Barriers to Progression: the role of Further Education Colleges

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Contexts: Nationwide

- HEIPR (Higher Education Initial Participation Rate) 43% for 2007 entrants up to age 30
- HEIPR young entrants to age 20: 34.2%
- Gender gap: 7% more females than males
- Social Class gap: Applicants 2005: 67% from NS-SEC 1-3 and 33% from NS-SEC 4-7
- >100,000 FEC applicants 2005: 23% of total applicants. 43% of FEC applicants from NS-SEC 4-7

Contexts: L3 learners in the North West

LSC estimates Summer 2009

- 20,000 young people will gain a L 3 qualification and progress to HE
- 16,000 young people (aged 18-20) will gain a L3 qualification and will not progress to HE

Contexts: Greater Manchester

- 80% of secondary schools are 11-16 schools
- 21,700 (58%) on L3 in general FE and 15,700 (42%) on L3 in Sixth Form Colleges - all ages
- 32% applying through UCAS 2007 were from general FE, and 43% were from sixth form colleges.

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Review of the Literature: the issues

- Level 3 voc learners 18% of HEI intake - lower at Russell Group
- 45% of voc learners progress to HE by 21, compared to 90% of A level learners
- UCAS success rates are lower from FECs
- Voc learners tend to come from lower socio-economic groups

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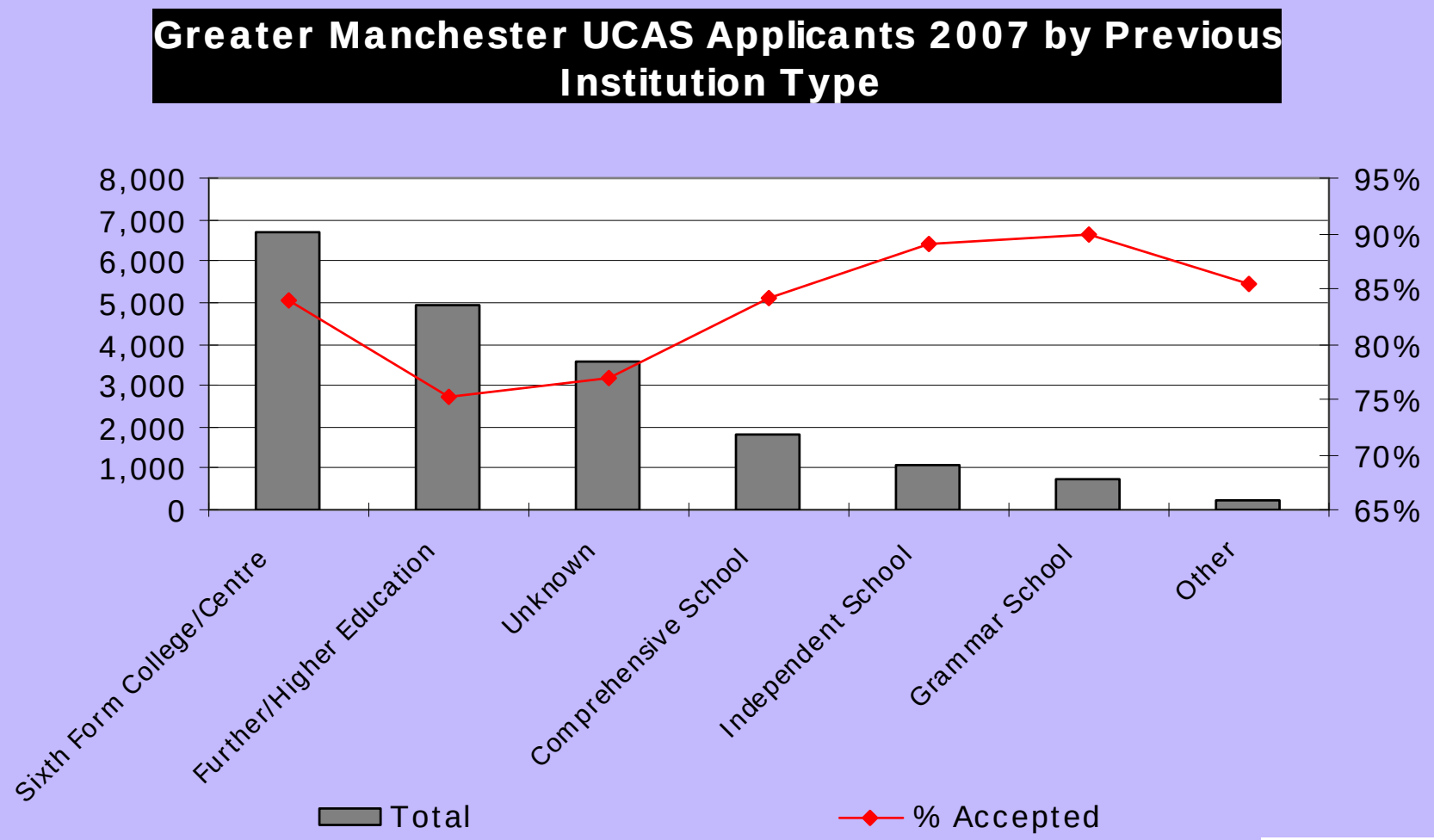
Pattern of Applications and acceptances UCAS 2007



