



Pupil and Parent Voice

NFER Pupil Voice April 2012

Survey of students about university entrance

The Sutton Trust

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Introduction

In response to the increase in university fees in the UK from 2012, the Independent Commission on Fees has been established to monitor the impact over the next three years. NFER, on behalf of the Commission, surveyed pupils in years 10-13 about their aspirations and plans for Higher Education. We were particularly interested in finding out:

- whether students were likely to apply to go to university and the reasons for their choices
- which universities they were thinking of applying to and the reasons for their choices.

This report provides an analysis of the responses to the questions, along with supporting information about the survey. Results are presented by year group where appropriate.

This report forms one part of the output from the NFER Pupil Voice survey. The analysis is also presented and given in more detail in a set of interactive web-based tables produced separately (in Pulsar Web).

Analysis of findings

The sample

A sample of 1032 students completed the survey. The sample included students from a wide range of Government Office Regions, and information on Social Grade and Annual Household Income was collected. Sample numbers were sufficient to allow for comparisons between year groups. Detailed information about the sample is given in the supplementary section of this report.

Background of those surveyed

The first questions in the Pupil Voice survey asked students about their school year, the type of school or college they attended and whether one of their parents or carers had been to university. This data is presented in Tables 1 to 3.

The sample of 1032 students was split evenly across the four year groups with 512 learners in key stage 4 (years 10 and 11) and 520 in the sixth form (years 12 and 13).

Table 1. What year are you in at school/college?

	All (N)
Year 10	258
Year 11	254
Year 12	260
Year 13	260
Local base (N)	1032

Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.

As Table 2 shows, most (83 per cent) respondents were in non-selective state schools or colleges. Around a fifth (18 per cent) of students attended a college; while fewer than one in ten attended a grammar school or private/independent school (9 per cent and 8 per cent respectively). The percentage of students in each year in fee-paying schools and in non-fee paying grammar schools represented less than ten per cent of the sample in each year. The single biggest group in fee-paying or selective schools were year 13 students in grammar schools (13 per cent). Around half the year 12 and 13 students (52 per cent of year 12 students and 44 per cent of year 13 students) were in school sixth forms while around a third of the sample in those years were at college.

Table 2. What type of school/college are you at?

	All	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
Private/independent (fee-paying school)	8%	6%	6%	9%	9%
Comprehensive or secondary school (non-fee paying)	65%	84%	82%	52%	44%
Grammar (non-fee paying school that selects pupils on ability)	9%	8%	8%	8%	13%
College (non-fee paying)	18%	2%	3%	32%	34%
Local base (N)	1022	254	250	260	258

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*

As Table 3 shows, more than half of the sample (55 per cent) said that not one of their parents or carers had studied at university. There were fairly minor differences in the responses by year group. The lowest proportion of students with a parent or carer who had been to university (40 per cent) was in year 11. The proportion of students reporting that a parent or carer had been to university was highest among year 13 students.

Table 3. Have either of your parents (or your carers) studied at university?

	All	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
Yes	44%	42%	40%	46%	48%
No	55%	57%	60%	53%	50%
Don't know	2%	1%	<1%	2%	2%
Local base (N)	1020	256	250	257	257

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*

Future intentions

We asked students in years 10, 11 and 12 whether they were likely to apply to go to a university in the UK. We also asked year 13 students whether they had applied to go to university in the UK. We then asked the year 12 students who said that they were fairly or very unlikely to attend university, along with the year 13 students who had not applied to go to university in the UK, for their main reasons. We asked them to select three of 14 possible responses about why they might not want to do so. We then asked these two sub-groups of students what they were planning to do instead of attending university in the UK. Finally, we asked all 1032 students about the extent to which the increase in tuition fees had influenced their choices.

Table 4 includes the responses to the question of how likely were students to go to university in the UK. Almost three quarters of students (74 per cent) said they were very or fairly likely to apply to a UK university, while ten per cent were undecided. Eight per cent of the sample said they were fairly unlikely to apply, and the same proportion said that they were very likely to apply. The percentage of students who said that they were likely to apply for university was highest among year 12 students (80 per cent). More than half (54 per cent) said that they were very likely to do so and a further quarter (26 per cent) said they were fairly likely. The percentage who said they were unlikely to apply was highest among year 11 students (11 per cent) while year 10 students were, by a very small margin, proportionally most likely to be undecided.

Table 4. How likely are you to apply to go to a university in the UK?

