

Action Research Executive Summary

What are the career guidance issues for pupils intending on going onto HE who have negative pre-entry attributes* and what support do they receive?

***noted by Moffat and Allan**

This research is based on work carried out by Moffat and Allan as they were concerned about the support pupils intending on going onto HE received. It was felt that career guidance had a strong focus on social exclusion and this raised questions over mainstream guidance. This research aimed to note if the issues raised by Moffat and Allan are still current, what support pupils received and find out what pupils in their final year of school thought of the support offered to them. Moffat and Allan noted that pupil's can hold negative pre-entry attributes (marginal academic achievement/potential, lower income family, no or more limited family history of participation in HE, lack of parental engagement in the process, school with poor links to HE, unrealistic choice, brief decision-making, lacking confidence, misconceptions about 'academic life'). Participation at university is growing and wider access has been encouraged however; this raises concerns over retention rates.

The research employed in this study had three stages. The careers adviser at Napier was interviewed and current drop-out rates and issues were noted. 6th year pupils intending on going onto Higher Education at Musselburgh Grammar school were given questionnaires to complete (20 pupils questioned). The careers advisers for Musselburgh Grammar and a teacher involved in the support process were also interviewed.

The main findings from this research noted that drop-out rates are still of concern to university and the careers adviser at Napier felt that the students were not prepared for university. The research also noted that pupils feel less confident about going to university than course choice; they feel that careers advisers are hard to access and most noted that university life is not discussed within the interview. The teacher at Musselburgh Grammar also felt the school could do more to make pupils socially ready for university. Therefore it seems students may benefit from talks from ex-pupils on university life which has been suggested by Bartley (2004) and Moffat and Allan (2004). It is also important that pupils understand how careers advisers can be accessed and make sure that the process seems easy. The role of a careers adviser should also be clarified as the careers adviser may not be perceived to assist with understanding university life. It is also noted that pupils do not think of university life as an important factor in choosing courses and universities. Students need to be aware that courses are 3 to 4 years long and it is important to feel motivated to do the work in this time frame.

In Moffat and Allan's paper implications were noted. These were that: careers advisers should gather information early, schools develop good links with HEIs, career education should focus on 'qualitative information', careers advisers and schools should encourage pupils to research. This research agrees with these implications and notes that some are indeed being remedied. However, it should be noted that not all those deemed at risk will need help and visa versa. It is important that career guidance is seen as more accessible and that the role of the careers adviser is clarified.

What are the career guidance issues for pupils intending on going onto HE who have negative pre-entry attributes* and what support do they receive?

***noted by Moffat and Allan**



**Action Research
Amber Beatson**

This research is based on information from literature reviews, interviews, statistical data and questionnaire

Contents

List of tables and figures	3
Preface	4
Acknowledgements	4
List of Abbreviations	4
Introduction (including literature review)	5
Research methods	9
Interviewing staff at Napier and finding out about current drop-out statistics	9
Questionnaire sent to S6 pupils intending on going onto Higher Education	10
Interviewing Career Staff and a teacher involved in the support process	10
Results	11
Interviewing staff at Napier and finding out about current drop-out statistics	11
Questionnaire sent to S6 pupils intending on going onto Higher Education	13
Interviewing Career Staff and a teacher involved in the support process	19
Discussion	21
Conclusion	25
Limitations	26
References	27
Appendices	29

List of tables and figures

Table 1: Young Napier students undertaking their first degree retention data

Table 2: Information about pupils who filled in questionnaires with regard to highers expected, income and family history in HE.

Table 3: Confidence rated by students on going to university and course choice.

Table 4: Summary of rating given by pupils about the career interview they received

Figure 1: Pupils who had family members with a history of HE split by those who had a careers interview and those who did not

Figure 2: Number of highers expected by pupils split by those who had a careers interview and those who did not

Figure 3: Pupils family average income split by those who had a careers interview and those who did not

Figure 4: Whether pupils who have had a careers interview or not agree that they have carried out enough research

Figure 5: What pupils think they know about university life. Split by those that have had a careers interview or not

Figure 6: Whether pupils who have had a careers interview or not agree that their school has provided them with enough information

Figure 7: Whether pupils who have had a careers interview or not agree that their school has helped them gain the needed skills for university

Figure 8: Sources of information and support used by pupils

Figure 9: Sources deemed hardest to access by pupils

Figure 10: Sources deemed easiest to access by pupils

Figure 11: Confidence about going to university for those who had attended a careers interview or not

Figure 12: Confidence about course for those who attended a careers interview or not

Figure 13: Confidence about university in relation to research carried out

Figure 14: Confidence about course in relation to research carried out

Preface

This research is based on work carried out by Moffat and Allan and aims to note if the issue is still current and find out what pupils in their final year of school think of the support offered to them. This research is of personal significance as it was felt that pupils who were going to university were organised and well informed needing no extra help. My school acted as though other decisions could wait and I needed no extra help and if I did I had to seek it out.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff at Napier University, Musselburgh Grammar and Careers Scotland for their time and support. I would also like to thank the pupils of Musselburgh Grammar who filled in the questionnaires, with a special thank you to the head girl for helping distribute them.

List of abbreviations

HE:	Higher Education
HEI:	Higher Education Institutions
HEFC(E)	Higher Education Funding Council (for England)
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
LEAPS:	Lothian's Equal Access Programme for Schools
SESWAF	South East of Scotland Wider Access Forum

Introduction

Moffat and Allan (2004) have carried out research via a literature review to identify factors influencing choice and success of pupils intending on going onto Higher Education. The research also considered the information and guidance needs of this group. Their research was conducted due to concerns the authors (and others) had with the focus of careers guidance. It was worried that careers guidance was focusing on socially excluded and 'hard to help' clients with implications that those clients wishing to go onto Higher Education would not be offered the same support.

It should be noted here that although HE can mean anything from a HND qualification upwards it is used in this research with focus on university degree qualifications.

Careers Scotland is a relatively new organisation which aims to 'support all individuals' to effectively career plan throughout their working life. Career Scotland work under a differentiated model which considers that most clients needs can be met by providing information and a minority of clients ('those with the most difficult and intractable problems', Scottish Executive 1999: 53) will need more intensive support. It is generally appreciated that those who suffer from social exclusion should receive specialist help but there are concerns over what services will be offered to other. As noted in Moffat and Allan's report one Bayliss (1999) asks "will it be a guidance service or will it simply act as a filter, removing all but the hard to reach cases" thus there are concerns that the mainstream guidance may suffer as a result. Some may view that those pupils intending on going onto HE only require information but there is evidence to suggest that this client group may require more. Moffat and Allan noted that pupil's pre-entry attributes can influence an applicant's ability to make successful transitions to Higher Education. The negative pre-entry attributes were noted to be:

- Marginal academic achievement/potential
- Lower income family
- No or more limited family history of participation in HE
- Lack of parental engagement in the process
- School with poor links to HE; school providing less 'qualitative' information
- Poor information research: research not focusing on the detail of course content and institution; unaware of financial implications of attending HE; unrealistic choice
- Subjective, brief, incomplete, rushed or late decision-making
- Lacking confidence
- Misconceptions about 'academic life' (unrealistic or stereotypical views of 'being a student')

(Moffat and Allan, 2004)

The present research aims to note if the issues described by Moffat and Allan are still current, what support pupils intending on going onto HE receive and what these pupils feel about the support they receive and the transition they are about to make. It will also be considered whether or not the implications noted by Moffat and Allan are being met. The research thus aims to provide further support for that found by Moffat

and Allan. When considering Moffat and Allan's research it can be noted that most findings are based on drop-out rates and students reflective opinions of the support they received at school. The current research therefore aims to find out what 6th year pupils feel about HE and the support they have been given.

