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OPEN DAYS

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Background

The University of Strathclyde is committed to Widening Access and ensuring that the University's student body is representative of wider society as a whole, encompassing talented students from a wide range of backgrounds. For a variety of reasons, pupils from some schools are underrepresented in Higher Education. Within Glasgow, there are a number of schools which have below average progression to Higher Education rates and initial research has indicated that these schools are also underrepresented at our Open Days.

The decision to attend university is a difficult task for most high school pupils as it is a high-involvement decision which often affects their life paths. By attending Open Days, young people can gain access to a range of information and support available to them, which may prove instrumental in helping them to make an informed decision regarding attending university. Furthermore, the University of Strathclyde and other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the wider context can also benefit from Open Days, as they help institutions to recruit the best possible candidates from a range of backgrounds.

In summer 2016, a student intern was recruited to work with pupils and teachers from a selection of target schools currently underrepresented at the University of Strathclyde's Open Days, with the objective of identifying any barriers which may stop these young people from attending Open Days. This report draws on evidence gathered from a review of the literature, as well as qualitative data gathered via direct engagement with two target schools, plus quantitative data supplied by UCAS. Recommendations are given regarding demystifying Open Days, and also minimising the potential impact of any social, cultural or economic factors which may be presenting barriers to local talented young people from underrepresented schools, to encourage and enable these young people to attend the University of Strathclyde's Open Days.

Literature Review

Institutional habitus is the dominant concept on student transition and progression. Bourdieu (1990; cited by Donnelly, 2014) developed the concept, theorising that habitus confines the aspirations of individuals within the possibilities deemed to be 'feasible' for the social group to which they belong (1990; cited by Reay, David, & Ball, 2001a). Early research by McDonough (1996; cited by Reay et al., 2001a) demonstrates that the relationship between a student's social class background and the secondary school's organisational contexts and processes is fundamental to a young person's decision to attend university. Reay (1998) contributed significantly to this area of research in a UK context by illustrating that this is a dynamic relationship whereby processes in schools and their catchments mutually shape and reshape each other. Tooley and Darby (1998) are critical of Reay's contribution to the development of Bourdieu's theory, arguing that Reay attempts to make evidence fit with the theory. However, this criticism of Reay (1998) is persuasively rejected by Nash (1999) for the reason of being unsubstantiated. Additional evidence by Reay et al. (2001a), note an institutional influence which they term 'a school effect'. Subsequently, Reay, Davies, David, & Ball (2001b) conclude the experiences of the choice process to be different for working-class students compared to more privileged counterparts. Later evidence supports this view that social class is a key

influencing factor in university choice, in that young people from less-advantaged backgrounds are less likely than their more advantaged peers to apply to more prestigious universities (Ball, Reay, & David, 2002), for reasons such as fear of experiencing cultural isolation (Forsyth & Furlong, 2000). In contrast, participants in a study conducted by Baker and Brown (2007) who were from working-class backgrounds reflected that they had aspirations of ‘leveraging upwards’ towards attending traditional universities perceived as having reputations for ‘excellence’.

Regarding socio-economic factors, Forsyth and Furlong’s (2000) research findings are particularly relevant to the context of the present research, as their study involved senior secondary school pupils across Scotland including Glasgow. The results identified specific factors that hinder progression to Higher Education such as a fear of getting into debt, also extending to the ability to pay off debt once in employment following university.

Later research by Moogan and Baron (2003) considers the vast quantity of information involved in making the decision of considering and choosing to attend a university, and how this can often lead to confusion for young people, which can be intensified by conflicting opinions of schools and HEIs. According to Pugsley (2004: cited by Shiner & Noden, 2014), young people from working-class backgrounds experience additional challenges as they are often ill-equipped to engage in this process as a result of limited access to Higher Education information sources and networks.

In terms of information requirements in student decision making, research conducted by Veloutsou, Lewis, and Paton, (2004) identifies the most important factors: questions on the course (including career information); the university reputation; the campus; and the social life. This data is supported by previous findings of Moogan & Baron (2003), and Bowden (2000; cited by Veloutsou et.al, 2004), as well as Joseph & Joseph (2000; cited by Veloutsou et.al, 2004). Furthermore, it is also important to consider which sources of information are most influential. Recent research by Gibbs and Dean (2015) report the most highly trusted sources are university visits, the UCAS and university websites, printed prospectuses, teachers, and family. Interestingly, Veloutsou et al. (2004) specifically report that university sources rank higher than career advisors, parents, and teachers. This piece of evidence supports the view of Wasmer et al. (1997) that information can be perceived as more credible when accessed through HEI personnel or current students whilst at the institution itself.

