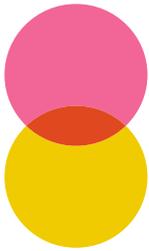


million



leading the
university agenda



SOCIAL
MOBILITY
UNIVERSITIES
CHANGING
LIVES



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Social Mobility: universities changing lives was undertaken by million+ with Matt Rodda who led the research with support from Louise Tilbury. Some of the quantitative elements of the report are based on work undertaken by Sarah Tough and her colleagues at the Institute of Education, University of London. The interpretation and use of this work in the report is that of the authors. This research was carried out in partnership with million+ which exercised final editorial control over the content.

million+ would like to thank Matt Rodda, Louise Tilbury, Sarah Tough, the Institute of Education and the universities which assisted with this project for their help and guidance.

Foreword

As part of its work as a university think-tank, million+ commissioned research to assess the impact of undergraduate degree courses on social mobility at the 28 universities in the UK which subscribe to million+. We believe that the result – *Social mobility: universities changing lives* – is an important contribution to the debate about how higher education and Government can best support and encourage social mobility.

In spite of anecdotal suggestions to the contrary, this report confirms that universities are key drivers of social mobility. This is particularly important because there is clear evidence that there is still a need to promote strategies to support social mobility in the UK. *'Social mobility: universities changing lives'* shows that million+ member universities are playing an outstanding role in encouraging social mobility which benefits hundreds of thousands of people, their families, their communities and the wider UK economy.

This research uses new data for the first time to demonstrate the social mobility generated by these 28 universities. The analysis by the Institute of Education shows significant social mobility by occupation – allowing a large number of graduates from working class families to progress into technical, managerial and professional careers. It also shows that the graduates of these universities are earning significantly more than their peers who did not study for a first degree.

Social mobility: universities changing lives, argues for a broader perspective to be brought to the policy debate about the social mobility created by universities – rather than one focused on encouraging a few thousand high achievers from working class backgrounds accessing a small number of traditional universities. Instead, it makes the case for generating social mobility through transforming the lives of large numbers of students who otherwise would not have gone to university. This approach offers the UK the prospect of more social mobility and in turn greater benefits to both individuals and the economy.

We hope that this report encourages a more sophisticated debate about what social mobility is, what is driving it and how it can best be supported.

In particular, the research makes some key recommendations to policymakers and calls for more people to get the chance to progress by going to university. This will require renewed and sustained efforts to widen participation and will require enhanced investment by Government in university student numbers.

We have been heartened to see the extent to which the degrees obtained by the hundreds and thousands of graduates who studied at the universities which subscribe to million+, helped them change their lives. Above all, we want to pay tribute to the work of these universities: they are helping people from all backgrounds to achieve their ambitions – and they are making Britain a fairer and more cohesive society.



Les Ebdon

Professor Les Ebdon CBE
Chair



Pam Tatlow

Pam Tatlow
Chief Executive

This new analysis confirms that million+ member universities create a substantial amount of social mobility in the UK. This is demonstrated by both a movement in terms of occupations from working class to professional and managerial occupations as defined by the Office of National Statistics and by increased salaries.

This is a positive contribution to social mobility and to social cohesion that should be recognised and reflected in Government policies and funding regimes.

- An analysis of official HESA data shows significant occupational mobility generated by million+ member universities. This is providing large numbers of graduates from working class families the chance to move into professional, managerial and technical careers.
- For example, 8% of graduates from million+ member universities come from professional families – but 17% have similar professional or management careers three and a half years after graduating¹.
- These universities are offering this social mobility on a significant scale. Over half of the UK's higher education students study at million+ member universities and over 3 million people have achieved graduate qualifications through these universities.

- Three and a half years after graduating with a first degree, wages of graduates from million+ member universities surveyed by HESA are likely to be nearly 15% higher than wages of people who have lower qualifications – many of whom could have progressed to university but did not do so.
- This is one of the highest rates of return for UK qualifications².
- million+ member universities provide many degrees with considerable technical content. These include many in subjects like IT, engineering, design and qualifications related to medicine which are in high demand with employers.
- Graduate wages have not fallen despite a growth in supply – indicating a growing demand for graduates from employers³.
- There is considerable evidence to show the wider benefits of degrees from million+ member universities – such as the considerable number of graduates who go into socially vital careers, rather than seeking out the highest paid jobs.
- million+ member universities serve a more diverse group of students, than other institutions. Nearly 60% of black graduates and around 36% of Asian graduates have studied at million+ member universities.
- These universities have a higher proportion of women graduates, more graduates who are older when they go to university and more who have studied part-time.

¹ See notes under Figure 1 for more information on these percentages.

² See for example: Jenkins A, Greenwood C and Vignoles A (2007) 'The Returns to Qualifications in England: Updating the Evidence Base on Level 2 and Level 3 Vocational Qualifications' Paper No. CEEDP0089 London: Centre for the Economics of Education.

³ See: Clark D, Conlon G and Galindo-Rueda F (2005) 'Post-Compulsory Education and Qualification Attainment' in Machin S and Vignoles A (eds) (2005) 'What's the Good of Education?: The Economics of Education in the UK' Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Social mobility is, rightly, the subject of intense political interest among political parties in the UK. The Government has signalled its importance by the publication of a social mobility White Paper, *New Opportunities: fair chances for the future* with a foreword by the Prime Minister and support from ten government departments and the Cabinet Office. The Conservative Party has established the Centre for Social Justice led by former Conservative leader, Iain Duncan Smith MP. The Liberal Democrats launched a Social Mobility Commission which reported in January 2009. Social mobility is therefore not a subject to be ignored: it is at the very heart of the debate about the direction of the UK in the next decade and beyond.

This report uses new survey data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to review the impact upon social mobility of studying at and graduating from the 28 universities in the UK that subscribe to million+. Universities that took part in the research are all 'post-92' institutions providing teaching undergraduate and postgraduate, research and knowledge transfer. They range in size from large universities with more than 25,000 students studying for higher education qualifications to smaller institutions with around 3,000 students. Four of the universities which took part in the study are located in Scotland and the remaining 24 are in England. All of these universities support excellence in teaching and research and access to higher education. Together, they educate the majority of the higher education students in the UK.

This report set out to define social mobility in two ways: first, as the opportunity to progress into higher status occupations – for example, from routine or manual work into professional, managerial and technical careers and second, as the ability of an individual to increase their earnings compared to their peers.