Education is a very important priority of today's government and HE is becoming more accessible to the public than ever before. Indeed, between 1984-1993 the percentage of school leavers participating in HE doubled. The government aims to get 50% of young people into HE by 2010, and in fact 50% of young Scots are now participating in HE (Scottish Executive, 2003). However, as more people enter HE concerns rise over retention rates. The Scottish Executive and Higher Education Institutions hold wider access to HE as key priority, as it is noted to offer personal, cultural, social and economic benefits to individuals and the wider community. Strategies from the Scottish Executive which encourage wider access include "Life through learning: Learning through life" (2003) and "A Framework for Higher Education in Scotland" (2003). The South East of Scotland Wider Access Forum (SESWAF) aims to advocate for under-represented groups in HE and support its members to widen access and participation in HE.

The widening access agenda has brought about the introduction of organisations to help raise awareness and support to pupils who are underrepresented at HE. An example of such an organisation is that of the Lothian Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS) which runs in the Lothian's area.

With the growing concern over retention rates, and the cost low retention rates entail, a lot of research has been carried out as to why people decide to leave university. Tinto (1975) developed a model to explain why students dropped out. He argued that drop-out is due to a failure to integrate into the universities social and academic world. He notes that student's commitment and value of university are made from pre-entry attributes and then these values and commitment levels are re-evaluated once HE is experienced. There has been support offered for part of Tinto's model but when Brunsdon (2000) tested the whole model it was found it did not fit the results. It was noted by Brunsdon that if any other model was to be introduced then this model should consider the student experience and the context in which they made their decision.

Adams (1996) found that 80% of drop-outs occur in the first year of study, with 30% occurring within the first term. Yorke et al (1997) also noted that entering courses without full understanding of course content is a risk factor in dropping out of HE. Thus it is very important to consider the support young people receive at school as drop-out rates may be able to be avoided.

Napier University has one of the countries highest numbers of wider access students. The university is concerned about drop-out rates and has a Student Retention Project which aims to research and supports retention within the university. The government in Scotland provide universities with additional funding to support wider access (wider access premiums). This additional funding is provided due to two main assumptions:

- Disadvantaged students are more expensive to recruit and support
- Disadvantaged students are more likely to drop out or fail

However it should be noted that socio-economic factors and student success is complex and research conducted by the Student Retention Project found that although students from more deprived areas are more likely to fail/drop out than their peers there are other stronger factors such as year of entry and accommodation. It has also been noted that qualifications received at school are more important than social class for explaining non-completion (HEFCE 2000, Table A). Furlong and Forsyth (2003) noted that social class did influence academic success at university. It was argued that this was influential because low social class is related to underachievement at school, students tending to stay at home for university, difficulty adjusting to middle class culture, lack of familiarity with HE and may have economic barriers.

Christie (2004) found that important factors in decisions to withdraw were:

- Poor course choice
- Limited support network
- Lack of 'fit' between student and Higher Education Institution

Thus this is further evidence to suggest that more support is needed by some pupils in the school setting.

Moffat and Allan considered a lot of different research on drop-out rates which contributed to the negative pre-entry attributes described. Lack of preparedness for university was noted to be a factor influencing drop out, problems were also apparent for those students who held unrealistic views on university (Ozga and Sukhmandan, 1998 cited in Moffat and Allan, 2004). It has also been noted that clearing can lead to students making quick decisions based on little information with the main aim to be to get into university rather than to find a good institution and course 'fit'. The clearing process has raised concerns for Napier's Student Retention Project and they aim to put more effort into trying to achieve a good 'fit' for students going through this process.

It was found by Connor et al (2001) that those students who had a family history of HE were more likely to make a successful transition to HE. Those students are more likely to handle the information about courses and institutions whilst other students may require more support. Family support is also important in making successful transitions and the career influence of parents has been noted in many papers (UCAS, 2002, Howieson and Semple, 1996, Cherry and Gear, 1987). Another noted factor effecting student's transition to HE is their level of confidence. Low levels of confidence are higher in post-92 universities than other (Connor et al, 2001).

The support of the school is also important when making transitions to university and good links with HEIs can prove to be influential. Connor et al (2001) also noted that although most students were satisfied with the course and institution they picked most students stated that they would have liked to be more informed in at least one area. They felt that improvements had to be made at a school level about the information that schools provided about HE.

Cherry and Gear (1987) conducted a study which considered what school pupils thought of different sources of career help. It was noted that the careers officers and parents were thought to be the most useful source of help for the pupils examined.

However, the pupils thought that the first role of a careers officer was to help people find a vacancy. The role of friends, school visits and talks to employers were deemed to be more important later in school than they were previously.

Arnold (1988) however found a different result as employer talks were deemed to be the most important and careers officers were rated as the 4th important information source out of 6. It was also noted that 5th formers found careers officers more useful than sixth formers and upper sixth formers found friends more useful than the lower years. This is an interesting finding and suggests that support and finding out from experience of others may become more important. The careers officer was thought of as useful because they provided relevant information, knew about qualifications and training requirements and discussed options. However, some felt pressure by the careers adviser, felt they did not know them well enough or that they provided irrelevant information.

Bartley (2004) conducted a study into pupil's perceptions of HE and what they felt of sources of help available. Most pupils questioned thought that anyone can go to HE although many pupils felt that they were not 'brainy' enough and a small minority thought that HE was only for 'posh' kids. It was generally viewed that undertaking a degree is hard work and there is not much support offered. Pupils varied in their knowledge of HE, with some pupils being very well informed and some pupils knowing nothing at all. It was felt that university was expensive but those wishing to go were considering getting a part time job and attending a local university (this sent Bartley alarm bells over the probability of drop-out rates). University can be rejected by pupils as they believe it is simply 'more school'.

Bartley noted that the careers service was thought of as good by those that used it but many pupils were not sure how to access it. It was also felt that the careers service can compensate for any lack of information from home. Pupils also used the internet to find out information. Surprisingly pupils did not rate talks from university staff highly and there were varied opinions on the usefulness of trips to universities. The strongest information source was noted to be from the family. Pupils also preferred to get advice from students and former pupils and valued impressions of university life from friends.

It was concluded that due to the mix of information levels of pupils there was a need to encourage a greater access of information and advice. Careers service was essential for those pupils with no family experience of HE. It should be noted that Bartley's study questioned 2nd and 4th year pupils and thus direct comments on career advice in 5th and 6th year cannot be made.

The present research aims to consider the issues discussed here and not only gain information from professionals and statistics on drop-out rates but will question 6th year pupils about the support and the feelings they have about university.

Methods

The research employed in this study was broken down into three stages:

- Interviewing staff at Napier and finding out about current drop-out rates and issues.
- Questioning 6th year pupils intending on going onto Higher Education at Musselburgh Grammar school via a questionnaire
- Interviewing Career Staff and a teacher involved in the support process

This was done to get an understanding of current issues from a school and university prospectus and also to understand what support was available at both levels. The methods employed will now be discussed in turn.

Interviewing staff at Napier and finding out about current drop-out statistics.

This research has been based on that carried out by Moffat and Allan (2002), it was felt important to consider support available to students at university, what the university careers adviser thought of students readiness and match to course, as well as whether drop-out rates were still a current issue and if drop-out rates were higher for those pupils who possessed negative characteristics.