In favour of the idea that Open Days can be used to influence and encourage a young person to apply to university, Gibbs and Dean (2015) report Open Days as the prime information source not only for trustworthiness, but also for usefulness in student decision making. These findings support the opinion of Veloutsou, Paton, and Lewis (2005) whereby Open Days are an effective tool in fulfilling student information requirements. Similarly, Moogan & Baron (2003) propose that students can gain a ‘taste’ of university experience first-hand, and that this may help overcome anxiety about entering Higher Education, which is particularly relevant for young people with no experience of university.

Consideration as to which university representatives offer more value in communicating with young people during Open Days is given by Moogan and Baron (2011), who emphasise the importance of utilising both current students and ‘approachable’ staff to provide a rich experience for young people. Likewise, Briggs, Clark, and Hall (2012) discuss the positive effects of ‘person-to-person stories’ and ‘messages’ that potential students can relate to, and moreover in order that they can envisage managing the difficulties of transition and succeeding in a university environment. This

opinion is supported by extensive research indicating that if potential candidates are left with a positive experience, they are more likely to want to apply to attend university there (Kealy & Rockel, 1987; Kellaris & Kellaris, 1988; Redwood, 2000; all cited by Moogan & Baron, 2003). In addition, Gutman and Miaoulis (2003; cited by Moogan & Baron, 2011) propose creating an informative and positive university image to encourage young people to apply there. This is particularly appropriate in the context of Open Days which offer young people the opportunity for their information requisites to be fulfilled and for them to make a subjective assessment on the suitability of the HEI.

In order to encourage young people to attend Open Days, Briggs et al., (2012) argue there is a need for designated school staff to be responsible for actively encouraging pupil participation. Furthermore, that any appointed staff should be well-informed on the Higher Education application process and have a wide network of contacts within universities. A further proposal is for HEI's to develop marketing strategies whereby communication is matched to the information needs of specific subgroups in order to reduce barriers (Moogan and Baron, 2011). In the same manner, Bonnema and Van der Waladt (2008) refer to evidence to advise HEIs against using a 'one size fits all' marketing approach. Veloutsou et al. (2005) emphasise the value of personal contact from universities and that this is particularly important for HEI's who wish to approach better-qualified students. However, the authors caution that any personal 'tailor-made' approaches to specific groups such as those with little experience of HEI's should be conducted in a way which encourages trust and understanding.

Methodology

An intern was appointed in August 2016 on a full-time basis for a period of 5 weeks to undertake the research project. The intern was a current undergraduate student at the University of Strathclyde, and was based within the Widening Access office, supervised by the Widening Access Support Coordinator and the Widening Access Support Adviser.

Prior to the start of the project, the intern received training on conducting a literature review from a Study Skills Advisor within the University of Strathclyde. The intern also met with one of the University's librarians in the early stages of the project to learn effective techniques for carrying out a search of contemporary literature relevant to the project.

A meeting was held between the intern and the Senior Recruitment Officer within the Recruitment and International Office (RIO) of the University of Strathclyde in order to develop the intern's knowledge of what an Open Day involves. The business reasons behind an Open Day were also discussed during the meeting, as well as why Open Days are important for the young people who attend them. This meeting enabled the intern to gain a better understanding around some of the barriers which may be preventing young people from low progression schools from attending Open Days, and also for the intern to develop ideas on possible ways of increasing awareness and engagement towards Open Days amongst this target group of young people.

A review of the literature was conducted which focused on: identifying factors which influence a young person's decision to consider and choose a university; ways in which Open Days can be used to encourage a young person to apply to a university; and also ways in which potential students can be encouraged to attend an Open Day.

Thereafter, the intern co-ordinated small focus groups of young people from 2 schools located in Glasgow, to uncover current attitudes towards Open Days and also to identify possible barriers/reasons for non-participation. Lead pupils from each school canvassed their peers to collect additional data, and to ascertain whether the majority of their peers shared similar or differing views and opinions. The lead pupils from both schools were rewarded with Amazon vouchers for taking part in the project.

