 and 11-18). The case study data provides further detail of funding arrangements for such work, which for many schools/ colleges is framed in the context of a loss of Aim Higher funding.

7.1. Use of Pupil Premium for aspiration-raising generally

As shown in Figure 16, Pupil Premium was used by around two-fifths (44 per cent) of 11-18 schools, and just under three-fifths (57 per cent) of 11-16 schools. It should be noted that at a significant proportion of respondents said they 'didn't know' whether Pupil Premium was being used for this purpose, so in reality the proportion of schools using the Pupil Premium to fund aspiration raising activities may be higher than estimated here.

Figure 16. Whether Pupil Premium is used to fund aspiration-raising activities
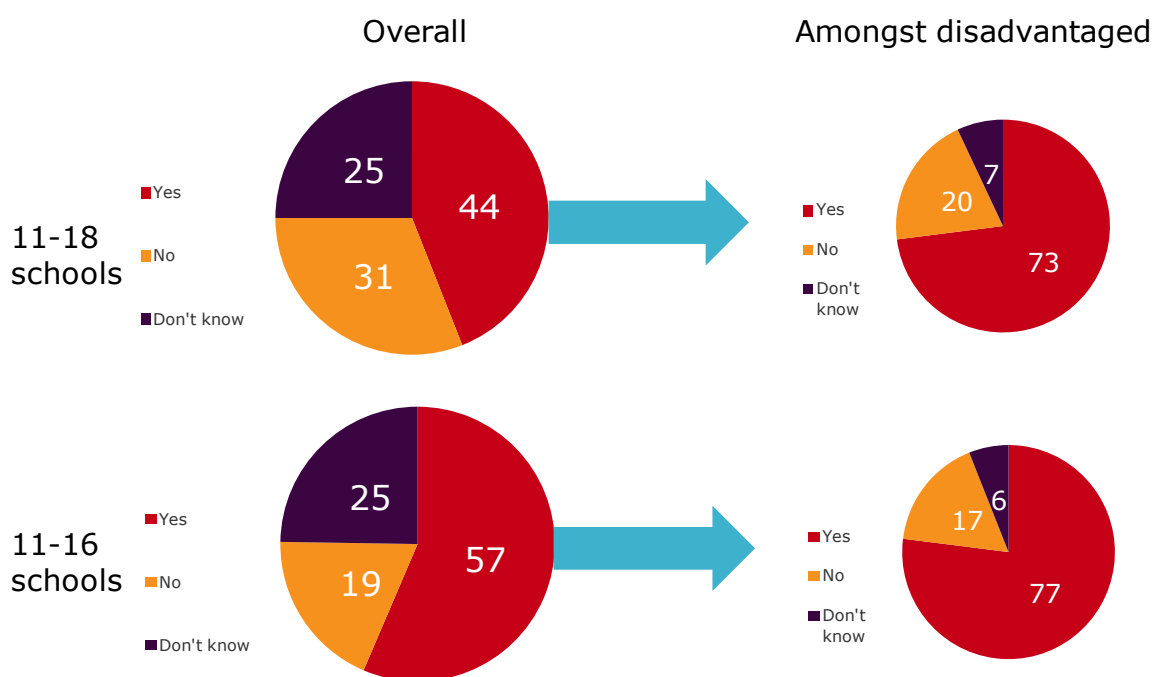
Base: Overall- 11-18 schools (298), 11-16 schools (161)
Amongst disadvantaged- 11-18 schools (132), 11-16 schools (92)

It is perhaps surprising that 11-16 schools were more likely to be using Pupil Premium for aspiration raising activities than 11-18 schools. However this difference may, to some extent, be explained by the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM within each type of school. 11-16 Schools tended to have higher proportions of FSM-eligible pupils (see earlier discussion in chapter 1), meaning that a larger amount of Pupil Premium funding would be allocated to these schools. So, on average, 11-16 schools may have proportionally larger sums of Pupil Premium funding to spend on aspiration-raising activities[69]. Also, it is possible that in 11-18 schools, the head of sixth-forms responded to the survey, and since the Pupil Premium is only available for lower down the school, they may not have had the information.

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[69] Once the total number of pupils in the schools is taken in account.

Table 10 shows the proportion of schools using the Pupil Premium funding for aspiration-raising by the proportion of pupils in those schools who are eligible for FSM. The results are split by 11-16 and 11-18 schools.