In order to achieve the desired outcomes it was felt that an interview method would be the best method to adopt. This was also complimented with statistical information provided by the university and the HESA website.

The interview took place in April 2005 at Napier University. The interview was arranged relatively easily via a telephone call and e-mail. As the interview was arranged relatively easily and travel was not an issue it was a feasible method to use. The interview made sure all necessary information could be collected and that there was no confusion with the questions asked. The interview also encouraged a lot of information to be achieved which may not have been achieved via a questionnaire approach. This method did not use any leading questions which may have influenced the answers given. The method however did require the interviewee to reply to all questions and the interviewee may have felt he did not have enough time to think of answers. Some questions may have also been answered on the basis of opinion and some answers may have been to put the university in a good light (please see Appendix 1 for a list of questions asked).

Unfortunately the interviewee did not have access to the statistical information I required and due to time constraint this information was accessed via the HESA website. This website is a very reliable source however, the data was based on figures from 2001-2002.

Questionnaire sent to S6 pupils intending on going onto Higher Education

A questionnaire was designed and piloted to 3 S5 pupils for feedback. The questionnaire focused on information about the pupil and the research that the pupils carried out (which included an evaluation of the Career interview process). The questionnaire also contained a cover letter which explained the study and gave instructions for filling in the questionnaire.

A letter was sent to the Assistant Head of Musselburgh Grammar school informing them of the research topic and requesting permission to send questionnaires to the school (please see Appendix 2 for example). This request was met with a reply from the head girl stating that she would distribute the questionnaires. A list of pupils intending to go onto Higher Education was made available and the head girl was met. The head girl was met and taken through the questionnaire and list of names asking if she had any questions. The questionnaire was distributed to the school in April and collected a week later. The questionnaire was intended to be filled in by 39 pupils and 20 were completed. This was due to high proportion of absentees caused by the approaching exams and open days to universities. By using a questionnaire answers were comparable and the data was able to be collected in the time available. Spaces were also given for comments and longer answers to make sure that all relevant data could be collected. Unfortunately the return rate was poor and confusion could not be checked (please see Appendix 3 for collaborative questionnaire).

Interviewing Career Staff and a teacher involved in the support process

The Careers advisers for Musselburgh Grammar school were interviewed in April at the Careers Scotland office in Musselburgh. This was arranged relatively easily due to links made during an earlier placement to this office. Again this method was picked so maximum information could be achieved and to also gather opinion on issues. This method enables questions to be answered straight away and any questions or uncertainties answered. However, the career advisers had not been in post at the school long and they were thus unable to answer some questions. A teacher at the school was therefore contacted via e-mail due to time constraints for both parties (please see Appendix 4 for list of questions given to careers advisers and the teacher).

Results

The results will be split up into the same sections as occurred above in the methods section.

Interviewing staff at Napier and finding out about current drop-out statistics.

It was noted that the Careers Service at Napier:

- Provided information to students
- Gave Career Education
- Offered Guidance
- Offered help finding a job

Information about the Careers Service is in all university publications and during some inductions however students still don't tend to use the service until their final year. Students are e-mailed information about services. Most services are offered on a self-referral basis but the service also has a Retention Officer (although post vacant at the moment) who liaises with first year tutors and offers help to any students considering leaving. Dropping-out of university is a big issue and Napier considers it important to tackle this issue. Course tutors can refer people for interviews as well as the self help approach. Year tutor also encourage students to feel supported and able to talk to them.

The careers adviser was asked if he felt students knew enough about different aspects of courses and university life.

- He noted that a significant number did not know enough about the course that they were doing, however this was still a small proportion of students. He noted that some students blamed the careers education and guidance that they received at school although he felt that this was partly due to the blame culture that we live in. He also suggested that private school pupils were the worst and that the careers guidance that private schools offer can be "thin".
- He thought that students were largely aware of financial implications of studying and this may be because of parental involvement.
- It was also considered that students many not know enough about student life as they can be shocked and find it hard to cope with such a big transition.
- He felt some schools are better at preparing pupils for the demands of study as most schools still teach.
- He noted that those students undertaking a vocational degree had considered the options open to them after completion but other students tend not to consider this.

- It was also suggested that the students had not considered what employers were looking for.

It was noted that although school liaison officers aim to inform pupils about university they are primarily involved in marketing.

Data was also provided on student retention this data was taken from HESA. The data is shown below in table 1 and is based on rates of young entrants taking their first degree. Unfortunately the most up-to-date data available was that for 2001/02.

Table 1: Young Napier students undertaking their first degree retention data

	Young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods			Young entrants from other neighbourhoods		
	% continue or qualify	% at other UK HEI	% not in HE	% continue or qualify	% at other UK HEI	% not in HE
Students at Napier 2001/02	78.7	3.4	18.0	80.8	3.3	15.9
Students at Napier 2000/01	82.0	3.0	15.0	83	3	14

Napier also allowed access to there report on the Retention Project which provided a specialist service to those students planning to drop-out. Below is a list of the main reasons given by students considering dropping out in 2003/04:

1. Not enjoying the course/course content
2. Concerned about career options when finish degree
3. Having difficulty with content
4. Really interested in another subject
5. Health problems
6. Course didn't meet expectations

The report also noted that those people using the service were likely to be

- 18 years or younger
- Originating from Scotland
- Entering with traditional school qualifications
- From certain faculties i.e. psychology and sociology

For full details of the report please see appendix 5.

Questionnaire sent to S6 pupils intending on going onto Higher Education

Information was collected about the pupils who filled in questionnaires. Below is a table of this information for the 20 6th year pupils who filled in questionnaires.

Table 2: Information about pupils who filled in questionnaires with regard to highers expected, income and family history in HE.

	Highers expected			Average family income (£)			Family History in HE*	
	3-4	5-6	7+	0-15,000	15,000-30,000	30,000+	yes	no
% response	10	75	15	5	70	25	20	80

***most pupils did know friends in HE**

Out of the 20 pupils who filled out the questionnaires 10 had had at least one interview with a careers adviser. The data was therefore also used to note if there was any differences in the pupils who went for a career interview or not. This information is depicted in the graphs below.

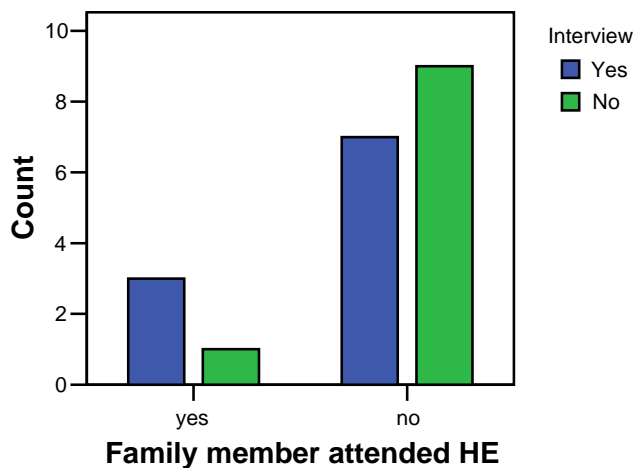


Figure 1: Pupils who had family members with a history of HE split by those who had a careers interview and those who did not