Finally, the interviews were transcribed and the peer canvassing feedback was reviewed, whereby similar points/themes were grouped together for analysis. The evidence collected was used to draw conclusions, and thus provided the basis for the recommendations presented at the end of this report.

Discussion

A number of barriers have been identified which prevent the young people at the target schools from attending the University of Strathclyde Open Days. Prior to discussing the barriers, the perceived views of these young people are considered towards their respective school's culture in terms of Higher Education.

The majority of young people reported they felt there was a strong focus on progression to Higher Education at their school, and that this was instilled in them during the early stages of attending high school. For example, Connor from School A reported:

"In first year, I remember being asked by my teachers 'so are you going to college or university?' And I just remember in first year, going I don't really even know yet."

Similarly, the vast majority of pupils reported that they felt they had received a lot of support from school to help them deal with the decision of whether to attend university. Toni at School A stated:

"...we've got some career advisors in school and their office is just over there, so they're available to talk to and help you to decide, but from very early on I think you can decide whether you will be able to go with what classes you are in or you're put in. I think you start from early on from gaining an awareness of where you're gonna end up and the school help you a lot through the different programmes that are available."

This evidence illustrates that the attitudes and aspirations of young people towards progression to Higher Education are greatly influenced by the level of the ability class that they are placed in early on in secondary school. Therefore, this supports the findings of McDonough (1996; cited by Reay et al., 2001a), whereby the relationship between a student's social class background and the secondary school's organisational contexts and processes is fundamental to a young person's decision to attend university.

In addition, whilst the vast majority of young people from both schools felt it was considered 'normal' for them to progress directly from school to university, it was often common for some young people to attend college instead. Elizabeth from School B reported:

"Quite a lot of people in our year are opting for college instead of uni so like let's say in their exam results they've not got what they needed..."

To some extent, this supports the presence of 'a school effect' (Reay et al., 2001a), whereby the educational institution strongly influences child outcomes. This influence is also evident at School A, whereby the young people expressed the opinion that the teachers possessed a genuine desire to see the pupils progress to university in order to gain better employment prospects:

"...I think anything like this (participation in the project) is a teacher's dream because it's their pupils that they've taught for all these years, and they've wanted them to get all the good grades that they need to go to university and get a good job."

In summary, the young people from both schools believed there to be a very strong focus on progression to Higher Education at their respective school, and furthermore, that they felt supported by teachers in working towards reaching and fulfilling their academic potential.

LACK OF AWARENESS

A major barrier identified was a lack of awareness amongst the young people regarding university Open Days, particularly as to when Open Days were due to take place.

The majority of pupils overall reported they knew what an Open Day was. However, there was a proportion of young people from School A who advised they did not. Connor from School A reported findings from canvassing with his peers:

“A lot of them didn’t actually know about Open Days...I got 7 out of 14 people, so half of them knew what an Open Day was.”

Furthermore, the vast majority of young people from both schools did not know the dates for any of the Open Days for any of the Scottish universities, including the University of Strathclyde. Connor at School A advised:

“Yeah I think it’s more about the awareness, like nobody’s actually aware, like I wasn’t really aware about Open Days as much, like I knew what they were but I had never been to one and like didn’t know the dates, so like I wasn’t really aware myself until you came and spoke to us.”

Julia from School B commented on the size of the barrier regarding lack of awareness:

“...that’s the biggest barrier! Not knowing when it is.”

Significantly, there was a high consensus of opinion that young people would wish to attend an Open Day if they were made more aware of them. For example, Aidan at School B stated:

“Cos I definitely think people would want to go and could go to them it’s just that half the time they don’t actually know when they are”

The young people from School A, including those who were not aware of what an Open Day was, expressed a strong desire to attend a University of Strathclyde Open Day after becoming more informed about them:

“I asked whether they wanted to attend and I got from all 14 that they definitely wanted to attend. After telling them about all the things, they went ‘yeah I definitely want to go’.”

In addition, out of the young people attending School B who had a good knowledge of Open Days, many reported that the most popular ways they had found out about them included university websites and UCAS emails. This evidence corresponds with the findings of Gibbs and Dean (2015) whereby both these sources rate highly as trusted sources of information.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BARRIERS

An overwhelming majority of the young people reported to experiencing socio-economic barriers related to attending an Open Day.

