

Does Cost Matter? Students' understanding of the higher education finance system and how cost affects their decisions.

Overview

A joint NEON and UCU research project to explore students' understanding of the higher education finance system and how cost affects their decisions.

About NEON

The National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) is the professional organisation in England for those involved in widening access to higher education (HE) and social mobility founded in 2012.

About UCU

UCU is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK.

Aim

In April 2015 NEON published *Does Cost Matter? Students' understanding of the higher education finance system and how cost affects their decisions*.

NEON and UCU propose to collaborate to repeat the research to build an overview of the trends in students' understanding of the higher education finance system and how cost affects their decisions one year on from the initial research. In addition to the new fee regime, the current cohort of year 13/equivalent students will be affected by recent changes to the student maintenance support system that will see the maintenance grant will be abolished and replaced with a loan.

Objectives

To explore:

- students' understanding of the costs of higher education
- the role of cost in students' decisions about higher education study
- the potential implications of both an increase and reduction in the cost of progressing to higher education.
- perceptions about the recent change to the format of student maintenance support

Methodology

For the purposes of the 2015 report, nearly 1500 year 13/equivalent students applying to higher education for the 2015 cycle completed an online survey from November

2014 to February 2015. Respondents were drawn from eight areas of the country: Bedfordshire, East Anglia, Hull, Leicestershire, Liverpool, London, Manchester and Sheffield. Selected higher education institutions in those regions worked with post-16 providers to encourage their students to complete an electronic questionnaire.

It is proposed that the methodology should follow a similar format, with the following additions:

- to improve targeting and response rates by increasing the guidance available to schools
- to increase targeting to support greater response rates from black and minority ethnic respondents
- to include new questions to explore perceptions about the conversion of maintenance grants to student loans from 2016/17
- the potential to edit or remove previous questions for the purposes of improving the overall data
- to explore, though not necessarily adopt the inclusion of respondents who will not be applying to higher education to assess the role of cost in HE decision-making for non-applicants