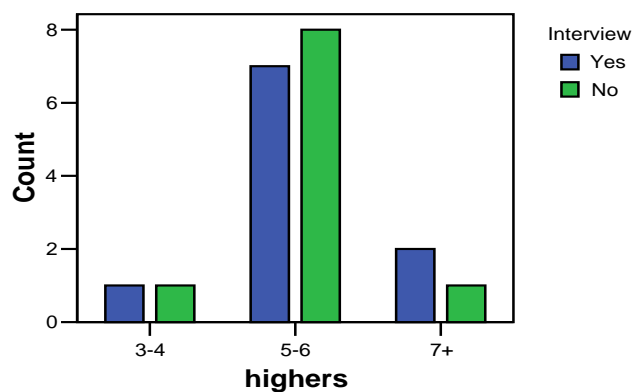


Figure 2: Number of highers expected by pupils split by those who had a careers interview and those who did not

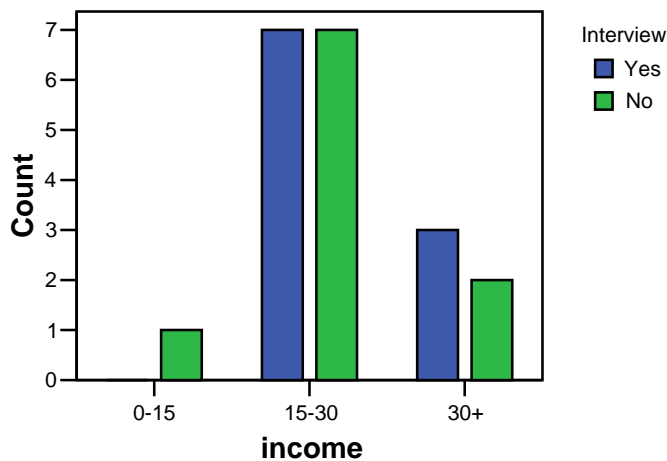


Figure 3: Pupils family average income split by those who had a careers interview and those who did not

Students were also questioned on the research that they had carried out:

- 80% agreed that they had carried out enough research on HE choice
- 85% agreed that the school had helped them gain skills needed whilst at university
- 55% agreed that the school provided good information and support about going to university
- 65% noted that their family had been involved with their decision to go to university
- 55% noted that they had carried out a reasonable level of research, 40% a lot and 5% minimal
- 95% of students had attended a open day
- It was also noted that pupils thought course content to be the most important factors in picking a course. Other important factors were university, entry requirements and career opportunities. University life was not noted as that important.

Below are graphs to depict the break down of answers to some of the questions on research with reference to whether the pupils had a career interview or not.

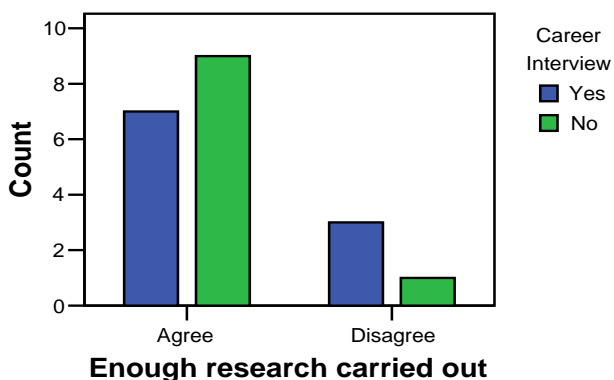


Figure 4: Whether pupils who have had a careers interview or not agree that they have carried out enough research

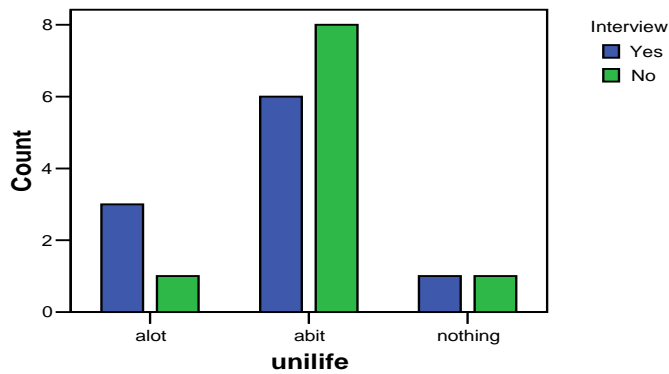


Figure 5: What pupils think they know about university life. Split by those that have had a careers interview or not

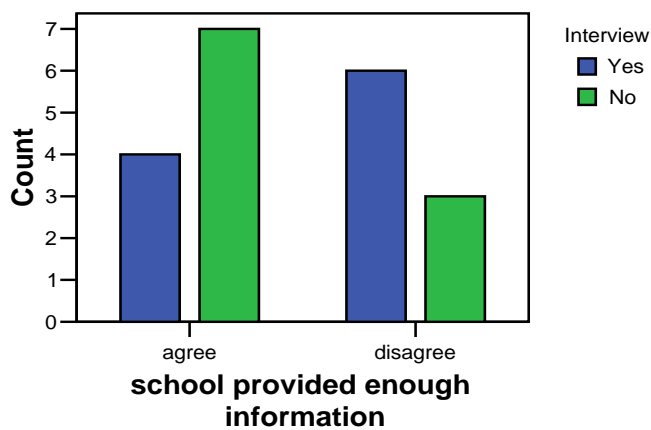


Figure 6: Whether pupils who have had a careers interview or not agree that their school has provided them with enough information

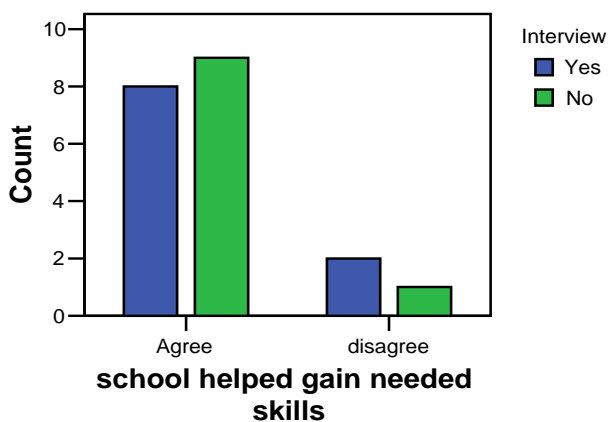


Figure 7: Whether pupils who have had a careers interview or not agree that their school has helped them gain the needed skills for university

Students were also asked to note what sources of information they used. They were allowed to note all sources that they used. See figure 1 to note what sources were used.

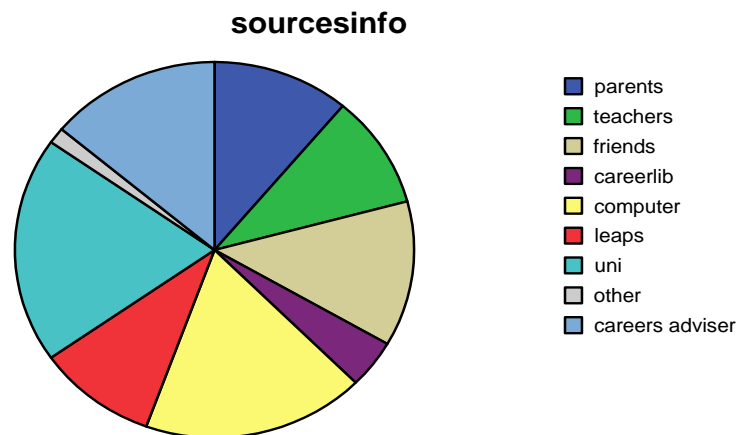


Figure 8: Sources of information and support used by pupils

Students were also asked what sources they found easiest and hardest to access. Below are figures to depict this.