This new analysis by the Institute of Education, used data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency's Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Longitudinal Survey, which surveys graduates of first degrees three and a half years after they graduate from university⁴. As a result, *'Social mobility: universities changing lives'* offers a much better insight into how these 28 universities are an engine for social mobility in the UK.

The two types of social mobility outlined above were measured in the analysis. Occupations were defined using Office for National Statistics guidelines and mobility was established by comparing graduates parents' occupations with their own ones – or, for older students, comparing their occupations before and after going to university. Earnings were defined as a percentage increase on what individuals might have earned if they had lower qualifications.

The evidence suggests that million+ member universities are creating significant social mobility by occupation – allowing a large number of graduates whose parents had manual jobs to take up professional, managerial and technical careers. The analysis shows that these universities offer these benefits to a far more diverse group of students and demonstrates that graduates from million+ universities are earning significantly more than they would if they had not gone to university.

⁴ The Annex gives further details of the DLHE longitudinal and the Labour Force Survey.

- There is a significant amount of occupational mobility generated by the universities which subscribe to million+. Many graduates get the opportunity to move from manual backgrounds into professional and managerial careers.
- 8% of graduates from million+ member universities come from professional families – but 17% have similar professional or managerial careers three and a half years after graduating⁵.
- The diverse population which attends million+ member universities includes a much higher proportion of black and Asian students compared to the average for all UK universities.
- These 28 universities have significantly more women graduates and graduates who have studied later in life – providing opportunities for social mobility which add value in terms of other equality indicators.
- Graduates from these universities earn an average of around £22,000 three and a half years after graduation.
- Three and a half years after graduating, wages of graduates from million+ member universities are likely to be nearly 15% higher than wages of people who have lower qualifications, many of whom could have progressed to university but did not do so.
- The wages of these graduates are likely to be 60% higher than those of people with no qualifications.

⁵ See notes under Figure 1 for more information on these percentages.

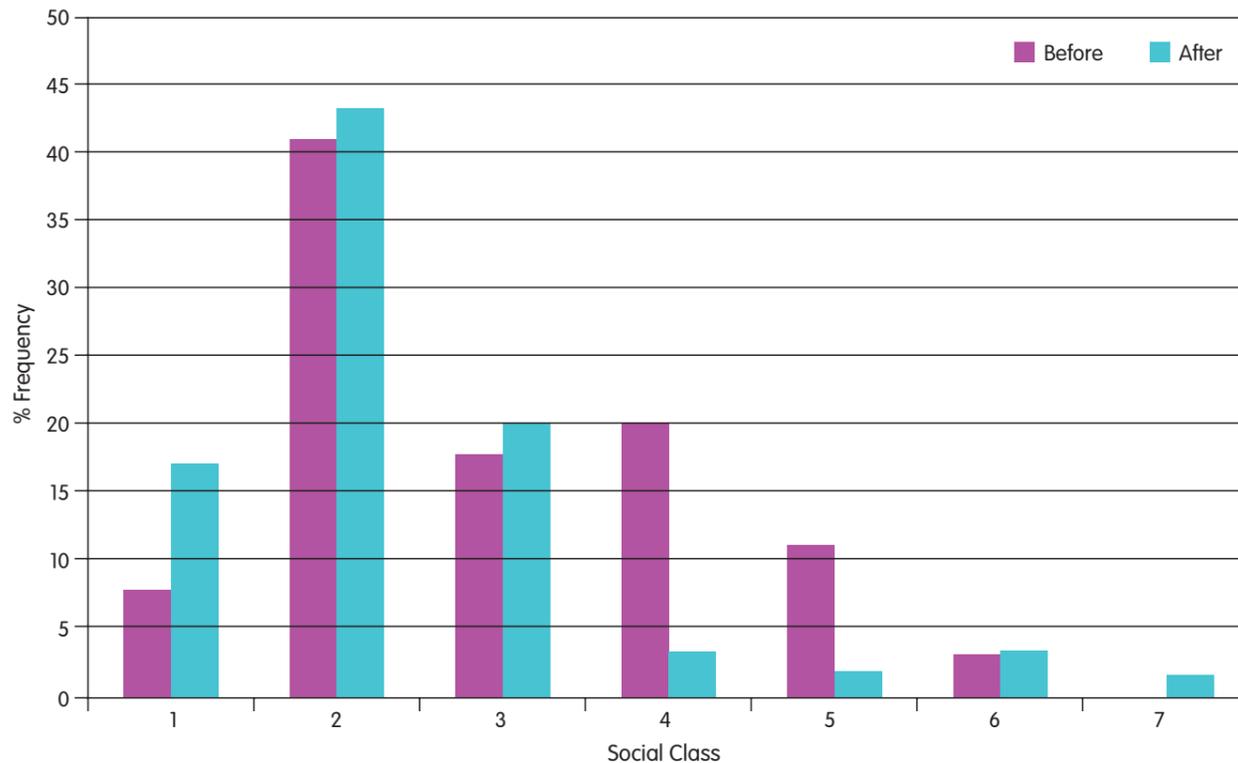
Detailed findings

Moving into professional, managerial and technical occupations

The available data gives a strong indication of the social mobility which is linked to degrees and graduate qualifications obtained as a result of study at million+ member universities.

The data shows an overall shift taking place as graduates move from skilled, partly skilled and unskilled manual backgrounds into managerial and professional careers.

Table 1: Social class before and after graduation from million+ member universities



Data source: DHLE Longitudinal Survey (see Annex for more details on this).

Notes:
 1 The Office of National Statistics definitions of social class changed somewhat while the students studied were at university (see Annex). The original social class definitions were based on the ONS 1990s definitions Group 1 Professional, 2 managerial and technical, 3 skilled non-manual, 4 skilled manual, 5 partly skilled, 6 unskilled. These were amended in 2000: Group 1 higher managerial and professional, 2 lower managerial and professional, 3 intermediate, 4 small employers and own account workers, 5 lower supervisory and technical occupations, 6 semi-routine occupations, 7 routine occupations (not included in 1990s ONS definitions). However, the social class definitions remained similar and the data allowed broad conclusions to be drawn.

2 Data on socio-economic background before and after graduation was only available for approximately 40% of the total number of million+ graduates, whose details were collected by HESA.