Looking only at schools that have more than 10 per cent FSM-eligible pupils (Medium and High in Table 10) there was no difference in the proportion who are using Pupil Premium between 11-16 and 11-18 schools. However, the survey findings suggest that among schools with a low proportion of FSM-eligible pupils (10 per cent or less) and therefore with a relatively low level of Pupil Premium *per head* there are differences between 11-16 and 11-18 schools.

While the number of 11-16 schools with a low proportion of FSM-eligible is small (50), it appears that these schools were as likely to be using Pupil Premium to fund aspiration-raising as those with a medium or high proportion of FSM-eligible. Whereas in 11-18 schools this was not the case – only around a third of 11-18 schools with a low proportion of FSM-eligible were using Pupil Premium for this purpose. It should be noted that the number of schools who answered this question is quite small so the findings should be treated with caution.

Table 10. Whether Pupil Premium is used to fund aspiration-raising activities

Whether uses Pupil Premium to fund aspiration raising activities...	TOTAL	Low proportion of FSM pupils (10% or less)	Medium proportion of FSM pupils (11% to 25%)	High proportion of FSM pupils (over 25%)
11-18 schools:				
Yes	**44**	36	52	55
No	**31**	44	24	6
Don't know	**25**	20	24	39
Base: All 11-18 schools	***298***	*136*	*99*	*54*
11-16 schools:				
Yes	**57**	59	54	56
No	**19**	20	15	24
Don't know	**25**	20	30	21
Base: All 11-16 schools	***161***	*50*	*69*	*41*

It should also be noted that although a reasonably high proportion of schools said they had used Pupil Premium to fund HE aspiration-raising activity, the precise reality maybe slightly different. For example, schools may have used Pupil Premium to fund *general* aspiration-raising activity which *included* HE aspiration-raising activity as opposed to *specific* activity focused solely on HE.

7.2. Use of Pupil Premium – contribution to existing activities and expansion of new activities

In the survey, respondents whose schools did use Pupil Premium to fund aspiration-raising work were asked to what extent this had enabled new activities to be created or whether it had been used to expand or continue to offer existing activities.

As shown in Table 11, three-quarters (76 per cent) of all schools said that the Pupil Premium had allowed them to continue offering activities that otherwise may have stopped and just over half (55 per cent) said it had allowed them to expand existing activities. Around a third (36 per cent) said that they had been able to fund completely new activities and, encouragingly, only four per cent said it had made no difference to this area of work.

There were small differences between 11-16 and 11-18 schools but these are not statistically significant.

Table 11. How Pupil Premium has helped fund aspiration-raising activities

	TOTAL	11-16 School	11-18 School
Fund completely new activities	**36**	36	36
Expand existing activities	**55**	53	57
Allowed you to continue offering activities that may otherwise have stopped	**76**	80	73
Made no difference	**4**	4	4
Don't know	**5**	5	5
Base: All schools using the Pupil Premium to fund aspiration raising activities	***224***	*92*	*132*

The case study data highlights the different perceptions of the impact made by the Pupil Premium. In several cases, discussions of the Pupil Premium were framed in the context of previous Aim Higher support for aspiration raising activities targeted at FSM-eligible students and school budget issues in general. For example, in one school researchers were told that the Pupil Premium made no difference to the funding available for aspiration raising activities, and in fact, was not sufficient to compensate for the other general cuts made to the school budget.

> *I mean people behave like it's new money. Well it's not. They've just cut other areas of funding to the school budget and then they give you something called the pupil premium that doesn't even equate to the money they've cut from other areas. … I mean the pupil premium doesn't even get us to where we were before. … It's a red herring the pupil premium and actually [the] government needs to stop selling this because the reality is very different. (Inner London Boys: deputy and head of sixth-form)*

In contrast, there was evidence from another school of how the Pupil Premium could make a significant impact for disadvantaged pupils. In this school, North West Comprehensive, staff told researchers that they used the Pupil Premium to focus on raising the attainment of FSM-eligible students (or those ever in receipt of FSM in the last six years) who were failing to achieve the benchmark of 8 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths. The funding enabled this school to focus on improving the quality of feedback to students; intervention work in English and Maths including small group work. The Pupil Premium had also contributed towards the salary of an assistant head with a new remit and responsibility for *attainment and progress*; the employment of three learning mentors, two Advanced Skills teachers and the salary of the ex-Aim Higher coordinator as a general mentor. Additionally, the school was in the process of employing a 'Pupil Premium Champion' and mentor to work with Year 10, where there are specific issues with pupil progress.