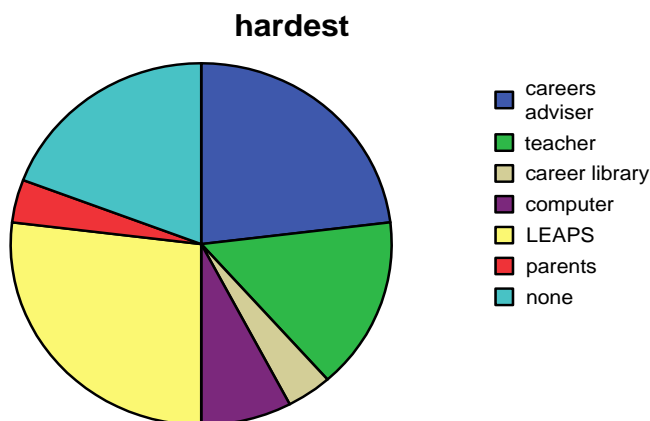


Figure 9: Sources deemed hardest to access by pupils.

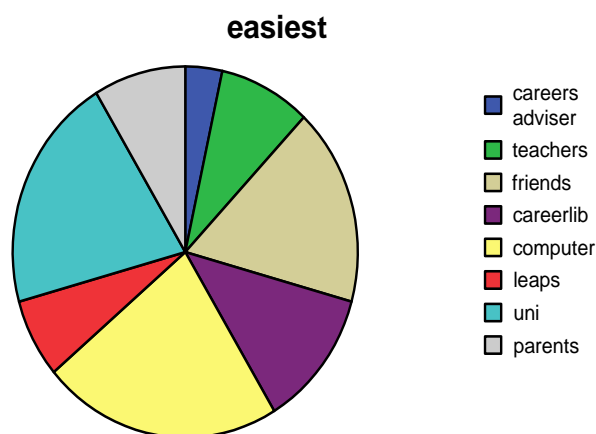


Figure 10: Sources deemed easiest to access by pupils

Pupils were also asked to rate their confidence about going to university and on their course choice. The results are noted in table 3 below.

Table 3: Confidence rated by students on going to university and course choice.

	% Confidence rating				
	Very confident	Confident	A bit confident	Not that confident	Not confident at all
Going to University	10	60	20	10	0
Course choice	40	50	10	0	0

Below are graphs which note the confidence levels of those pupils who had a careers interview or not.

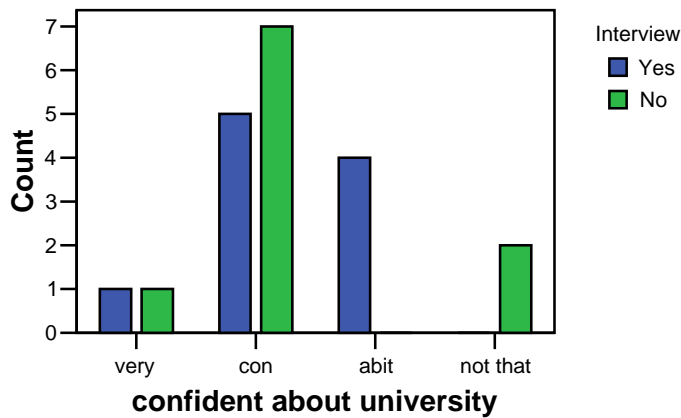


Figure 11: Confidence about going to university for those who had attended a careers interview or not

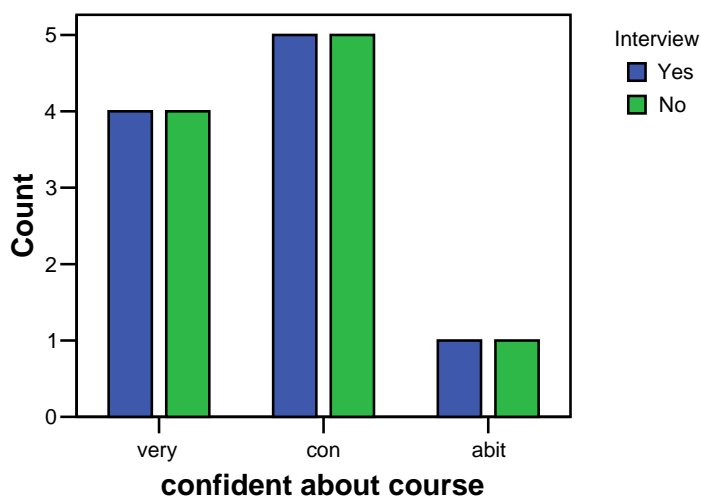


Figure 12: Confidence about course for those who attended a careers interview or not

The confidence levels were also compared for the research carried out by pupils. Below are graphs of these results.

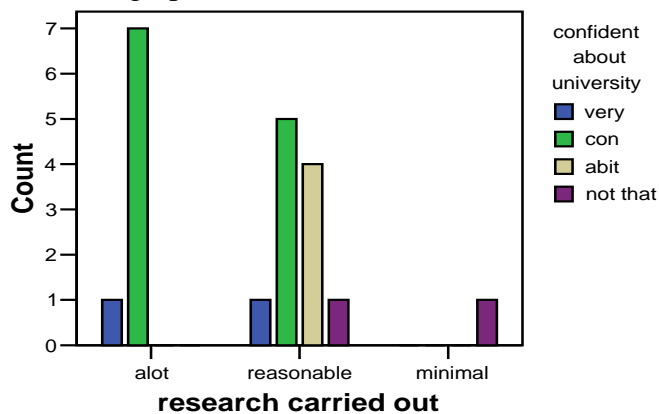


Figure 13: Confidence about university in relation to research carried out

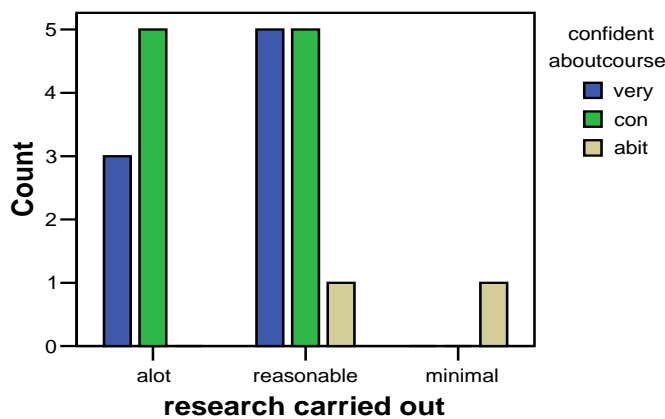
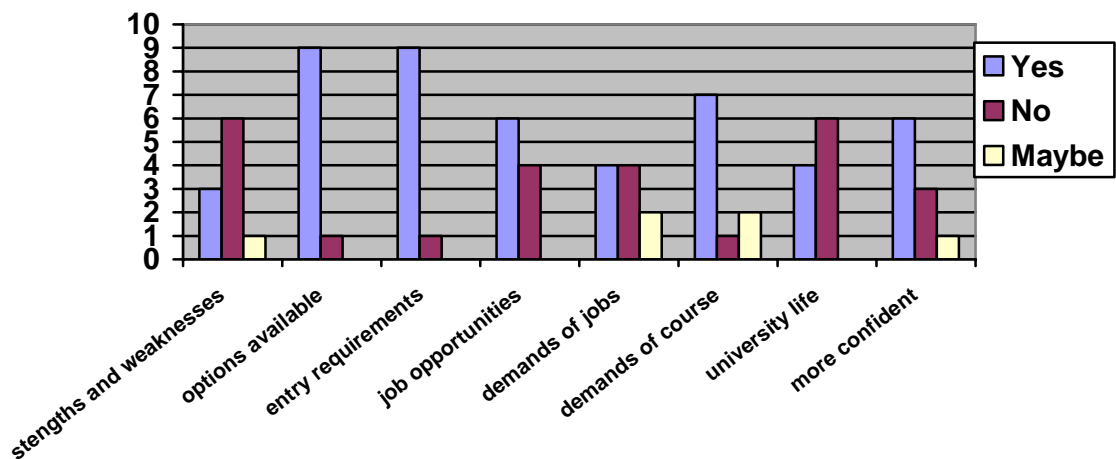