➤ **Cost of transport / limited geographical knowledge**

A common barrier reported by the young people across both schools was the cost of transport in travelling to and from Open Days. This data corresponds with a survey conducted with 18-19 year old UK undergraduate applicants in the 2015 admissions cycle, whereby 43% reported the cost of transport relating to attending an Open Day as a deterring factor (UCAS, 2016).

The young people at School A reported additional barriers over and above the cost of transport including the availability of public transport services, as well as a limited geographical knowledge outside the part of Glasgow in which the young people live and attend school. It was reported that many of the young people were not familiar with the location of the University of Strathclyde, situated in Glasgow City Centre. Toni from School A commented:

“So a lot of people don’t know about the city, they only know about this area. I’ve found that like if you say blah blah blah this place, they’ll be like oh I don’t know where that is.”

Connor from School A discusses these barriers further:

“Cos that’s like one of the major factors they were saying cos I asked them about factors and they said like being able to afford to actually travel, transport itself there’s not really any ..., eh the location, some people didn’t really know where the University was, so it was more about getting to and from.”

Whilst it was also reported by the young people at School B that the cost of transport was a major barrier for them, geographical knowledge and access to the City were less so. This is likely to be due to the location of School B school being situated relatively close to the City Centre.

➤ **Parents / friends unable or unwilling to attend**

Notably, the young people reported finding it difficult to arrange for someone to attend an Open Day with them. The vast majority of young people reported a preference to attend Open Days with friends or parents, however this was not always possible. Connor from School A reported:

“... because some of the days it was happening their mums and dads were working so they didn’t have anybody go with, or a lot of their friends like don’t want to go.”

➤ Anxiety around participating in an Open Day.

In addition to worrying about travelling to an Open Day, a vast majority of the young people from both schools reported feeling uncomfortable or anxious about being at an Open Day on their own. Aidan from School B said:

“...there is definitely a factor affecting some people is [sic]that they don’t want to go on their own. They kinda feel as if like they don’t belong if they go on their own and they’ll find it a kinda struggle to interact and engage with people.”

This evidence relates to the findings of Reay et al. (2001b) that the experiences of the choice process is different for working-class students compared to their more privileged counterparts. In some cases, fear and anxiety around attending an Open Day alone had prevented some young people from going to an Open Day after they had registered to attend. Toni at School A commented:

“...I remember last year I signed up to go to some Open Days but ...hmm I ended up backing out. ... I think I was just a bit too scared to go on my own and I wasn’t really sure where it was, and I dunno, I got a bit nervous.”

The vast majority of young people reported they thought the best way to overcome this barrier relating to anxiety was to attend an Open Day as part of a group from school. Sian at School B stated:

“.. that’s like the main factor like going in a group with people you know and they’re going through the same stage as you...”

TIME CONSTRAINTS

➤ Taking time off school

Another barrier identified was the impression that teachers would react negatively to the pupils taking time out of school to attend a university Open Day, on the basis that this could result in the pupils falling behind with the class curriculum. Adrianna from School B commented:

“(mimics teacher) Like ‘you’re gonna miss a day of learning’ and ‘you’re gonna have to catch up! You’re not going to catch up!’”

Some young people reported finding the attitudes and actions of teachers somewhat contradictory regarding taking time out of school to attend an Open Day, with regards to showing support for students involved in the Higher Education application process. Kristopher from School B said:

“.. a lot of them will tell you it’s important for like for a personal statement but as soon as you try to leave their class they’re like ‘no’.... that’s a step too far!”

This evidence can be related to Moogan and Baron’s view (2003) whereby any confusion experienced by young people arising from the extensive decision-making process can be further intensified by conflicting opinions of schools and HEIs.

In the case of School A, some of the young people thought that the school could be even more supportive than they already were by giving permission for senior pupils to attend Open Days during school hours. Connor from School A reported that he would view this action as being an extension of teachers supporting progression to Higher Education in the wider context:

“.....the school want to push us forward and make sure that they give us that extra help, so definitely by having a university open day and letting the pupils go to it would definitely be one of the things that the school could do....”

➤ **Part-time employment**

A number of pupils from School B also reported having part time jobs which prevented them from being able to attend university Open Days held during the weekend. These young people reported they felt they were in a no-win situation; they were unable to attend any university Open Days held on weekdays in fear of missing school, or at the weekend due to work commitments. Aidan from School B referred to the dilemma faced by these young people and the anxiety it can cause:

“A lot of people in sixth year especially have like part time jobs and they feel as if Saturday is like a work day almost where they can get some money. And then during school as well, maybe they are worried as well about the workload that they have, or like they have stuff to do and they are worried about missing it, and they would rather just stay in school and go to the weekend one instead but obviously that isn't an option for some people.”