	All	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Very likely	44%	39%	39%	54%
Fairly likely	30%	35%	30%	26%
Fairly unlikely	8%	7%	11%	7%
Very unlikely	8%	7%	11%	7%
Not sure either way yet	10%	12%	9%	9%
Local base (N)	772	258	254	260

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
 This question was filtered through to year 10, 11 and 12 students only.
 Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*

Table 5 shows that that more than three quarters (77 per cent) of the year 13 students had applied to go to university in the UK.

Table 5. Have you applied to go to a university in the UK?

	Year 13 students
Yes	77%
No	23%
Local base (N)	260

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
 This question was filtered through to year13 students only.
 Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*

We asked the years 10 - 12 students who said that they were fairly or very unlikely to attend university and year 13 students who had not applied to go to university in the UK to select from a given list the three main reasons why they made that decision. The 182 responses from these students are shown in Table 6. Due to the small number of respondents in Table 6, the results should be treated with caution.

Table 6. Please select the main reasons why you are unlikely to go to university in the UK (select up to three)? (N)

	All	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
I am put off by the tuition fees charged by universities in the UK	74	16	15	16	27
I am put off by the overall cost of going to university in the UK (tuition fees, living cost etc.)	71	12	21	16	22
My family can't/won't support me financially to be a student	32	11	8	7	6
I have decided to do something else before applying to university in the UK	18	1	4	1	12
I have decided to do something else that does not involve going to university in the UK	28	3	12	6	7
I would rather have a job/career instead of going to university	50	14	16	12	8
I don't think going to university improves your chances of getting a good job	18	1	5	4	8
I don't think my exam results would be good enough	34	9	15	6	4
I am put off by the number of years I would need to be at university	9	2	1	3	3
Studying at university does not appeal to me	23	5	8	3	7
University life does not appeal to me	17	4	6	2	5
I don't know enough about university	1	0	1	0	0
None of my friends or family members have applied/ been to university	3	0	3	0	0
Nobody has encouraged me to think about applying	4	0	2	1	1
Other (please give details below)	14	1	2	3	8
Local base (N)	182	35	54	35	58

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

As a multiple response question, pupils could tick more than one option (up to three).

This question was filtered and therefore numbers of students completing may be low. Therefore the numbers of pupils shown should be taken with caution.

Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.

The five most frequently cited reasons were:

- I am put off by the tuition fees charged by universities in the UK (41 per cent selected this option)
- I am put off by the overall cost of going to university in the UK (tuition fees, living cost etc.) (39 per cent)
- I would rather have a job/career instead of going to university (28 per cent)
- I don't think my exam results would be good enough (19 per cent)
- My family can't/won't support me financially to be a student (18 per cent).

It is notable that three of the top five reasons for not applying to university in the UK relate to the financial cost involved.

The sample is too small for conclusions to be drawn about the different perceptions of each age group, so we have not reported on the sub-group analysis.

We then asked students who said they were unlikely to go to university what they were planning to do instead (Table 7). Of the 183 who responded, 59 said they planned to get a paid job while 52 said they planned to study at a college. A total of 35 students said they planned to do an apprenticeship or work-based training.

Table 7. What are you planning to do instead of going to university in the UK?

	All	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
Get a paid job	32%	46%	13%	49%	32%
Get an unpaid job/work experience	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Study at college	28%	29%	37%	20%	25%
Do an apprenticeship or work based training	19%	20%	32%	11%	12%
Study abroad	3%	0%	6%	3%	3%
Travel	3%	0%	2%	0%	7%
I am not sure/ No plans	12%	6%	11%	11%	15%
Other (please give details below)	2%	0%	0%	6%	3%
Local base (N)	183	35	54	35	59

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

This question was filtered and therefore numbers of students completing may be low. Therefore the percentages should be taken with caution.

Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.

More than half of all students (59 per cent) said that the increase in tuition fees had influenced their decision whether to go to university in the UK. However, more than a quarter (29 per cent) said that it had not influenced them. This percentage was highest (63 per cent) among year 13 students but it was not much higher than any other year group. Younger students were proportionally more likely to indicate that they did not know how the increase would affect them.

Table 8. To what extent has the increase in university tuition fees in 2012 influenced your decision to apply to a university in the UK?

	All	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
To a great extent	22%	21%	21%	20%	24%
To some extent	37%	40%	33%	38%	39%
It has not influenced my decision at all	29%	21%	31%	31%	33%
I am not sure how the increase will affect me	11%	18%	13%	10%	4%
I did not know about this increase	1%	<1%	2%	1%	0%
Local base (N)	1025	256	252	258	259

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*

Choice of courses and institutions

We asked respondents about their choice of courses and universities. We asked all students who said they were fairly likely or very likely to go to university what subjects they were hoping to study. We asked year 13 students whether they had considered applying to Oxbridge (and if they had actually done so), and any of two groups of universities specified by the Sutton Trust. We also asked year 10-12 students who had indicated that they were very or fairly likely to apply to attend university in the UK about their *intentions* with regard to these choices, including whether they intended to study at Oxbridge; and the main factors that would influence which universities they applied to.