Figure 14: Confidence about course in relation to research carried out

The questionnaire also contained questions to establish what pupils felt about the careers interview process. Out of the 20 pupils who completed questionnaires 10 had attended at least one careers interview. Below is a summary of the results.

Table 4: Summary of rating given by pupils about the career interview they received



Interviewing Career Staff and a teacher involved in the support process

The two careers advisers for Musselburgh Grammar school were interviewed together to find out what support is available to pupils intending on going onto higher education. The careers advisers have not been in post long so a teacher who deals with HE issues was also questioned.

The main points of these interviews are noted below:

- Careers advisers offer career interviews on Mondays and Tuesdays within the school, these interviews can be booked on a self referral basis although the guidance teachers can also request pupils to be interviewed (but careers adviser and guidance staff do not hold a close relationship). A clinic is also offered. The careers adviser noted that most pupils required interview when decisions had to be made in a small time frame.
- Careers advisers offer Career Box sessions to all years of secondary school. The sessions are aimed at each year group as a whole and aims to help pupils understand the career planning process. This is a transition year and therefore S5 and 6 pupils were given an introductory session on the services offered by Careers Scotland. The career advisers noted that they used to do HE talks.
- Musselburgh Grammar held a UCAS information night for pupils and parents.
- Careers advisers noted it is hard to target support and not be discriminatory.
- Teacher noted that pupils can need more support than others and LEAPS aims to highlight individual needs.
- Careers advisers felt career guidance is easy for pupils to access.
- During interviews careers advisers will discuss with pupils intending on going onto HE: career options after course, course choice, university life, finance and any issues that the pupil wishes to raise.
- The teacher thought that the school academically prepared students for university. She noted that it would be good to give students more responsibility around school to allow them to be more socially prepared. It was noted that although the school offers opportunity to make pupils more socially prepared not all pupils maximise these opportunities.
- Career advisers noted that they encouraged pupils to undertake their own research and would show them references and encourage open days.
- Pupils are also supported by LEAPS, which has a partnership with Careers Scotland. LEAPS offers all pupils intending on going onto HE interviews, they also offer workshops and a summer school for those worried about entry requirements.
- Some pupils are also involved in Pathways to Professions (Edinburgh scheme for pupils intending studying Law, Medicine or Veterinary Medicine).
- Edinburgh University gives a S6 talk every year (careers advisers concerned over impartiality).
- Careers advisers noted that it is important to support pupils but should not just focus on HE.
- Careers advisers saw drop out rates as 'more of a concern for universities' as they should consider the pupils ability to cope with course especially during clearing. Young people should also make sure they have carried out enough research.

- Careers advisers felt that pupils did not carry out enough research although some are well informed. Many pupils just go with the flow. At school the pupils are given a talk and then told they have to choose between HE and non HE and they are split into different PSE classes. Teachers base the pupils' decision on academic ability and encourage some pupils where to go. The in-between group are a worry to careers advisers.
- The teacher felt enough support was being offered and it is also important if 'pupils are capable of doing some research for themselves if they are to be successful at university.

Discussion

From the results found from Napier University it was clear that retention rates were a big issue for them. The careers service aimed to provide accessible support and they also held specialised roles in retention (retention adviser and student retention project). The careers adviser at Napier noted that some students did not know enough about the course that they were doing and interestingly suggested that private school pupils especially did not know about their courses. Concerns were also raised about the knowledge that students have about university life prior to entry. It was also noted from the data available that drop-out rates are still of concern and that the percentage of drop-outs were slightly higher for young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods, which gives slight support that lower income can be a negative pre-entry attribute to university. The student retention projects 2003/04 report highlighted that many concerns about leaving university were due to uncertainties around the course students were taking. However health problems were also one of the reasons given for considering leaving university. It was also noted that those using the retention service were more likely to be 18 years or younger and hold traditional qualifications.

This research tells us that drop-out rates are still an issue and that problems with the courses taken by students are given as reasons for considering dropping-out. The research also notes what support is provided by the university careers service and that the careers adviser at Napier does have some concerns about some school pupil's readiness and knowledge of university. It was noted that mainly younger students used the retention service which further supports the reasoning for carrying out this study. Interestingly it was those students with traditional qualifications that were more likely to use the retention service which would not be expected by Moffat and Allan's research as they suggest marginal academic achievement to be a negative pre-entry attribute. The findings from Napier therefore note that issues about retention are still current and also supports and contradicts some of the negative pre-entry attributes to HE suggested by Moffat and Allan.

The careers advisers for Musselburgh Grammar saw drop out rates as 'more of a concern for universities' as they thought universities take on pupils during clearing who do not have the ability to cope. Yet, more students interviewed who were considering dropping out from Napier held traditional qualifications.

The results of the questionnaire noted that most pupils were expecting to leave school with 5-6 highers, had an average family income of £15,000-30,000 and had no family history in HE. It was noted that most pupils that had a family history in HE had a careers interview. This suggests that having a family member with a history of HE does not mean that the pupil has enough information or support. It was also noted that the one pupil questioned in the lowest income bracket did not have a careers interview; this may be of concern when considering the research suggesting that lower income participants are more likely to drop-out (Johnston et al 2003, Furlong and Forsyth, 2003, Scottish Executive, 2003). Pupils were almost just as likely to have an interview as not at every Higher level, again noting that all those with negative pre-entry characteristics were not likely to seek out the support.

Most pupils questioned thought that they carried out enough research with only one pupil stating that they carried out minimal research. However, although most pupils felt that the school helped them with skills required for university (which a teacher also agreed with); only 55% agreed that the school provided them with enough information and support. Pupils who had a careers interview noted that they knew more about university life than those who did not have an interview. However, pupils who had not had a careers interview were more likely to agree that they had carried out enough research and that the school had provided enough information and support than those that had an interview. This may be because those pupils who had a careers interview knew more about how much research could be done or they feel most apprehensive about the transition.

The Careers advisers however, felt that pupils did not carry out enough research although some are well informed. They felt decisions were sprung on pupils at school and that the most academic were encouraged to go onto university. This they thought resulted in many pupils just going with the flow and it is this in-between group that are a worry to careers advisers.

The main sources used by pupils were universities, computers, careers advisers, friends and parents respectively. Pupils felt that the easiest sources to access were computers, university and friends with the hardest sources being LEAPS, careers advisers and teachers (although many thought that no sources were hard to access). Careers advisers and LEAPS were deemed hard to access because some pupils felt that the staff were never in school. It is unclear how much pupils know about the interview referral process or times of clinics. The careers advisers are in school two days a week and think that they are easy to access (it should also be noted that Careers Scotland also have information on Higher Education available online).