Table 1 indicates social class before and after graduation and demonstrates a general shift towards higher social class after graduation. The most advantaged social classes appear at the left of the table (class 1; professionals), the less advantaged on the right (class 6; unskilled).

The HESA survey showed that 8% of students graduating from million+ member universities came from professional families, 41% from managerial or technical ones, 18% had a skilled non manual background, 20% had a skilled manual background, 11% were from families with a partly skilled background and 3% were from an unskilled background.

Three and a half years after graduating this had changed and the percentages of people in the most advantaged groups had increased considerably. The number of graduates in the most advantaged group had more than doubled to 17%, the lower professional and managerial and technical group had increased to 43%, and the intermediate group had increased to 19%. The four lower groups had fallen dramatically to 3%, 2%, 3% and 1% respectively.

The analysis also showed where the new higher managerial or higher professional graduates came from, with the majority moving up one or more group.

Of those in the lower professional or managerial group, about half had moved up from the skilled, partly skilled or unskilled groups.

Increased earnings

The study included students who on entry to university had A-levels and some higher vocational qualifications. The average earnings for graduates from the 28 universities, three and a half years after graduation were £22,000. As with all figures for average graduate earnings, this figure for mean earnings conceals a wider range, although this spread of earnings is typical for graduates. The largest single group of graduates from million+ member universities earned between £20,000 and £22,500 three and a half years after graduating.

The 15% extra earnings for graduates from these universities three and a half years after graduating was calculated using the average earnings from the HESA data, evidence from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and other studies.

The data from HESA, LFS and other studies indicates that the wages of a graduate who had studied at these universities was likely to be over 60% more than those for people with no qualifications at all. It is very likely that the earnings of these graduates will continue to grow significantly as they progress in their careers.

Average returns for graduates typically mask a great deal of variation by subject and degree classification. The research showed that graduate earnings were affected by degree classification with on average 20% more for first class honours, 15% more for upper second class honours and 10% more for lower second class honours, compared to graduates with third class honours degrees.

As with other studies, the subject studied is another key factor which determines earnings.

The research showed that some subjects that are often studied at million+ member universities have some of the highest returns available. For example, analysis showed earnings are 10% higher for subjects related to health, a strength of the universities which subscribe to million+.

Social mobility, ethnicity, gender and age

The analysis also gave a detailed picture of the diversity of the graduates completing degrees from the 28 universities which subscribe to million+. Overall, these universities are educating a more ethnically diverse group of students, a high proportion of women, students who are older and more students who enter university with non-traditional qualifications and go on to study part time.

- Around a quarter of the students graduating from million+ member universities were from ethnic minorities compared to an average for UK institutions of just over 16%. Of this 26% of students from ethnic minority backgrounds, nearly 13% were Asian students while over 6% were black students.
- The average figures for all UK institutions are much lower: Asian students make up just over 8% of the total undergraduate student body and black students make up less than 2.5%. However, these figures do not tell the whole story. Black and Asian students are far more likely to go to these universities than other institutions. Nearly 60% of all black graduates and around 36% of Asian graduates in the HESA survey studied at these 28 universities.
- It is equally significant that nearly two thirds of graduates from million+ member universities are women.
- million+ member universities also have a much larger share of older students. The average age of graduates is 26⁶, a year and a half older than other universities.
- One in eight graduates from the 28 universities studied part time, significantly higher than the average for UK universities.

⁶ Details of graduates were provided in age bands. The average was calculated by using the mean of these bands and the numbers of graduates within each band.

Benefits to graduates

The evidence from the analysis which showed million+ member universities generating significant social mobility is in line with findings from earlier more general research. These show that graduates increase their earnings and get the chance to develop a career that might not otherwise be open to them⁷.

The Dearing Report⁸ highlighted the evidence showing graduates benefiting from increased earnings. Analysis of the Labour Force Survey has shown that graduates enjoy significant wage increases as a result of gaining a degree. Studies using the LFS have found that, on average, returns to degrees are more than double other qualifications.

Earlier surveys by HESA have also shown evidence of increased wages for graduates. However, until recently HESA only collected data on graduates six months after graduation. Policy makers rightly concluded that the six month time frame was too soon to give any meaningful results and this is why information from the survey three and half years after graduation is of importance.

⁷ See for example: Walker I and Zhu Y (2001) 'The returns to education: evidence from the Labour Force Survey,' DfES Research Report No. 313. Available online at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/rr313.pdf>

⁸ Details of graduates were provided in age bands. The average was calculated by using the mean of these bands and the numbers of graduates within each band. The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) Report of the National Committee. (The Dearing Report). Available online at: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/>

Under-represented groups of graduates

If Government is to improve participation in higher education and achieve social mobility by opening up access to university to a broader range of people, it is vital that there is more understanding about the factors (other than attainment) which influence whether or not individuals from under-represented groups progress to university.

Returns to degrees have remained positive overtime despite serious concerns from some analysts that the large increase in the number of graduates in the UK which has taken place would lead to a fall in the higher wage premiums associated with having a degree. In fact, returns (in terms of earnings) rose sharply during the 1980s and remained relatively constant over the 1990s, despite a large increase in the numbers of graduates over this period⁹.

⁹ See: Clark D, Conlon G and Galindo-Rueda F (2005) 'Post-Compulsory Education and Qualification Attainment' in Machin S and Vignoles A (eds) (2005) *What's the Good of Education?: The Economics of Education in the UK* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Some research has looked at the likely returns to groups from lower socio-economic backgrounds¹⁰. While these reports suggest that returns to those from lower socio-economic groups appear to be lower, as Connor suggests that there are likely to be many reasons for this. Reasons include the 'double disadvantage' due to the distribution of these students by institution i.e. students are not evenly distributed throughout the university sector and the targeting in terms of recruitment of graduates from particular traditional institutions. Other reasons include the possible more modest confidence of these students in their own abilities and aspirations and more difficult transitions into the labour market¹¹.

Local university

Finance is also a factor when deciding at which university to study. For example, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds would appear to be more likely to attend a local university. This is likely in part to be related to finance and there are obvious cost savings of living at home whilst studying. However, it could also be due to family and care commitments and the proximity to a wider range of universities for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds as a result of their higher likelihood of living in an urban area. The state of the local (youth) labour market also has an impact on the decision of whether to go to university for younger students.