7.3. Use of Pupil Premium for aspiration-raising among disadvantaged pupils

Looking at schools that were using Pupil Premium to fund aspiration-raising activities, it is not surprising that a high proportion of these used it specifically for raising aspirations among disadvantaged pupils. Rates of Pupil Premium funding are affected by the number of FSM-eligible pupils in each school[70] and, while schools are free to spend Pupil Premium as they see fit, there is an expectation that it will be used to benefit disadvantaged pupils specifically. In fact guidance is available to schools on use of Pupil Premium in the form of the Higgins et al. 'toolkit of strategies'[71]. The data show that 75 per cent of all schools that were using Pupil Premium to fund aspiration-raising activities said they used it specifically for raising aspirations among disadvantaged pupils (the equivalent of 32 per cent of *all* schools).

There was no difference between 11-16 schools and 11-18 schools in this respect - around three-quarters (74 per cent of 11-18 schools and 77 per cent of 11-16 schools) of both types of schools said they used Pupil Premium to fund aspiration-raising activities amongst disadvantaged pupils.

The current Pupil Premium Evaluation survey[72] similarly suggests that Pupil Premium has had a positive impact on support for disadvantaged pupils specifically. Despite the majority of schools in this evaluation saying they already had a focus on helping disadvantaged pupils before Pupil Premium, over half of secondary schools agreed the

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[70] In 2011/12 pupils that were currently eligible for FSM were eligible for Pupil Premium and from 2012/13 the eligibility criteria for Pupil Premium were extended to include pupils that had been eligible for FSM in the last 6 years.

[71] Higgins et al (2011). *Toolkit of strategies to improve learning*, CEM Centre, Durham University

[72] TNS BMRB survey for DfE (2012) results to be published in Spring 2013.

introduction of Pupil Premium had meant the school puts 'more effort into helping disadvantaged pupils'.

The numbers of schools in the current survey do not support a more in depth analysis of the precise ways in which Pupil Premium was used. However, the parallel TNS BMRB survey suggests that, amongst secondary schools, those with a low level of disadvantaged pupils were actually *more* likely to be targeting particular groups or individuals (primarily disadvantaged and under-attaining pupils) than those with higher levels of disadvantaged pupils: 26% of schools with a low level of FSM pupils[73] were targeting particular groups or individuals, compared with 15% of schools with a medium level of FSM and 9% with a high level of FSM. Whilst this may appear counterintuitive, our analysis of the case studies suggests that schools with high proportions of 'disadvantaged' students and located in areas of high 'deprivation' do not feel a need to target particular groups because they consider themselves overall to be a 'disadvantaged school'. Staff therefore perceived universal or general strategies to be more appropriate.

7.4. Aim Higher

All the case study schools (and the two colleges) had previous involvement with Aim Higher, and Aim Higher had provided funding for some of their aspiration raising activities. A number of staff in the case study research spontaneously mentioned the role and impact of Aim Higher in supporting, and in many cases establishing some of their current provision of aspiration raising activities. Its loss was commented on by several of the interviewees.

> The loss of projects such as Aim Higher mean that we no longer have the staff or the budget to carry out as many new initiatives as we would like. This means we cannot identify as many students that would benefit from extra support such as care leavers (Southern FE College: careers advisor)

In one case study school, the loss of Aim Higher had negatively impacted on the institution's capacity to support aspiration raising activities for 'disadvantaged' students. A respondent told researchers that, previously, they had used Aim Higher funding to support trips to different universities for 20 students during their time at the school. In addition these students had places ring fenced for them at a summer school as a consequence of being identified as an Aim Higher cohort. Since Aim Higher ended, these kinds of students had found it extremely difficult to gain places for summer schools and other similar programmes. There was no longer any systematic identification and monitoring of these students nor a coordinated programme of activity and opportunities for them to automatically enrol on. As the gifted and talented coordinator described:

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[73] For secondary schools, a low level of FSM pupils is classed as up to and including 13%, a medium level is more than 13% up to and including 35%, and a high level is more than 35%.