We asked students who said they were very or fairly likely to go to university what subjects they wanted to do. This data is shown in Table 9. No subject included in the selection drew more than ten per cent of respondents but the most popular choices were:

- Biological Sciences (10 per cent)
- Medicine and Dentistry (8 per cent)
- Mathematical and Computer Sciences (7 per cent)
- Law (7 per cent)
- Creative Arts and Design (7 per cent).

There was a fairly consistent pattern in the choices across all year groups.

Table 9. Which of the following subjects/subject areas are you hoping to study at university?

	All	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
Medicine & Dentistry	8%	9%	5%	10%	10%
Subjects allied to Medicine (includes for example Nutrition, Pharmacology)	5%	3%	6%	5%	6%
Biological Sciences (includes for example, Biology, Genetics, Psychology)	10%	7%	12%	9%	12%
Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture & related subjects	3%	5%	2%	2%	5%
Physical Sciences	5%	8%	3%	4%	3%
Mathematical & Computer Sciences	7%	6%	7%	8%	6%
Engineering	5%	5%	6%	3%	5%
Technologies)including for example Metallurgy, Polymers, Ceramics)	1%	2%	1%	1%	0%
Architecture, Building & Planning	2%	2%	3%	3%	0%
Social Studies (includes for example Economics, Politics, Sociology)	6%	3%	5%	7%	9%
Law	7%	6%	7%	6%	9%
Business & Administrative studies (includes for example Business Studies, Accounting, Marketing)	6%	4%	7%	7%	6%
Mass Communications and Documentation (includes for examples Media Studies, Journalism)	2%	1%	2%	1%	5%
Linguistics, Classics & related subjects	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%
European Languages, Literature & related subjects	2%	1%	2%	1%	6%
Non-European Languages and related subjects	<1%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Historical & Philosophical studies (includes Archaeology and Theology)	2%	1%	2%	2%	4%
Creative Arts & Design (includes for example Music, Dance, 4Dance, Fine Art)	7%	8%	7%	9%	6%
Education	4%	5%	4%	2%	5%
More than one subject/combined course	2%	2%	3%	3%	2%
I'm not sure what I am going to study	8%	13%	9%	11%	0%
My subjects is not listed	7%	7%	5%	8%	6%
Local base (N)	767	190	176	200	201

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

This question was filtered and therefore numbers of students completing may be low. Therefore the percentages should be taken with caution.

Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.

We asked all year 13 students who had applied to university in the UK whether they had considered applying to Oxbridge. Table 10 shows that two fifths (41 per cent) of them said they had at least considered applying to Oxford or Cambridge University, but only 16 per cent had actually made an application. More than half (59 per cent) had not considered applying.

Table 10. Did you consider applying to Oxford or Cambridge University?

	Year 13 students only
Yes I applied	16%
Yes but I did not apply	25%
No	59%
Local base (N)	198

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

This question was filtered through to year 13 students only.

Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.

We asked year 13 students who had applied to a UK university to identify whether they had applied for the 11 named universities listed in Table 11. As the table shows, more than a third (37 per cent) had not applied for any of those listed. The three universities to which the highest percentage of the sample had applied were Bristol (20 per cent), Birmingham (19 per cent), and Nottingham (18 per cent). No more than 12 per cent of the sample had applied to any of the other universities. Looking at applications to Scottish universities, only one per cent of the sample had applied to St Andrew's University but nine per cent had applied to study at Edinburgh University.

Table 11. Which, if any, of the following universities have you applied to?

	Year 13 students only
Birmingham	19%
Bristol	20%
Durham	11%
Edinburgh	9%
Imperial College	8%
London School of Economics (LSE)	6%
Nottingham	18%
St Andrew's	1%
University College London (UCL)	12%
Warwick	10%
York	10%
None of the above	37%
Local base (N)	200

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

This question was filtered through to year 13 students only.

Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.

We also asked the sub-group of year 13 students who had applied to a UK university whether they had applied to a different selection of the 17 universities listed in Table 12.

This table shows that a quarter of the sample had not applied to any of those universities. The universities to which the highest percentage of students had applied were Manchester (18 per cent), Leeds (17 per cent), Sheffield (17 per cent), and Liverpool (16 per cent). The least cited was the University of Strathclyde, to which no-one had applied.