Perceptions of risk

Other factors which influence decisions about whether to undertake a degree are associated with risk and the confidence of students in their own ability to succeed. It is well known that retention rates vary substantially across different socio-economic groups. This is why retention is

recognised by universities as being important. Retention is more likely to be enhanced by more flexible approaches to study and accreditation but this is not the whole story. Whatever their mode of study, once students are enrolled at university it is clearly integral to the social mobility agenda to ensure that the universities which recruit large numbers of students from lower socio-economic groups are fully funded and resourced to support and enhance the student experience of these students.

This is why funding to support higher education students from lower socio-economic groups while they are studying at university (and not just to encourage them to apply to university) should be a key issue addressed by Government policy and institutional funding priorities.

Other benefits of university

The broader outcomes associated with having a degree may also impact on people's decisions as to whether to go to university. Whilst economic returns are likely to be the main consideration these broader factors are often overlooked but are illustrated in the graduate case-studies which appear in this report.

Research also suggests that some differences in benefits of doing different subjects may be due to the characteristics of some of the students who do those subjects. If a subject is very popular and attracts highly motivated students this may also explain part of the success of this group rather than the subject studied.

This is why analyses which compare graduate earnings across broad subject areas and the university sector as a whole without regard to the entry profile of institutions, risk minimising the benefit to individuals of achieving a graduate qualification.

There is also a danger that information, advice and guidance which relies on over-simplistic comparisons of graduate earnings could act to deter the very applicants who should access university if the aspirations of all political parties in respect of social mobility are to be fulfilled.

Another health warning about part-time data

A further issue with a number of studies is that salary information is only available for those graduates who were in full-time employment. This was the case with *'Social mobility: universities changing lives'*, as HESA was unable to provide data on those employed part-time because of inconsistency in the data it held. Research is therefore again limited in respect of those working part-time after graduation.

Information, advice and guidance

There are clearly many variants in estimating different graduate premium and the complex factors which affect an individual's decision to study at university. Information, advice and guidance for young people and adults based on full-time models of study and simplistic assessments of graduate premium are unlikely to assist in encouraging access and could even be a deterrent unless the broader benefits of graduate qualifications are also promoted. Great care needs to be taken when using generalised or average returns to courses, modes of study or institutions as the basis of IAG. The reasons why students make valid life-style decisions to choose particular universities also need to be better understood and taken into account by information, advice and guidance services. Despite the complexity of the evidence, there is no excuse for prejudices replacing fact and no place for old-fashioned presumptions about the prestige (or otherwise) of universities to be reflected in IAG or promoted more generally.

Benefits to the UK economy

Earlier research has shown there are also considerable economic benefits in creating social mobility through higher education. Studies have seen this in the context of increased global competition, when China and India are producing four million graduates a-year.

The Leitch Report¹², in particular, demonstrated the scale of the challenge facing Britain. Out of 30 OECD countries, the UK was ranked 17 on low skills, 20 on intermediate skills and 11 on high skills. The report projects that, even if current targets were to be met, by 2020 the UK's skills base would be inferior to that of many other developed nations. It argued that a radical step-change was necessary.

The report recommended that the UK Government committed to a compelling new vision – to become a world leader in skills by 2020. It called for more than 40% of adults to be skilled to graduate level and above – up from 29% in 2005. It also pointed out that in 2005, the UK was only just above the OECD average for participation in higher education with approximately a quarter of adults qualified to degree level. America and Canada had 40% qualified to degree level in 2005. Lord Leitch also concluded that if the UK wanted to be a world leader in skills by 2020, universities needed to cater for older people going to university as well as those leaving school or college.

This report confirms that million+ member universities are already leaders in this area, with older students forming a large part of the intake of some institutions. For example, just 4% of students at London South Bank University enter the university as 18-years olds.

However, despite the need to expand participation there is still evidence that more needs to be done to support this – in particular, by offering better support to older students.

¹⁰ Robertson D and Hillman J (1997) 'Widening participation in higher education by students for low socio-economic groups,' Report No. 6 The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing). Blundell R, Dearden L, Goodman A and Reed H (1997) Higher Education, Employment and Earnings in Britain London: Institute of Fiscal Studies.

¹¹ Connor H and Dewson S (2001) 'Social class and HE: Issues affecting decisions about participation by lower social class groups' DfES Research Report No. 267. Davies P and Williams J (2001) For me or not for me? Fragility and risk in mature student decision-making,' Higher Education Quarterly 55 (2) pp. 185-203.

¹² Lord Sandy Leitch (2006) 'Final report in to UK Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills.'

The 2007 million+ report – ‘*Reality Check: Student Finance Regimes*’¹³ – called for a more holistic system and review of the arrangements for supporting part-time students in light of evidence of falling participation rates in favour of full-time students. The fall in part-time enrolments has been confirmed by HESA statistics (HESA 2007/08 Student Enrolments and Qualifications).

It is clear that disincentives to study part-time do not fit easily either with the Leitch policy ambition to target working age candidates for higher education or the social mobility agenda.

Making the right comparison with vocational qualifications

A study¹⁴ of returns to Level 2 and 3 qualifications found that wage increases after completing courses range up to 6% for specific technical sectors. At Level 3 the average returns are stronger at 8%. Many people with Level 3 vocational qualifications go on from these to take a degree at a million+ member institution.

It is therefore very important that Government and policy-makers recognise that these vocational types of qualifications should be a stepping stone to a degree rather than an alternative to it.

Some international comparisons

International comparisons show the importance of continuing to expand provision. Other western countries are expanding participation in higher education in response to global economic changes. A number of other comparable countries have higher participation rates and are spending more per student than the UK¹⁵. In some cases, competitor countries also have higher achieving school systems according to OECD data¹⁶.

However, as *Social mobility: universities changing lives* demonstrates qualifications obtained at school need not be the only determinant of entry to university. Some university admissions policies accommodate pre-entry vocational qualifications, entry via access courses and progression from FE or previous occupations.

The impact of universities – social benefits and social mobility

This research did not set out to specifically explore the impact of universities on the economy but these benefits are analysed in a UUK paper, *The Economic Impact of UK Higher Education Institutions*¹⁷.

However, there are a number of other benefits of increased social mobility generated by universities. One of the most significant is the large number of graduates who choose to work in socially important but less well paid professions.