First I didn't know that this boy in my form was on school meals. I was also shocked when he said to me oh I've never been on any trips, on any day trips and I went oh surely you must have been. I was really shocked about that so I think it would have been great if we had a system that could identify and flag up you know a computer system that could identify … Someone asked me the other day can I please give him a list of all the kids who went on trips. And I went; that's impossible. I can give you a list of the kids I took on things but I can't say who in English was taken where. I can't say who in history was taken where because that information doesn't always come back to me so in that sense it's difficult. (Outer London Boys: gifted and talented coordinator)

However, there was no evidence of this type of loss at other schools (including West Midlands Catholic) where staff had been able to maintain a focus on FSM amongst those on their gifted and talent register following the end of Aim Higher. This was achieved by ensuring that a third of the places for students in Years 8 and 9 selected for visits to Oxbridge were allocated to FSM students. In the East Midlands Comprehensive school, the end of Aim Higher and Connexions prompted the school to employ two part-time 'raising aspirations' coordinators with a focus on various forms of disadvantage (e.g. SEN, deprivation by post code, FSM, at risk of becoming NEET). One member of staff commented:

A lot of the free school meal kids and the kids in the deprived area postcodes will overlap so you will find a lot of them are the same kids but it does work.'

The coordinators in this school had a high profile at the institution and provided one-to-one careers interviews with all students and a drop in service. They also worked more closely with a target group of disadvantaged students to provide additional pastoral support, tutoring and learning support. In another school, Aim Higher funding for school trips to universities for FSM-eligible pupils had been replaced directly by Pupil Premium funding.

At the North West Comprehensive, the school had employed a full-time member of staff using Aim Higher funding, but since its cessation had decided to re-employ this individual in a less substantive role as a general learning mentor (with no budget specifically for aspiration raising activities). A member of staff at this school talked about the constraints this placed on what they could offer students:

I think it's changed because I've got to be a lot more creative. Because if we go and visit somewhere most of the time kids have to pay for their transport… £3.00 is fine. If we had to use the train it would have been £8.00 each, so it's about being creative…but I'm very conscious that we do not have access to funds.'

As previously mentioned, most of the case study institutions had participated in the Aim Higher programme. Whilst the qualitative data attests to the diverse, and often creative, responses to the loss of Aim Higher funding and support, they also highlight the fact that, in some cases, provision and support for aspiration raising work has been diminished despite the advent of the Pupil Premium. The feeling among staff was that this made the focus on disadvantaged groups harder to maintain and monitor. Case study data also suggests that it is not only about the funding but the linked and coordinated forms of support for aspiration raising (e.g. ring fenced places in summer schools) which are important. Equally, the identification and focus on the opportunities available to a cohort of disadvantaged students provided strong incentives for schools to monitor and target provision. It does not appear that the Pupil Premium is currently facilitating this kind of targeted work in some schools.

8. Conclusions

This study provides evidence of the importance that schools and colleges place on encouraging their students to apply to higher education, with most institutions surveyed indicating that this was one of their highest priorities. The case study work similarly illustrated a high level of commitment in schools and colleges to this work. In this final section, we reflect on some key issues and conclude with recommendations for best practice that emerged from the study.

Identifying 'disadvantage'

A particular focus of the study was on the strategies used by schools and colleges to support *high achieving disadvantaged* students to pursue Higher Education, and one of the key issues to emerge was that there were differences in how institutions defined and operationalized 'disadvantage'. Although the main measure used by the Department is eligibility for Free School Meals (this was also the most common definition of disadvantage amongst survey respondents from schools), a range of other criteria were also evident, including lower socio-economic group, looked after children, SEN and postcode. In colleges, in particular, previous eligibility for FSM was rarely used.

In the case studies, staff also tended to see 'disadvantage' as more complex than eligibility for FSM. The case study institutions tended to prefer 'first-generation into university' as a way of conceptualising who is 'disadvantaged' in relation to aspiration raising – with social and cultural barriers to considering HE often identified amongst non-FSM students as well as those who were eligible for FSM. In institutions where a third or more students were FSM-eligible (including the London schools) it tended to be assumed that most students were disadvantaged, so raising the aspirations of high achievers generally was seen as targeting the disadvantaged.

These definitional issues have implications for both the monitoring and targeting of activities.

Monitoring and evaluation

In terms of monitoring, FSM was often used in relation to attainment, but it was rarely used in the context of HE aspirations and outcomes, reflecting the perceived appropriateness of FSM in this context noted above. In addition, where monitoring of applications and outcomes did take place, this was seldom specifically related to disadvantaged students (however schools and colleges chose to identify 'disadvantage'). Further, there was little evidence that monitoring of aspirations and outcomes was used systematically to inform practice. 11-16 schools in particular found it difficult to monitor applications or acceptances to HE, given that most of their students do not move directly into HE.