INFORMATION SOURCES / KNOWLEDGE GAPS

➤ **School**

An overwhelming majority of young people reported they had received very little or no information about university Open Days from school. In the case of School B, there was little variation in the experiences of the majority of pupils who generally shared the opinion that information sources at school were not forthcoming in providing information about Open Days. Aidan offered the opinion that young people would need to act on their own initiative and approach the support department themselves in order to gain access to this information:

“The only way they would tell you is if you went to the partnership base.”

On the other hand, the pupils from School A reported dissimilar experiences to each other. For example, Connor from School A believed the first time he had heard the topic of Open Days being discussed in school was through taking part in the research project which this report describes:

“...I think the only time I heard was through...just for this course...it was from Miss McManus, that's the only time I've been told about it.”

Whilst Toni from School A reported she found out about Open Days incidentally during class:

“I heard...one of the teachers talking about it and they were asking if we were going to be in class that day I think it was in admin last year, or the year before, um and they were

asking if we were going to be in because some people were going to an Open Day on that day. But I didn't hear anything about it in school in assemblies or anything."

Significantly, Keurene from School A reported she had previously received information about Open Days from an individual teacher, and moreover, she was encouraged by the teacher to visit a number of different universities to help make an informed decision:

"For me it was my Pastoral Care Teacher, she has actually brought it up before with me. Cos I just want to do medicine, she was kinda like encouraging me to check out universities and see which universities I would like to go to."

This evidence strongly supports Briggs et al.'s (2013) argument that there is a need for designated staff in school to be responsible for actively encouraging pupils to attend Open Days.

Opinions were given as to what teachers thought about Open Days. Connor reported that he believed the teachers at school generally viewed Open Days in a positive light, however, that some teachers were less able than others to share information on Open Days with pupils due to curriculum commitments:

"It's kind of hard for them to build in talking about Open Days and do all the coursework...I think they (teachers) all think it's a good thing but eh, I know a lot of them obviously in the classes really can't go about saying 'oh Open Days' and things cos they have a course to teach so it's more in R.E and PSE that they can talk about it cos it's the extra period.."

➤ **The University of Strathclyde**

None of the lead pupils from either school were aware of an opportunity for schools to request for the University of Strathclyde to come out and deliver a talk on Open Days. Toni from School A expressed the opinion this would help address the lack of awareness surrounding Open Days in general, and would also encourage the senior pupils at the school to attend Open Days held by the University of Strathclyde:

" ...I think it might encourage more people to go because then they would have more information...they would know more about it so they would feel more likely to go."

This point regarding lack of direct contact between universities and schools relates to the view of Pugsley (2004: cited by Shiner & Noden, 2014), that young people from working-class backgrounds are unable to fully engage in the process of collection and dissemination of information as a result of limited access to Higher Education information sources and networks.

However, a very small portion of pupils from School B reported that they had formed an unfavourable opinion of university talks delivered at school based on previous experience. These young people advised they found the speakers to be dis-interested or ill-informed. This point stresses the importance of HEI's using informed and engaging speakers to communicate key messages to young people. Furthermore, this evidence lends some support to the opinion of Wasmer et al. (1997) that information may be perceived as more credible when it is accessed at the Higher Education Institution itself.

In addition, a few of the young people from School B made reference to when another university had visited the school, and indicated that the timing of receiving the talk did not seem to be the most appropriate. Aidan commented:

“Back in fourth year to be honest you don’t really think about it as much.”

This point illustrates the need for pupil engagement to be sustained throughout key stages of Secondary School as opposed to HEI’s conducting one-off school visits.

➤ **HELOA Posters**

Most of the lead pupils from both schools reported they were unfamiliar with the annual HELOA (Higher Education Liaison Officers Association) posters which advertise the dates for Scottish Universities Open Days. On seeing the posters for the first time, Toni from School A was enthusiastic about all of the university Open Day dates being available in one format:

“That’s really good”.

Similarly, Julia from School B commented on the importance for young people to be able to access the information on the posters:

“They should have them up even in a meeting room or something. People who are really interested (in Open Days) should like see what it is, because we don’t know (when the dates of the Open Days are).”