The huge numbers of graduates who enter fields like teaching, social work, the NHS, the various services of local government and the ‘not-for profit sectors’ make a significant contribution to society. Earlier studies have found this difficult to measure, particularly using a purely economic analysis. However, million+ member universities are making a considerable contribution to this work providing a wide range of degrees in subjects like education, nursing and other health related subjects. These graduates enhance the professionalisation and productivity of the public and not for profit sectors.

There is a considerable body of evidence of the broader effects of learning¹⁸. Bynner and Egerton¹⁹ found a link between participation in higher education and participation in political activities, community affairs and voluntary work.

¹³ London Economics (2007), ‘Economic Intelligence Report on Student Finance Regimes,’ Final Report for Million+.

¹⁴ Jenkins A, Greenwood C and Vignoles A (2007) ‘The Returns to Qualifications in England: Updating the Evidence Base on Level 2 and Level 3 Vocational Qualifications’ Paper No. CEEDP0089 London: Centre for the Economics of Education.

¹⁵ OECD ‘Education at a Glance,’ (2008).

¹⁶ OECD ‘Education at a Glance,’ (2008).

¹⁷ Universities UK (UUK) (2006) ‘The economic impact of UK higher education institutions,’ London: UUK.

¹⁸ See the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning for more on this: <http://www.learningbenefits.net/>

¹⁹ Bynner J and Egerton M (2001) ‘The wider benefits of higher education’ Report by the Institute of Education, University of London, sponsored by the HEFCE and the Smith Institute Report 01/46. Available online at: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2001/01_46.htm

Estimates and analysis of the benefits to the economy and to society of graduate qualifications do not always make clear the numerous other individual benefits associated with qualification attainment. This is why graduates from million+ member universities were asked to provide further details and make themselves available for interview by members of the research team.

Overall, there was no doubt that graduates saw their degree as a life changing experience which transformed their career opportunities. In many cases this was through studying a degree which was valued by employers because of the skills and knowledge it provided. Many graduates also observed that their degree had helped them develop confidence and transferable skills.

The case-studies which appear in the report represent only a small selection but they enabled graduates themselves to tell their side of their story. The interviews support the data and provide further evidence of the social mobility which these universities have promoted. The words of these graduates are just as relevant for the politicians, policy-makers and funders who hold the purse-strings and decide whether and how universities are funded and who also claim that social mobility is their goal. The case-studies provide further evidence as to why funding for universities has undoubtedly enhanced social mobility and why future funding should not be in doubt and should be expanded.

Education – my route to a professional career

Lucy Hughes is 37 and a mother of five, and is the first person from her family to go to university. She had been working as a teaching assistant and decided to take an education degree at the University of Sunderland and now plans to be a teacher herself.

“I became a nursery parent helper, then one thing led to another, and I got a job as a TA,” she added. “Education is a really good thing and I got a bee in my bonnet – I didn’t think it was right that some children were failed by the system and wanted to help by being a teacher.”

Lucy had left school at 16 and went to work in a post office. Her dad was in the army and her brothers followed suit. Staying on as a teenager didn’t seem an option.

She stayed with the post office for several years although she was interested in working with children. Then Lucy got more interested in education when she had her own children. Going to the University of Sunderland was a big step but it turned out to be very rewarding.

She said: “Going to university boosted my confidence and self esteem, it made me realise I could do something other than mundane jobs, where the routine was exactly the same one day to the next.

“Once you’ve got a degree it opens far more doors, people want to listen to what you have got to say.”

For most of the time during her part-time study, Lucy, did a full-time job as a school teaching assistant. Her husband Dave frequently works away.

Lucy said: "My whole family, including my Mam and Dad, have been absolutely marvellous, and I couldn't have done any of it without them."

"My tutor was fabulous and I've got a really, really good head at school who has been very supportive of me. Now my ambition is to be a deputy head."

First graduate in the family – and the first professional

Lee Fairhurst works for Barclaycard as a Marketing Campaign Manager, working on business to business marketing. He is the first person from his entire extended family in the North West to go to university. He says his marketing degree at the University of Northampton was vital.

"I wouldn't have been able to do my job without my degree," said Lee. "I wouldn't have found the marketing discipline as it was not my original degree subject."

My degree helped me develop a more logical mind and more thorough approach to my topic.

"I wanted to use my academic ability - I didn't just want to work in a physical role. Getting a degree and going into an office job has given me the opportunity to utilise these skills and progress."

"Working for Barclaycard is very exciting and challenging. You are dealing with the best agencies and working with some of the most astute people."

Lee said it is all very different to his parents' working lives. His dad was an HGV driver and his mum worked in retail. A number of other relatives did labouring or manual jobs.

He came to the University of Northampton after working in sales during a gap year following his A-levels. He knew he wanted to take his interest in business to a higher level and study a relevant degree.

Lee started studying a business management and marketing joint degree. He had been much more interested in management but found himself more and more drawn to marketing and he changed to single honours in the subject.

After university he got a job as a marketing assistant in the university and in a few years progressed to become a marketing manager after four and a half years.

He moved to Barclaycard earlier this year. Now at the age of 27 he feels he has a great range of opportunities ahead of him, either in the UK or abroad.

Building an education and a career

Rachel Whitehouse decided at 17 that full time education was not for her, and began working as a trainee in an office. But, at 26 she has now completed a BSc from Birmingham City University, and is planning a career in management. She is the first person in her family to go to university.

"I got my GCSE's in 1998 and decided to go to college to complete my A-Levels. After 6 months of studying I decided that full-time education was not for me and went straight into a trainee office role with a local architect," said Rachel.

Despite leaving education, part of Rachel had always wanted to complete a degree and she was pleased when her company agreed to support her development - encouraging her to complete her NVQ's and a Modern Apprenticeship.

Completing a level three NVQ provided her with the qualifications she needed to go onto an HNC course franchised from Birmingham City University, which was not too far from her home in Sutton Coldfield. She describes this as "my path into higher education" and says it was important because it bought her closer to the eventual goal of completing a degree.

She felt that getting an apprenticeship before going to university was really advantageous.

"Once I completed the HNC I moved organisations a number of times to gain experience in different areas," she added.

"I then applied for a position within a marketing department that required a minimum qualification of a HNC. I was successful in my application and began working for the organisation in 2005. I then went on to complete my HND and degree with Birmingham City University on a part-time basis with the support of my employer."