In addition, across all institutions, there was little evidence of systematic evaluation of aspiration raising activities, although staff often expressed a sense of what activities they felt were effective. The perceptions of staff were generally supported by what students regarded as helpful and/or effective. Clearly, however, monitoring and evaluation is one area where practice could be improved.

Targeting

Where aspiration-raising activities were targeted at particular groups, staff tended to first identify those who are high achieving, and only then, and only in some cases, ascertain which students were eligible for FSM. Often this was because the majority of students were deemed to be disadvantaged (by whatever criteria the institution chose to use), and so either (i) universal approaches to aspiration-raising were adopted and/or (ii) activities were targeted at particular groups based on levels of achievement. It was also apparent that where external programmes offered opportunities and/or resources specifically for HAD students, schools had an incentive to identify and target these groups. Often, however, such external programmes (e.g. INTO University) used school-level criteria for disadvantage (rather than pupil-level FSM) and so in these cases, there was no incentive for schools to specifically identify and target HAD students.

In general, a mix of both universal and targeted provision was adopted by most case study institutions. Targeted approaches were valued by student who took part in them, but there were some concerns expressed by both students and staff about those who may be missing out where targeting took place. There was also evidence that differentiated provision and the academic/vocational divide could limit opportunities for some disadvantaged students, for example where activities targeted at highly selective universities were only available to students at the 6th form centre at one case study college, and not at the main vocational FE site.

Raising aspirations and attainment

Raising aspirations and raising attainment tended to be seen as highly interlinked in case study institutions, with activities initially aimed at addressing one of these often seen as naturally leading to the other. In some of the case study institutions, and particularly in the 11-16 schools, raising *attainment* was actually regarded as a key precursor to raising *aspirations* for HE – i.e. students needed to get the required GCSE grades to move on to A levels before they could really start thinking about HE. There was also evidence, however, of aspiration-raising with younger students in the sense of 'widening horizons' and academic goals. Conversely, concerns about 'getting the grades' were expressed more widely in relation to older (and often high-achieving) students, as grade attainment became key to considering which universities to apply to and to students' chances of getting offers. Furthermore, 'attainment' was identified as a key challenge to aspiration-raising work in the case study institutions, in particular in relation to disadvantaged students (for some students, unless attainment can be raised then raising aspirations to attend HE was less relevant).

Recommendations for best practice

Based on the findings of this study, best practice in the area of aspiration-raising would appear to encompass the following:

For schools and colleges:

- A whole institution *culture* of raising aspirations.
- A combination of universal *and* targeted approaches to raising aspirations to ensure both inclusivity but also the most appropriate advice/support to meet students' needs.
- Specialist, knowledgeable staff, including trained careers officers, with specific responsibility for HE access.
- A well organised programme of activities embedded in an ethos of high expectations.
- Early interventions, lower down the school (including from KS3).
- Advice and support on applications and subject choice.
- Information about the HE system and different types of HE Institutions to 'de-mystify' HE.
- Information and guidance on financial issues for both students and parents at an early stage. Sessions need to address not only issues of fees, loans, etc., but also broader concerns about living costs and the potential risks and returns of attending higher education.
- Immersive experiences of university, including trips to universities, residential and summer schools - these were very highly rated by students and staff and used most often by the boost schools in the survey. Key aspects of their effective delivery were good organisation and liaison between schools and colleges, and the host university; subsidised travel to encourage participation particularly amongst disadvantaged students; subject focus where appropriate; inclusive criteria for participation so as to maximise impact across the institution. Making such visits compulsory and a core part of the curriculum should be stressed where students are reluctant to consider HE as a possibility.
- Pro-active work to develop partnerships and links with universities and other external organisations (e.g. IntoUniversity, local employers) that can provide support for aspiration-raising and career development activities.
- Systematic monitoring of applications and destinations, including for disadvantaged students (and by ethnicity, gender as well as FSM/social class) and the use of this to inform aspiration-raising activities.

For supporting the work of schools and colleges

- Consider whether FSM is the most appropriate indicator to identify disadvantage. Evidence from this study suggests that the inclusion of other indicators in addition to FSM may better reflect the experiences and practices of schools and colleges.
- Incentivise schools and colleges to monitor and evaluate the success of their aspiration raising strategies and students' destination data more systematically. Data-sharing so that 11-16 schools also have access to HE applications and destinations data would enable them to more effectively evaluate their work.

- A central point of information/network to support and coordinate aspiration-raising work (such as that provided by AimHigher)
- Funding to support university visits and related activities.

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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