However, an important issue was discussed relating to using posters as a marketing method in School B; namely that there is a huge number of posters and marketing material displayed throughout the school, resulting in this type of communication being largely ineffective.

➤ **Online information sources**

Contrasting opinions were given by some of the young people at School B about the added value of attending Open Days over and above accessing information online. Adrianna reported that some young people considered attending an Open Day a worthwhile experience in terms of fulfilling information requirements:

“...you don’t just think it’s the same information you have on the website. You were actually given more information from the tutors and the students and everything so you got more in-depth what you wanted to do.”

On the other hand, Kristopher from School B reported that Open Days were viewed by some young people as unnecessary and an inefficient use of time and effort:

“...a couple of people were saying that a lot of the information you could just get off websites and it was kinda unnecessary trekking down there as you could just the information online.”

➤ Knowledge Gaps

A number of young people from both schools demonstrated important knowledge gaps in relation to student funding and finance, and some of these young people were unaware of being able to satisfy these information requirements by attending one of the student funding talks which take place at all of the University of Strathclyde Open Days. Aidan at School B reported:

“...there was a couple that said that they weren't sure 'cause...they wouldn't really know what funding was available to them so they would be worried about taking out for example students loans, or maybe they'd be worried that they might have to depending on their circumstances and stuff, but they wouldn't know what sort of bonuses or what sort of help they could get with that sort of thing.”

This evidence also backs up the findings of Forsyth & Furlong (2000) that a fear of getting into debt is a factor which hinders progression to Higher Education for some young people.

Crucially, the majority of the young people from both schools reported that they were unaware of the significance of attending a university Open Day in connection with increasing the quality of their Personal Statement. Julia at School B commented:

“I don't think like people consider Open Days as something to do with that 'cause it's just like a day to see what it's like, but they don't consider it as important as their personal statement, they just think of it as an information thing.”

This knowledge gap could lead to serious implications for the young people concerned regarding successfully applying to university, especially as Personal Statements are considered as an intrinsic component by universities in assessing and selecting potential candidates (UCAS, 2016).

Benefits of attending an Open Day

A final point to end the discussion is that Open Days are a major factor in helping young people find out about universities and make an informed decision. 76% of UK university applicants who did not attend an Open Day prior to applying to a Higher Education Institution said that in retrospect, it would have been useful to have attended an Open Day (UCAS, 2016).

The following testimony by Julia at School B illustrates just a couple of the key benefits to be gained by young people from attending university Open Days, and furthermore lends support to the research findings of Gibbs and Dean (2015) that Open Days are the prime information source for usefulness in student decision making:

“... it was really useful, like that's where I found out which course I'd like to do and that was like really beneficial to me because now I'm more like going towards it...”

Conclusion

From analysis of the evidence presented, there are a number of barriers preventing the young people from the target schools attending the University of Strathclyde Open Days. The biggest barrier is a lack of awareness towards Open Days, which is paradoxical to the strong focus on Higher Education exhibited in both secondary schools. The evidence provided indicates that the core issue underlying this barrier, is that there are no formal or consistent processes in these schools for sharing information with the pupils on university Open Days, and moreover, for actively encouraging attendance at these events. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that young people at the target schools are only finding out about Open Days if they are already engaged in the topic. This raises an issue relating to those pupils who may be capable of progressing to Higher Education, but do not yet have the inclination or the confidence to seek out initial information on Open Days. Subsequently, there could be a large proportion of pupils from these schools who are likely to find themselves at a disadvantage compared with their more informed peers, due to being unable to make a more fully informed decision about progressing to Higher Education.

As a further consequence, universities will miss out on the chance to recruit the best candidates from the widest range of backgrounds. Therefore, secondary schools and HEIs cannot rely on young people finding out about Open Days by chance, especially those pupils from schools with below average progression to Higher Education rates, as these young people are often the ones which have the most to gain from attending Open Days. Consequently, it is important for secondary schools to integrate the topic of Open Days into discussions/classes at school regarding the Higher Education application process. This is particularly relevant as teachers are able to exert a substantial influence on the attitudes and behaviours of pupils especially on topics related to Higher Education, and also as schools have a considerable amount of day-to-day contact with young people. Furthermore, it would also be desirable for teachers to show a degree of flexibility in allowing pupils to attend university Open Days, in order to help remove the barrier of taking time out of school.

