

How Can Universities Prevent Working-Class Students from Withdrawing from Their Degrees?

References

1. Quinn, J. 2004. Understanding Working-Class' Drop-Out' from Higher Education Through A Sociocultural Lens: Cultural Narratives And Local Contexts. *International Studies In Sociology Of Education*, 14, 57-74.
2. Cotton, D. R., Nash, T. & Kneale, P. 2017. Supporting The Retention Of Non-Traditional Students In Higher Education Using A Resilience Framework. *European Educational Research Journal*, 16, 62-79.
3. Newman-Ford, L., Lloyd, S. and Thomas, S., 2010. Impacts of a bursary and attendance monitoring on the retention of widening participation students during the early years of Engineering, Technology and Mathematics degree programmes. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 12(1), pp.30-54.
4. Carson, T., 2010. Overcoming student hardship at Swinburne University, Australia: an insight into the impact of equity scholarships on financially disadvantaged university students. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 12(3), pp.36-59.
5. Harrison, N. and Hatt, S., 2012. Expensive and failing? The role of student bursaries in widening participation and fair access in England. *Studies in Higher Education*, 37(6), pp.695-712.
6. Bradley, H. 2017. 'Should I Stay Or Should I Go?': Dilemmas And Decisions Among Uk Undergraduates. *European Educational Research Journal*, 16, 30-44
7. Owens, J. 2009. Student Withdrawal From Higher Education. Wales: Welsh Assembly Government.
8. Thomas, L., 2002. Student retention in higher education: the role of institutional habitus. *Journal of education policy*, 17(4), pp.423-442.
9. Archer, L. and Hutchings, M., 2000. 'Bettering Yourself'? Discourses of risk, cost and benefit in ethnically diverse, young working-class non-participants' constructions of higher education. *British journal of sociology of education*, 21(4), pp.555-574.
10. Stephens, N. & Townsend, S. 2019. The Unseen Reason Working-Class Students Drop Out Politico.

1. Introduction

- Statistical analysis of the probability of withdrawal for UK university students indicated that non-completion was **more probable** for students from **low-ranked occupationally defined social classes** (Quinn, 2004)
- Archer and Hutchings (2000) argued that widening participation discourse was only concerned with the 'desire to participate' and universities' recruitment strategies, rather than addressing the 'ability to participate' once at university

2. Background

- Efforts from universities to retain working-class students include **scholarships, bursaries, peer mentors and additional support** (Cotton et al., 2017)
- Evidence of the effectiveness of different approaches is limited, although some research suggests that **combining financial support with close monitoring of educational engagement** can help reduce withdrawals (Newman-Ford et al., 2010).
- Bursaries alone have been found to **enhance retention** of low-income students (Carson, 2010; Harrison and Hatt, 2012)
- Although Harrison and Hatt (2012) found that students feeling **socially comfortable** at their institution was more important than the bursary's financial incentive

3. Reasons for Withdrawal

Difficulties adjusting to the middle-class culture of universities and pressurised academic demands are compounded for working-class students by money worries, need for term-time working and isolation caused by resulting inability to participate in extra-curricular activities (Bradley, 2017)

- **Lack of cultural capital** – Working-class students may be **less prepared and less able to cope** with both the learning and social aspects of higher education than those from family backgrounds where there is prior knowledge and experience of university life, leaving them without a roadmap to completion (Owens, 2009)
- **Feelings of not belonging** – Middle-class students are more likely to have already experienced separation from family at boarding school, travelling abroad or on exchange visits. The **strength of attachment to family** was a more general theme among working-class students who may feel alienated at university (Bradley, 2017).
- **Feeling overworked** – Working-class students to cite "workloads, class size and stress related to the demands of the programme" as reasons for withdrawal as well as time consumed from **part-time work** (Owens, 2009)

4. What Can Institutions Do?

1 Social capital – Students are more likely to remain if they have support from social networks and contacts with **similar values**. Thomas (2002) refers to "academic, social and cultural inclusiveness" as requirements for students to feel that they fit in

2 Targeted support – Data suggests that **supportive tutors** can help students develop the resilience required for successful completion regardless of social and cultural capital (Cotton et al., 2017)

3 Financial support – **Financial anxiety** from daily expenses can lead to working-class students withdrawing, therefore financial support should be provided (Cotton et al., 2017)

4 Changes in pedagogy – In research led by Andrea Dittmann, students that **work together interdependently** on a problem-solving task can lead groups of working-class students to outperform groups of their socioeconomically advantaged peers (Stephens and Townsend, 2019)

5 Universities should therefore emphasise the value of working in groups; promote a community of peers who can navigate higher education together; and connect all working-class students to the support of advisors or mentors to support them on their journey through higher education