"As my qualifications have increased so has my job description and responsibilities. Without completing the HNC I would not have been able to apply for the job I have today."

"Completing my degree has opened the door for a number of opportunities within the organisation. In the future I hope to continue my professional development and intend to complete a postgraduate or professional course."

Winning ways of woman engineer

Helena Hutt graduated with a BEng in Electrical and Electronic Engineering in 2002 and was awarded the title of The Young Woman Engineer of the Year by the Institute of Incorporated Engineers (IIEE).

The University of East London (UEL) graduate is now a project engineer for Thames Water working on the control systems for the company's new desalination plant in the Thames Estuary.

Helena loves her work and is very proud of her degree which has allowed her to progress much further in engineering than she might have otherwise might have done.

She is the first to admit that her route as a part time student who was also working full time was far from easy, but she liked learning in a practical setting while she was a technician for Thames Water.

"This way I got practical experience, and that started when I was 16. With both the qualifications and the experience I can think of the operator going in working on the plant and because I have done that, I understand it better."

"It was a very challenging course, especially studying while working full-time. I received great support from my tutors, my family and from Thames Water, and I was delighted to be awarded this prize by the Institute of Incorporated Engineers. Helena is now a Chartered Engineer with the IET

Her father worked his way up within industry, becoming a foreman, then a health and safety manager. But she thinks that it is harder to do that now without a degree.

Managing new opportunities

Linda Wallace left school and went into administration and working in a factory – now she is a practice manager after getting a degree as a mature student.

"I enjoyed school, but I never made the connection between gaining qualifications and getting a good job," she said. "So I didn't really apply myself and I left without many qualifications."

"After school I went to work as an administrator then became a watch assembler at Timex. I got married and soon moved jobs to work as a receptionist at the Union Street Dental Care Practice. Most of the other staff had qualifications, which made me think about education, but it was really when my children were studying for their standard grades and highers that my interest was sparked, and I decided I wanted to do something about it for myself."

Linda saw an advert for the University of Abertay's AHEAD course. Then after finishing the course she decided to carry on and do a few modules in Marketing.

"I never thought I'd end up doing a whole degree," she said, "I could have stopped after the first year with an NC and then later with my HND, but I kept going because I enjoyed it and I did end up with a degree, completing my Bachelor of Arts in Marketing in 2003.

"Soon after I finished my degree my husband was made redundant, and when he was exploring new career options he enrolled at Dundee College to do an NC in Psychology, and I ended up going along as well to support him! During my studies I continued to work as a receptionist for 31 hours a week, but although I was a full-time student, because my course was module based I was able to allocate my time appropriately and had a supportive employer.

"Learning has given me confidence in my own abilities as I know with determination I am capable of achieving what I want to. I've also got a better job now. I'm the Practice Manager of the Union Street Dental Care Practice and responsible for all the marketing for the surgery," Linda added.

Her husband is now self-employed and she is able to help him by doing his accounts, and when her children went to College and University themselves it gave her a lot of personal satisfaction that she could help them. "Working and studying at the same time was hard," but she said, "I wouldn't change a thing about the experience and it was definitely worth it."

A practical course lays the foundations for a career

Sharon Grimmond loves her work as a project manager – something she could not have ever imagined herself doing when she left school at 16 to become a hairdresser.

Sharon started work at the New Deal for Communities as a web editor and developer with the NDC regeneration programme in West Ham. She had graduated with a BSc in Information Technology from the University of East London (UEL) and done a work placement at NDC.

Sharon, who is 34, has run a successful bid for £50,000 of from the heritage lottery fund. She has also led projects including interactive local history workshops and on developing multimedia skills and equality. She was 27 when she went to university after doing other courses that got her back into education after leaving school at 16.

"Back at 16 I would never have thought that I could go on to university," Sharon said. "I was fascinated with hair at that age, then I wanted to run my own hairdressing business, then got fascinated with computers and wanted to do an IT degree."

Sharon did business studies and then an access course before going to university.

"My degree has been rewarding but also could be very marketable," she added.

My dream job in a castle

Diane Sanders has taken the first step on the ladder of a career in museums after completing her degree at Staffordshire University.

Diane, 44, from Hednesford achieved a 2:1 in her BA (Hons) English and History and has accepted a position at Tamworth Castle as a museums assistant – a far cry from her previous role as "mum, housewife and secretary." She later took on the position of education and events assistant at the castle.

"I left school at 16 when my dad died but I always wanted to go back into education I wanted to go into teaching English but History took over and I decided I wanted to go into the museums service," added Diane, who was presented with the Andrew Poynton Memorial Prize for outstanding achievement.

The mum-of-two who studied for A-Levels at Cannock College added: "I don't think I'd have got the job if it hadn't been for the placement with Staffordshire Museums and Archives Service." The placement was one of two the university offered.

And she thinks one of the key factors in helping her complete her degree was the attitude of her tutors. They were very supportive of her as a mature student and really helped when she was under pressure after her husband's business ran into difficulties.

She added: "No one in my family had been to university before. My dad was a shunter on the railway and my mum was a telephonist."

Diane also benefited from a grant from an access to learning programme, but she would have liked funding to be more generous.

Now Diane hopes eventually to study for a Masters in Museum Studies. She added: "It's been very hard work but very enjoyable and I'm just glad I've done it."

Scholarship to success

The Lisa Wilson Scholarship Fund, a charity dedicated to providing 100 years of education by helping students with the cost of higher education, is an integral part of the support system at Southampton Solent University. A proud and special moment for the Scholarship arrived when Charlotte Field, one of the Fund's first recipients, graduated with a first class BA (Hons) Marketing with Media and Design degree.

At the age of 22, and as a single mother of six-month-old Max, Charlotte Field decided to return to study and hasn't looked back. She received a bursary from the Fund in each of the three years of her studies, and kept in touch with the Wilson family throughout. The money enabled her to buy equipment to help with her dyslexia, as well as providing financial support. "Studying for the degree has changed my life for the better," says Charlotte. In fact, she enjoyed it so much she has now embarked on a Master's degree. She is now an associate lecturer at Southampton Solent University, in her final year of a part time PGCE in post compulsory education and training and hopes to start a doctorate in September 2010.