Friends were used as a main source of information and were felt to be easily accessible. Friends could be viewed in this positive light as many pupils noted that they had friends at university which acted as a good information source. This highlights the point made by Bartley (2004) about the importance of hot information. However, pupils in this study used universities as their main information source even though Bartley noted university talks were not rated highly by pupils they questioned. This may have been because pupils in Bartley's study felt too far away from university compared to the 6th years questioned in this current study.

Pupils seemed to be more confident with course choice at university rather than going to university. It should also be noted that pupils thought that course content was a more important factor in the decision making than university life. Confidence levels for course choice were the same for pupils who had an interview or not. Confidence levels for going to university were lowest for those who did not have a careers interview (although some of those that had a career interview were also low). It was noted that confidence was also lowest for those that had not carried out enough research. This suggests that by becoming more well informed your confidence can increase, the careers interview can result in people becoming well informed. However, those that seek this help may seek it because they are not confident about the process and although their confidence level may increase, due to the starting point it is still deemed as low.

For the pupils that attended a careers interview most pupils thought that they found out about options available, entry requirements and demands of course. Some also thought they knew more about job opportunities, demands of jobs and felt more confident after the process. However, most pupils felt that they did not know more about their strengths and weaknesses or university life. This could be explained with reference to the interview with the careers adviser who noted that pupils come to interviews with rushed decisions to make and the time must be made as effectively as possible hence course choice can take over although the careers adviser does discuss university life if the time is available.

The careers advisers have not been in post long and so good links with the guidance staff are still being established this may raise concerns of those in need of help 'slipping through the net'. The careers advisers felt it is hard to target support and not be discriminatory. However Bartley (2004) felt that schools were in a position to offer targeted support and Careers Scotland offers targeted support for certain programmes that they run (i.e. Work Net). Napier's Student Retention Project have developed a diagnostic tool which aims to highlight those that are at risk of dropping-out in order to provide them with the best support available and have introduced literature to help students i.e. 'What am I doing here anyway' (Johnston 2000). However, it should be noted that there are always exceptions to the rules and just because you are deemed at risk does not mean you will drop-out or just because you are not deemed at risk does not mean that you won't. The evidence found in this study shows how hard it is to note who is at risk or not. Although, Moffat and Allan have found good evidence for their negative pre-entry attributes some attributes are easier to assess than others and some hold evidence against. For instance the careers advisers felt that they could not really assess how confident a person was and the person may not be honest with themselves about their confidence levels. It was also noted by Christie (2004) that poor course choice was more common amongst advantaged backgrounds rather than disadvantaged backgrounds. This counters the idea that students from advantaged background are well-informed decision makers.

Careers advisers noted that this is a transition year and therefore S5 and 6 pupils will be offered more group work sessions in the future. This group work will be delivered from Career Box and although it does not focus on any certain choices (i.e. HE) it aims to make pupils effective career planner. It is thought that it will take time for this product to show the best results. Musselburgh Grammar held a UCAS information night for pupils and parents and has good links with Edinburgh University. Thus the school is aiming to provide support and information for pupils. It was noted that university talks aim to inform pupils and market their university and so the information should not be viewed as completely impartial. The teacher at Musselburgh felt it would be good to give students more responsibility around school to allow them to be more socially prepared for university. Parents were noted to be involved in many of the pupil's decisions to go onto university and were noted to be a source of information for pupils; however the careers advisers noted that some parents can pressure pupils into decisions. Indeed Christie (2004) noted that familial support can be high and students may still make wrong choices about the future.

The teacher and careers adviser both felt enough support was being offered and it is important young people make sure they have carried out enough research for themselves to be successful at university. The careers advisers also noted that

although it is important to support pupils the support should not just focus on HE as pupils should be aware of all options open to them.

Many strategies are in place for wider access (Scottish Executive, 2003, SESWAF, 2004) which perhaps were not considered by Moffat and Allan. The SESWAF aims to help maximise learner's potential and promote and support transitions. Those schools with low progression rates to HE will be one of the targeted groups hence more policies are in place which may help pupils with negative pre-entry attributes be successful in their transition to HE. However, these strategies do not take into account all negative pre-entry attributes such as low confidence and hence these pupils still need the extra support. Widening participation initiatives have been criticised (Johnston, 2003) as they are noted to focus on increasing aspirations without tackling university culture.

Conclusion

The main findings from this research note that students feel less confident about going to university than course choice, they feel that careers advisers are hard to access and most noted that university life is not discussed within the interview. The teacher at Musselburgh Grammar also felt the school could do more to make pupils socially ready for university. Therefore it seems students may benefit from talks from ex-pupils on university life which has been suggested by Bartley (2004) and Moffat and Allan (2004). It is also important that pupils understand how careers advisers can be accessed and make sure that the process seems easy. The role of a careers adviser should also be clarified as the careers adviser may not be perceived to assist with understanding university life. It is also noted that pupils do not think of university life as an important factor in choosing courses and universities. Students need to be aware that courses are 3 to 4 years long and it is important to feel motivated to do the work in this time frame.

There has been support for Moffat and Allan's negative pre-entry attributes. However it is also noted that other pupils who seem less likely to need support could also require it. Diagnostic tests are currently being used at Napier University and could be considered being used within a school setting. This would enable careers advisers to support such pupils earlier and make sure support and decision making does not seem like such a rushed process. However if this is to be done more research would be required and it should also be noted that although some groups are more at risk of dropping out the majority of the group progress without intervention (Johnston, 1999).

It should also be noted that dropping-out may be the best decision for some or could be for reasons outside the control of the careers adviser (i.e. some health problems). Going to university is a very important transition to make and support should be in place at all stages. Although, universities and the government are concerned with drop-out rates it should be noted that rates in Scotland are lower than other countries (Scottish Executive, 2003).

In Moffat and Allan's (2004) paper implications were noted. These were that careers advisers should gather information early (supporting the diagnostic test), schools develop good links with HEIs, career education should focus on 'qualitative information' and careers advisers and schools should encourage pupils to research.

Career advisers noted that they encouraged pupils to undertake their own research and encourage open days. It was also noted that the school was trying to maintain and further develop links with HEIs and 'qualitative information' would be worthwhile. Hence, good support is being offered to pupils although perhaps by targeting support earlier more support could be offered increasing pupils information and confidence.

Limitations of the research

- The research was only carried out in one area and questioned pupils from one school a wider range of research should be carried out before any real conclusions can be made.
- Some of the research may be based on opinion of those interviewed and thus should be treated with caution.
- Pupils questioned are soon to leave school to attend university and therefore may wish to seem ready for the transition. Alternatively, pupils may choose to blame the school and others for any information and support not achieved rather than blame themselves.
- Students may have misinterpreted parts of the questionnaire.
- At the questions asking what sources were easiest of hardest to access there was not an option to say 'none'. If this was available the results found may have been different.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview - University Career Service

What career guidance services are offered at the University?

How well are students aware of the services they can use?

Does the career service target any client groups?

Why?

Do you feel that students have accessed career guidance enough prior to coming to this University?

Do students know enough about:

- The courses they are doing
- Financial implications of studying
- Student life
- The demands of study
- The opportunities open to them on completion
- What employers look for
.....prior to entry

Why do you think this is?

What support is available to students who are considering 'dropping-out' of University?