Table 12. Which, if any, of the following universities have you applied to?

	Year 13 students only
Bath	11%
Cardiff	10%
Exeter	10%
Glasgow	6%
King's College London	9%
Lancaster	5%
Leeds	17%
Leicester	7%
Liverpool	16%
Manchester	18%
Newcastle	9%
Reading	8%
Royal Holloway, London	6%
Sheffield	17%
Southampton	9%
Strathclyde	0%
Surrey	6%
None of the above	24%
Local base (N)	200

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
 This question was filtered through to year13 students only.
 Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*

As Table 13 shows, a quarter of the year 12 students who said that they were very or fairly likely to apply to university, indicated they were considering applying to Oxford or Cambridge University. This was a lower percentage than those in year 13 who had applied or considered applying (41 per cent) but higher than the percentage of year 13 students who had actually applied (16 per cent).

Table 13. Are you considering applying to Oxford or Cambridge University?

	Year 12 students only
Yes	25%
No	75%
Local base (N)	194

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
This question was filtered through to year 12 students only.
Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*

We asked year 12 students who had applied to a UK university to identify whether they had applied for the 11 universities listed in Table 14. Of this sub-group of year 12 students who said that they were very or fairly likely to apply to university, the highest number indicated that they were considering applying to Nottingham (23 per cent), Bristol (19 per cent), Durham (19 per cent), University College London (18 per cent) and Warwick (17 per cent). Less than 10 per cent indicated they were considering applying to Edinburgh, the London School of Economics (LSE), or St Andrew's.

Table 14. Thinking about the five choices you can make when applying to university, which, if any, of the following are you considering applying to?

	Year 12 students only
Birmingham	16%
Bristol	19%
Durham	19%
Edinburgh	6%
Imperial College	10%
London School of Economics (LSE)	8%
Nottingham	23%
St Andrew's	7%
University College London (UCL)	18%
Warwick	17%
York	15%
None of the above	17%
Don't know yet if I will apply to any of the above	24%
Local base (N)	200

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
This question was filtered through to year 12 students only.
Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*

We also asked the sub-group of year 12 students who had applied to a UK university whether they had applied to a different selection of the 17 universities listed in Table 14. The highest percentages indicated they were considering applying to Manchester (21 per cent), Leeds (18 per cent), and Liverpool (16 per cent). An equal percentage (15 per cent) were thinking of applying to King’s College London and Sheffield. The least popular were the universities of Glasgow (2 per cent) and Strathclyde (1 per cent).

Table 15. Thinking about the five choices you can make when applying to university, which, if any, of the following are you considering applying to?

	Year 12 students only
Bath	11%
Cardiff	10%
Exeter	13%
Glasgow	2%
King’s College London	15%
Lancaster	8%
Leeds	18%
Leicester	5%
Liverpool	16%
Manchester	21%
Newcastle	10%
Reading	8%
Royal Holloway, London	6%
Sheffield	15%
Southampton	13%
Strathclyde	1%
Surrey	5%
None of the above	6%
Don’t know yet if I will apply to any of the above	22%
Local base (N)	201

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
This question was filtered through to year 12 students only.
Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*

Finally, we asked those year 10 and year 11 students who had said that they were very or fairly likely to apply to go to university in the UK to choose up to three of the main factors that will influence which universities they apply to, from the list given in Table 16. The table shows that three issues were foremost in the minds of these year 10 and year 11 students when they thought about possible future university choices. These were the reputation of a university (55 per cent), overall cost of studying there [tuition fees, living costs etc] (38 per cent) and subjects offered (34 per cent). Other factors chosen by more than a fifth of respondents were tuition fees, course content and physical location of the university. The least frequently selected factors were ‘I want to go where my friends go’ (2 per cent), ‘social life’ (3 per cent) and ‘I want to live away from home’ (4 per cent).

Table 16. What are the main factors that will influence which university you apply to?

	All	Year 10	Year 11
Reputation of the university	55%	54%	57%
Type of university	13%	9%	16%
Tuition fees	26%	29%	22%
Overall cost of studying there (tuition fees, living costs etc)	38%	39%	36%
Opportunities for part-time work whilst studying	10%	9%	11%
Reputation of the course	24%	25%	23%
Subjects offered	34%	31%	37%
Course content	21%	22%	21%
Location (for example, town, country, seaside)	21%	20%	21%
I want to live at home	11%	10%	11%
I want to live away from home	4%	3%	4%
Accommodation arrangements	5%	6%	4%
Facilities (for example, sports, IT)	5%	7%	3%
Social life	3%	3%	4%
I want to go where my friends go	2%	4%	0%
I don't want to go where my friends go	0%	0%	0%
None of the above	0%	0%	0%
Local base (N)	367	191	176

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

This question was filtered through to year 10 and 11 students only.

Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.

Conclusions and implications for the client

Encouragingly, three quarters of the year 10-12 students surveyed said that they were likely to go to a university in the UK; and a similar proportion of year 13s had applied to do so. This, of course, means that around a quarter of students said that they were unlikely to apply to - or had not applied to - attend university in the UK.

Tuition fees and the overall cost of going to university in the UK issues were by far the most common factors reported by students who said that they were unlikely to go to university and year 13 students who had not applied to one. Six out of ten students in our survey said that the increase in tuition fees had influenced their decision whether or not to apply for university in the UK, at least to some extent. The issues cited most often by year 10 and year 11 students as influencing their thinking about where they might go to university were the reputation of an institution or course and the cost of studying, including tuition fees and other matters such as the cost of living.

Among students who said they were unlikely to apply to - or had not applied to - university in the UK, looking for a paid job or an apprenticeship or work-based training were the most commonly cited plans.

Students who said they were likely to apply to go to university, or had already applied indicated that they want to study abroad spread of subjects at university. The subjects cited most often were Biological Sciences, Medicine and Dentistry, Mathematical and Computer Sciences, Law and Creative Arts and Design.

Two-fifths (41 per cent) of year 13 students who had applied for university had considered applying to Oxford and Cambridge or had considered doing so, but only 16 per cent of them had actually done so. A quarter of year 12 students who wanted to go to university were considering applying to Oxbridge.

Year 13 students who had applied to go to university had applied for a broad spectrum of the universities named in the survey. Bristol, Birmingham and Nottingham in the first selection, and Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Liverpool in the second, were the most popular choices. However, no single university was mentioned by more than 20 per cent of the sample.

The universities cited by the highest percentages of year 12 students who said that they were likely to go to university were Nottingham, Bristol, Durham, University College London and Warwick from the first list and Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool from the second list. No one university was cited by more than 25 per cent of the sample.

Overall, it is clear that cost (including tuition fees and the cost of living) is an important concern for the students surveyed. However, it is also clear that despite these considerations most students thought that they were likely to go to university, or (amongst year 13s) had already applied. The sample intended to apply to a wide spectrum of the universities listed, but although 41 per cent of the year 13s who had applied to a university had considered applying for Oxford or Cambridge, only 16 per cent had done so.

The results suggest some important messages for the Sutton Trust as it seeks to support young people to fulfil their potential irrespective of background. Although we found that tuition fees and the cost of studying at university in the UK were not discouraging the majority of students from applying to university, these issues were influencing the decision on whether to apply to university in the UK for a sizable proportion (61 per cent) of students in the sample. Making sure that students receive accurate information about student finance, and the support available to them, would therefore appear to be important. Investigating the gap between the proportion of students who consider applying to Oxbridge, and that which actually does, continues to be necessary.

Supporting information

How was the survey conducted?

This report provides data from an NFER survey of students conducted in April 2012. The survey was completed by a panel of 1,032 children in years 10-13 who are in school/college/full-time education. The survey was conducted online and students were asked to complete the questionnaire between 16 and 27 April 2012.

What was the composition of the panel?

Information on the composition of the panel and the panel demographics are provided in Table S1 below; including gender, Social Grade, Annual Household Income and Government Office Regions.

Table S1: Panel demographics		% in sample
Gender of parent	Male	37%
	Female	52%
	No response	11%
Year group children	Year 10 (aged 14-15)	25%
	Year 11 (aged 15-16)	25%
	Year 12 (aged 16-17)	25%
	Year 13 (aged 17-18)	25%
Social Grade	A	12%
	B	26%
	C1	30%
	C2	15%
	D	8%
	E	9%
Annual Household Income	Under £10,000	6%
	£10,000 to £19,999	13%
	£20,000 to £29,999	18%
	£30,000 to £39,999	18%
	£40,000 to £49,999	13%
	£50,000 to £59,999	8%
	£60,000 to £69,999	5%
	£70,000 to £79,999	3%
	£80,000 to £89,999	2%
	£90,000 to £99,999	2%
	Above £100,000	3%
Prefer not to answer	9%	
Government Office Region	East Midlands	12%
	East of England	12%
	London	12%
	North East	5%
	North West	13%
	South East	17%
	South West	10%
	West Midlands	11%
	Yorkshire and the Humber	9%

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Source: NFER Pupil Voice Survey April 2012.*