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Local Research

- Four General Further Education Colleges
- 3 have directly funded and franchised HE provision
- 31 young full-time vocational L3 learners
- 9 Female; 22 Male
- Tutors, Curriculum Managers, IAG staff
- Data and management information

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The barriers identified by learners

- Confidence and self-belief
- Lifestyle decisions
- Perceptions of HE study
- Costs, debt and lack of knowledge of financial support
- Confusion over course options
- Difficult application process
- Low prior attainment/GCSE grades
- Personal issues

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The barriers identified by staff

- Awareness of benefits of HE
- Self-belief and confidence
- Influence of media, peers and family
- Previous educational experience
- Lifestyle choices
- Financial issues
- Learners lack organisation/discipline
- HEI bias against vocational qualifications

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Key Issues from the Research

- Lack of consistency between institutions and between courses/individual tutors resulting in different levels of support for different student groups
- Tutors play a key role
- Whose responsibility? IAG and tutorial staff roles

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FE Tutors at the centre

"I couldn't imagine it (HE) as I wasn't any good at school. But doing this course has shown me that I can. My tutor has pushed me forward, other tutors don't push you so much, but he's given me lots of help and shown me I can get good marks."

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Mind the gap

"Very confusing and horrible."

"There's hundreds of different courses and you can't tell what they do…sessions with tutors are just 2 minutes and they look at your grades, attendance, not really what you're good at or what you'll do. They don't help with that. "

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Talking and understanding

'We try to timetable a Level 4 student on to delivery even if it's only for 2 hours. They will get an idea of life and learning at HE level. We also have case studies around the building that give examples of the possibilities.' (Tutor)

'It was really helpful to show what university is like. The students who explained it seemed mellow and calm and said that if you go to all the lectures, you'll get through.' (L3 ICT learner)

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Knowledge and information

- *'There is a difficulty in staff knowing what the options are. … They know about the local universities, but don't know about new stuff e.g. foundation degrees…' (IAG practitioner)*

- *'Maybe you could have 1 hour classes from the 1st year just inform you about university so that you're well prepared. It only started in the 2nd year… It would be useful to have a guide to the whole process that gives the overall picture…' (BTeC Media student).*

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Learners at the centre

"I was really confused about course, but I was helped to make lists of what I enjoyed, what I was good at and talked this through. It's an amazing help to have someone to talk to, who listens and doesn't push you."

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An institutional strategy

- Focus on the learners – not the mechanics
- Link different inputs and activities in a strategy designed to support individual decision-making
- Consistently collect, analyse and report institutional data on progression
- Take best practice from own HE to support progression to HE elsewhere.

A strategy for progression

Aspirations and Motivation

– Dialogues and experiences to understand options and preferences. Campus visits, case studies, meet HE students. Work with Aimhigher.

Goal setting

– identifying strengths & weaknesses, career preferences, realistic options. Personal action plans, discussions with tutors, register lifestyle issues, formulate questions

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And then..

Reviewing options

– group work, 1:1 assistance, broader activities to raise HE awareness. Finance talks, course options, locations, information and support to confirm decisions. Work with Aimhigher. Staff development.

Applying to HE

– Support for UCAS applications and tutors/references. Getting the mechanics right; clear schedules and support lines.

Transition support

– Continued interest/ UCAS extra/Clearing. Who follows through?
– First semester follow-up contacts. Who knows what happens to them? Return to talk to new Y12 group.

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References

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[includes list of references]

- Stanton Geoff et. al, (2008): *Unfinished Business in widening participation: the end of the beginning*, Learning and Skills Network

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