My system for success

"I see my future as very bright! I'm enjoying what I do, what else I can get to learn and experience in the future, and hopefully have a salary that the IT industry promises to deliver!"

Michael Gerrard believes his degree at Coventry University is opening doors for him in IT. He works for a small dynamic company.

He graduated with a BSc in computing after being attracted to the course which was one of only a handful to combine the BSc with Cisco CCNA training.

He says: "My degree and Cisco CCNA adequately prepared me to talk confidently about Networks and to begin training at my job with enough working knowledge to get me started."

"At the time I applied to Coventry University, I chose Networking because it was the only area of computing I knew nothing about. I was interested in how the Internet worked, and wanted a job that challenged me. I wasn't a geek, I just like to know how things work."

Some days Michael says his role is to be a presales engineer, which involves sitting in front of high profile customers, directors or key decision makers, and selling their solutions to them and assuring them that the company is a 'safe pair of hands'. This can involve on the spot presentations, demonstrations of products, and design sessions.

On other days he will be a systems engineer and take on a range of other roles. He will see a project installation from start to finish, by liaising with the end customer to source their requirements. Finally he is also a support engineer.

Working hours are quite long but he is part of a dynamic company which works all over the UK Europe. And, he is excited about the future and sees this as a route to setting up his own IT business or training others in IT.

From football to fast stream

A former professional football player with a number of English Clubs including Watford and Preston North End, Dominic Ludden decided on a career change and was accepted on a BA (Hons) Business Studies course in 2001.

"The degree at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) allowed me to study a very broad spectrum of varied modules when I was unsure about where in the business world I wanted to work" said the 31-year-old.

"The opportunity of an industrial placement was paramount in my choice of degree as my former career had not enabled experience of office life or developed any IT skills and it was important to keep my options open".

While professional football was a wonderful opportunity, Dominic was always aware that his career would end and he had seen other players struggle to find work outside football. His degree helped him make himself marketable to future employers when most other players would not have known how to use a computer let alone the finer points of working in a big business.

Graduating with a 1st class honours in 2005, Dominic was one of only four graduates accepted on the AXA Insurance Graduate Leadership programme which included four placements across the company prior to a decision to specialise in one area of the business.

After winning the highest achieving graduate award that year he left the graduate programme having obtained a senior management role within the company. Dominic was the first graduate to come off the programme and move directly into a senior management role – a promotion which moved him up three grades of the company's salary scale.

Despite limited experience Dominic had been invited to apply for a post as South Regional Executive and now oversees a £10m budget and has responsibility for planning, driving and monitoring a £600m sales target across seven commercial branches employing three hundred people.

He says "Never underestimate yourself. Don't wait for something to come to you, go out and get it – wherever it may be".

A model career

Neely Reyes graduated from the University of Wolverhampton in 2003 with a BA in Graphic Communication. Now at just 27 she runs her own modelling agency working in London and the West Midlands town.

Teaming up with a fellow University of Wolverhampton graduate – Ian Warren, a BA in Interactive Multimedia Communications – they decided to set up their own business. Calling on their collective love of fashion and photography they spotted a niche in the market for a genuine London quality model agency based outside of the capital. With that, Sapphires Model Management was born.

Armed with only a small loan from Princes Trust they set up an office in the centre of Wolverhampton. Neely, was brought up locally by her mum and has many friends in the town. She wanted to base her business there.

Eventually they got clients to take notice and now they regularly work with established high street brands such as House of Fraser, Superdrug, Wella and Jack & Jones/Vero Moda.

In 2008 Sapphires opened a second office in London due to demand from clients. They did however keep their Wolverhampton base as their head office and do not intend to leave the West Midlands region at any time.

2009 has started off in fantastic fashion for the agency, they have teamed up with luxury department store Harvey Nichols for a charity project to raise money for the Prince's Trust, the same charity that helped them 3 years ago.

Neely says she uses her degree every day at work. She finds her knowledge of design very useful and in particular uses her website design skills. She also thinks her degree gave her confidence and soft skills which have proved important.

Policy implications The challenges of enhancing social mobility

In the last decade the social mobility generated by modern universities has been founded on growth backed by improved Government funding although this has yet to match that in some other OECD countries. It has also been supported by a positive policy in favour of increased participation that has been promoted at the highest levels of Government. This has been signalled by the adoption of a challenging target – namely that 50% of those aged between 18 and 30 should be encouraged to gain a university qualification.

There is a risk that policy on higher education shifts away from this agenda with potentially profound and adverse implications on social mobility. Policy makers now prefer to measure the number of degrees in the workforce rather than the participation rate of young people. Ministers have indicated that while attaining the 50% target is still desirable, there should be an increased emphasis on vocational qualifications and apprenticeships. In future, careers advisors in schools in England will be required to advise all pupils about apprenticeships²⁰.

Apprenticeships are clearly important but it is crucial that the specifications for apprenticeship frameworks provide for progression to higher education. Apprenticeships and other Level 3 vocational qualifications continue to attract a lower earnings premium than a graduate qualification. Career information, advice and guidance should not detract from the real and positive value of progression to university.

University students study their subject but they also learn the academic rigour of research, analysis and presentation whatever their degree. They acquire graduate qualifications and attributes which are valued and transferable and which allow them to do better in the job market in the short and long-term compared to non-graduates. This is why apprenticeships and vocational qualifications should not be counter-posed in funding and opportunity terms to the benefits provided by graduate qualifications.

All policymakers continue to agree that the economic future of the UK is high value and knowledge based. The UK needs to continue to encourage people of all ages to aim for the highest level possible for each individual. The momentum towards improved social mobility can only be maintained if Governments continue to commit in favour of expansion and growth of opportunities to study at university.

This report provides evidence as to why access to university should remain a key goal: it is central to the delivery of the Government's White Paper on social mobility and it is key for all Governments with a specific commitment to support and deliver social mobility and social cohesion. The stated commitment of all parties to social mobility needs to be matched by equally clear commitments to funding to support the expansion of university places.

²⁰ Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill
House of Commons 4 Feb 2009

Policy implications

The challenges of enhancing social mobility continued

This is even more important in a recession. Demand for university places is likely to increase as a result of the global downturn. When jobs are no longer available, qualified applicants choose to go to university rather than into employment – and this choice needs to be encouraged. The prospect and reality of unemployment also provides opportunities for some individuals to re-focus their careers, re-think their future job prospects and improve their qualification levels.