Appendix 2

Amber Beatson
4 Park Court
Musselburgh
EH21 7HG

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently studying Career Guidance at the University of Strathclyde. Part of this course requires me to complete a research project on issues relating to Career Guidance.

I am examining the Career Guidance need of pupils who are going onto Higher Education and finding out what support is offered to these pupils.

This is a very important issue as more people now attend university and there is no such thing as a 'typical' student anymore. As the student population rises so to does the concern over retention rates.

Research carried out by Moffat and Allan noted that pupils could possess negative pre-entry characteristics, which can put them at risk of dropping out of university. It was noted that such pupils would be more likely therefore to require Career Guidance intervention.

I have visited Napier University to discuss what support is available to students and what reasons students give for dropping out of university.

I would also like to supply 6th years with a questionnaire which considers how they feel about the transition to university and what support they used when making their choice.

I would be grateful if you would support my research and allow me to distribute questionnaires to the appropriate pupils.

Yours truly,

Amber Beatson

Appendix 3

Dear Student,

Firstly thank you very much for filling in this questionnaire.

I am currently studying Career Guidance at the University of Strathclyde and am required to complete a research project on issues relating to Career Guidance. This questionnaire examines how pupils feel about moving onto university, what support pupils use when making their choice and what they think of this support.

All responses to the questions will be used for research purposes only and all questionnaires are anonymous. Please be as open and honest as possible in order for the findings to be worthwhile.

If any help is needed when completing the questionnaire please inform a teacher.

Thank you again for your assistance.

Yours truly,

A Beatson

Amber Beatson

NOTE: LEAPS is referred to within the questionnaire this stands for:
Lothian Equal Access Programme for Schools

Questionnaire on pupils intending to go onto university and the support they receive

Research for decision

1. Did you have an interview with a careers adviser regarding your decision?

10/20 said yes

*please circle appropriate

2. If YES:

a) Did you know more about your strengths and weaknesses after the interview?

YES

3

NO

6

Maybe

1

b) Did you know more about options available to you?

YES

9

NO

1

Maybe

c) Did you find out about entry requirements?

YES

9

NO

1

Maybe

d) Did you discuss job opportunities available after course(s) considered?

YES

6

NO

4

Maybe

e) Did you know more about the demands of the jobs considered?

YES

4

NO

4

Maybe

2

f) Did you know more about the demands of the course considered?

YES

7

NO

1

Maybe

2

g) Did you know more about university life?

YES

4

NO

6

Maybe

h) Were you more confident about going to university after the interview?

YES

6

NO

3

Maybe

1

i) Was there any area not discussed which you would have liked to discuss?

___ One person said UCAS forms

3. IF NO to question 10 please state why:

Some said they already knew what they wanted to do

4. What (other) information sources did you use?

Parents	<input type="text" value="*"/>	Teachers	<input type="text"/>	Friends	<input type="text" value="*"/>
Careers Library	<input type="text"/>	Computer	<input type="text" value="*"/>	LEAPS	<input type="text"/>
University	<input type="text"/>	Other	_____ *please specify		

5. "I have carried out enough research on my Higher Education course choice."

AGREE / DISAGREE ***80% AGREED**

6. "My school has helped me gain the skills needed for university"

AGREE / DISAGREE ***85% AGREED**

7. "My school has provided me with good information and support about going to university"

AGREE / DISAGREE ***55% AGREED**

8. "My family have been involved in my decision to go to university"

YES / NO ***65% said YES**

9. How long have you considered going to university?

____ few years _____

10. How much research did you carry out?

A lot	<input type="text" value="8"/>	Reasonable Amount	<input type="text" value="11"/>	Minimal	<input type="text" value="1"/>
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11. Did you attend a university open day?

YES / NO ***95% YES**

12. What information sources were easiest to access?

Careers Adviser	<input type="text"/>	Teachers	<input type="text"/>	Friends	<input type="text" value="*"/>
Careers Library	<input type="text"/>	Computer	<input type="text" value="*"/>	LEAPS	<input type="text"/>
University	<input type="text" value="*"/>	Parents	<input type="text"/>	Other	<input type="text"/>

Why?

13. What information sources were hardest to access?

Careers Adviser	<input type="text" value="*"/>	Teachers	<input type="text" value="*"/>	Friends	<input type="text"/>
Careers Library	<input type="text"/>	Computer	<input type="text"/>	LEAPS	<input type="text" value="*"/>
University	<input type="text"/>	Parents	<input type="text"/>	Other	<input type="text"/>

Why?

_____NONE also noted

14. What support do you think is available at university for you?

Careers Adviser	<input type="text"/>	Tutor	<input type="text"/>	Friends	<input type="text"/>
Financial	<input type="text"/>	Parent	<input type="text"/>	Other _____	

15. What 3 factors were most important when picking a university course?

Finance	<input type="text" value="4"/>	Travel	<input type="text" value="2"/>	University	<input type="text" value="11"/>
University Life	<input type="text" value="5"/>	Interests	<input type="text" value="9"/>	Career Opportunities	<input type="text" value="10"/>
Entry Requirements	<input type="text" value="10"/>	Parents	<input type="text" value="0"/>	Course Content	<input type="text" value="14"/>

Other _____*please specify

Information About You

16. Sex Male / Female

17. Age 17/18

18. How many Highers do you expect to leave school with?

3-4

5-6

More than 6

19. Have any of your family members attended Higher Education?

YES / NO

***20% said YES**

If YES then please tick who:

Mum Dad Brother

Sister Carer Other

Please specify Other: _____

If NO then do you know anyone who has attended or is attending university?

Please specify: 95% knew someone at university _____

20. What income bracket do you feel best fits your family?

0-15,000 15-30,00 30,000 +

21. How confident do you feel about going to university?

Very Confident 10%	Confident 60%	A bit confident 20%	Not that confident 10%	Not confident at all
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*Please circle appropriate

22. How confident do you feel about your course choice at university?

Very Confident 40%	Confident 50%	A bit confident 10%	Not that confident	Not confident at all
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*Please circle appropriate

23. How much do you know about university life?

A lot	<input type="text" value="4"/>	A bit	<input type="text" value="14"/>	Nothing	<input type="text" value="2"/>
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24. What do you think students spend most of their time doing?

Attending Classes	<input type="text" value="12"/>	Drinking	<input type="text" value="7"/>	Doing Research	<input type="text" value="8"/>
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Working Alone	<input type="text" value="7"/>	Other: One noted attend placements*	
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25. COMMENTS (please supply any comments you feel will be useful):

NONE

Appendix 4

Questions for Careers Advisers

1. What guidance support do you offer pupils intending on going onto HE?
2. Should support be targeted? Explain.
3. Do you think careers guidance is easy for pupils to access?
4. Do you discuss 'student life' during interviews? Do you assess confidence?
5. Do you encourage pupils to research? How do you achieve this?
6. How are you connected to LEAPS?
7. What do you think about drop-out rates at university?
8. Can more support be offered to pupils? If so what?
9. Do you think pupils carry out enough research into HE?

Questions for teacher

1. What guidance support does the school offer to pupils intending on going onto HE? (Consider social education, visits arranged through school etc).
2. Do you think some pupils are in need of more support than others? If so how is this provided?
3. Do you think the school prepares pupils for university and student life? (Consider academically and socially)
4. Does the school have any links with HE institutions? If so what are they?
5. How is your school connected to LEAPS and what do they offer the school?
6. Do you think enough support is offered? If not how can it be improved?