Notably, the University of Strathclyde also has a critical part to play in addressing the barriers relating to the misconceptions and knowledge gaps that the young people from the target schools have, including the relevance of Open Days to the HE application process. The evidence given demonstrates a need for the University to take steps to educate young people and teachers from target schools by communicating with them the key benefits of attending an Open Day, in terms of an applicant's Personal Statement and fulfilling student funding information requirements. This action is particularly necessary as some of the existing marketing communications used to promote awareness and attendance at Open Days are not always reaching and engaging the target audience to which they are intended. It is also important for the University to help create and sustain the engagement of pupils towards Open Days via direct contact with them over the duration of their journey through secondary school, particularly at appropriate times which correspond with the key stages of the student decision-making process.

In addition schools, HEI's, and local government organisations could work better together to establish practical solutions conducive to overcoming socio-economic barriers relating to the cost of transport, limited geographical knowledge, and anxiety over attending an Open Day. In particular, travel arrangements to and from university Open Days could be co-ordinated to minimise these barriers.

Limitations of the present research include a relatively small sample size, and a substantial proportion of qualitative data from School A High School obtained during a follow-up interview with

one pupil as a result of other the pupils who were due to attend the interview being absent. However, this limitation demonstrates the need for this type of research into the attitudes, opinions, and level of engagement of young people towards Open Days. A suggestion for future research is for other HEIs to investigate whether young people attending other schools with below average progression to Higher Education rates are experiencing similar or additional barriers identified in this report. A further suggestion is to conduct interviews with teachers from target schools to further explore the nature of teachers' attitudes towards Open Days, and to identify any issues which may be preventing these teachers from sharing information on Open Days with pupils.

The number of young people from the target schools who attend Open Days held by the University of Strathclyde would be likely to increase as a result of addressing and removing this multitude of barriers. Moreover, the experience of attending an Open Day will help these potential candidates decide if the University of Strathclyde is the right HEI for them. Additionally, it will also help to increase the quality of the applications from the young people who do choose to apply to attend the University, and thus could increase the probability of receiving an offer to study there.

Recommendations

- ✚ Schools to ensure Pastoral Care Teachers are aware of university Open Days and that they discuss the importance of them with pupils as part of the class curriculum on Higher Education.
- ✚ RIO Senior Recruitment Officer or other appropriate member of staff to prepare/deliver annual talk to promote the benefits of Open Days, to be held at the University of Strathclyde commencing 2017 prior to S6 school inductions, with key school staff members including Pastoral Care Teachers in attendance. For example, this talk could feature as part of the annual RIO teachers' update sessions.
- ✚ Schools to co-ordinate organised school trips to take senior pupils in groups to university Open Days, providing an option for parents to accompany young people and utilise group transportation facilities.
- ✚ **Short term-** target schools to approach community transport organisations such as West of Scotland Community Transport Network and request transport (free gratis) for school trips to take pupils to university Open Days including those held at the University of Strathclyde.
- ✚ **Longer term-** target schools to secure funding from organisations such as Glasgow City Council, and Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership, for assistance in hiring a private bus. Alternatively, to propose coach pick-ups alongside other secondary school pupils facing similar socio-economic barriers.
- ✚ Widening Access team member to deliver annual school talk to senior pupils at target schools commencing August 2017, and take active approach of raising awareness of the key benefits surrounding attending an Open Day regarding Personal Statements/student funding information requirements / routes into university via college.
- ✚ Open Day programmes and prospectuses to be distributed at the end of each school talk. Online links supplied during talk to access these materials from the University website if printed versions are unavailable.
- ✚ Head Teacher / Pastoral Care Teacher to draw pupils' attention to the placement of HELOA posters displayed in their school, via school assembly / tannoy announcements, as well as online sources including Glow (Scotland's national intranet for schools).
- ✚ Schools to retweet University of Strathclyde Open Day communications on Open Days, and also schools to share/post any corresponding transport arrangements on school twitter pages.
- ✚ Widening Access Support Coordinator to encourage pupils from under-represented schools at the end of 'Making the Most of an Open Day' talk to generate positive word of mouth with their younger peers following the experience of attending the Open Day event.
- ✚ Widening Access Team members to maintain ongoing relationships with target schools by initiating telephone and email contact at regular intervals with future designated Pastoral Care Teachers.

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