Unless investment and growth of university places are maintained in the recession, progress in respect of social mobility is likely to be compromised. If investment and expansion are funded and backed by positive campaigns that promote the benefits of studying at university, there is a real possibility that one of the outcomes of the recession will be enhanced graduate qualifications and social mobility. This could lift participation rates and higher level skills in the UK so that they are nearer those already achieved in other countries.

This approach contrasts sharply with that of organisations such as the Sutton Trust which has promoted a narrow concept of generating social mobility and a focus on a small number of high achieving working class students entering a few courses at some traditional universities. *Social mobility: universities changing lives* shows why this definition of social mobility is inadequate and will not meet the political aspirations outlined by the main political parties, the challenges of the recession or the demands of the economy in the future. This limited approach to social mobility will also fail to promote the broader benefits to society of graduate qualifications.

A narrow and limited approach to the promotion of social mobility is not being replicated in other countries. For example, President Obama has specifically signalled that an expansion of access to higher education in the US will be a goal of his Presidency. Narrow definitions of social mobility do not accurately reflect what has been achieved by Government. Nor do narrow definitions accurately reflect what has been and is being achieved by universities and in particular by those universities that have student profiles similar to the universities which participated in this research.

There is now clear evidence that modern universities which have offered large numbers of graduates opportunities to gain degrees have contributed significantly to social mobility in the UK. There is therefore a need for a renewed and sustained effort to widen participation and for Government to provide the funding to sustain this expansion and the additional student numbers required if improved social mobility is to continue to be a central policy objective.

Conclusion

- Social mobility is essential to ensure equality of opportunity and to allow individuals from all walks of life to realise their potential.
- In today's increasingly competitive global economy the UK cannot afford to squander the talent of any of its people when China and India are producing 4 million graduates a year between them.
- Against this backdrop million+ universities have been an engine for social mobility - transforming the life chances of thousands of people from a diverse range of backgrounds, many of whom would not otherwise have got a degree.
- Graduates from these universities are benefiting from significant social mobility by occupation – allowing more working class graduates to move into professional, managerial and technical careers.
- Wages for graduates of these universities are likely to be nearly 15% higher than wages of people with lower qualifications, some of whom could have progressed to university but did not do so.

In view of the significant impact million+ member universities have on social mobility policymakers should consider:

- The damaging impact on social mobility of reducing funding for the expansion of university places
- The challenge of expanding access to university for the millions of working adults with vocational qualifications who could go to university.
- A student support scheme which produce fairer outcomes for students (especially part-time students) and those universities supporting social mobility.
- Additional ways to support the strengths of universities with a diverse student profile by funding the full costs of teaching the students whom they educate.
- Information, advice and guidance including for adults which encourages and promotes the broader benefits of graduate qualifications, flexible study options and values the opportunities to study at universities in a potential applicant's locality.

Annex: technical note on the analysis

Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
The DHLE Longitudinal Survey includes details of graduates' wages three and a half years after graduating, their age, sex and ethnicity.

The DHLE Longitudinal Survey is a three-year follow-up of the 2003 DHLE census of students who left higher education between August 2002 and July 2003. The survey was based on a stratified sample of 62,039 respondents to the census questionnaire. In total 24,823 of the 62,039 selected graduates completed and returned a questionnaire.

The survey deliberately over sampled some groups of students relative to others and the survey data has been weighted to adjust for this. The survey weights also include an adjustment for differential response rates across sub-groups of students.

Occupational Mobility

Occupational mobility was calculated using a subset of records where graduates had completed details of parental occupation. HESA did not include details of graduates working part time because of the number of incomplete records.

Parental occupation on attending HE was described using ONS's then standard measure – the 1990 soc codes. These grouped occupations into a number of social classes, and UCAS used six of these: professional, managerial, skilled non manual, skilled manual, partly skilled and unskilled.

By the time students had graduated ONS's new 2000 measure was in use and this was used by HESA to assess occupational types which graduates belonged to three and a half years after graduation. These were higher managerial and professional, lower managerial and professional, intermediate, small employers and own account workers, lower supervisory and technical occupations, semi-routine occupations, routine occupations and not applicable.

There are some differences between the two measures, such as the introduction of a new group, making a total of seven rather than six groups in the earlier measure. There are also differences because of the introduction of new occupations which have appeared since 1990.

It is also important to note that the research team had to make a decision to allocate some occupations under one or other group. This was because of a lack of detail in the data, which meant that in some cases a group of five or six related occupations did not have an overall social class, even though each of the individual occupations within this group had been identified as belonging to a particular social class.

As a result, the research team had to allocate groups to social classes in order to carry out the analysis.

Groups were described by the social class which fitted the majority of occupations within the group. In almost all cases a clear majority of occupations in a group fitted one or other social class.

The Labour Force Survey

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a quarterly sample survey of 60,000 households living at private addresses in Great Britain. Its purpose is to provide information on the UK labour market that can then be used to develop, manage, evaluate and report on labour market policies. The questionnaire design, sample selection, and interviewing are carried out by the Social and Vital Statistics Division of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on behalf of the Statistical Outputs Group of the ONS.

ONS publishes full UK LFS results. However, the fieldwork is carried out separately; by ONS for Great Britain, and by the Central Survey Unit of the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Department of Trade and Investment (DETINI).

The survey seeks information on respondents' personal circumstances and their labour market status during a specific reference period, normally a period of one week or four weeks (depending on the topic) immediately prior to the interview.

The LFS is carried out under a European Union Directive and uses internationally agreed concepts and definitions. It is the source of the internationally comparable (International Labour Organisation) measure known as 'ILO unemployment'.

Member Universities

University of Abertay Dundee
Anglia Ruskin University
Bath Spa University
University of Bedfordshire
Birmingham City University
The University of Bolton
Buckinghamshire New University
University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)
Coventry University
University of Derby
University of East London (UEL)
Glasgow Caledonian University
University of Greenwich
Kingston University
Leeds Metropolitan University
London Metropolitan University
London South Bank University (LSBU)
Middlesex University
Napier University
The University of Northampton
Roehampton University
Southampton Solent University
Staffordshire University
University of Sunderland
University of Teesside
Thames Valley University (TVU)
University of the West of Scotland
The University of Wolverhampton



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