



The £27,000 question

University applications in a world of KISs and higher tuition fees

A summary report based on research
by Vanilla Research, April 2013



Southampton
Glasgow
Plymouth
Sussex
Winchester
Manchester
York
Reading
Leeds
Durham
Bristol
Leicester
Bradford
Belfast
Hertfordshire
Kent
Cambridge
Swansea
Oxford Brookes
Aberystwyth
Bath
Edinburgh
Birmingham
Exeter

Introduction

This report presents the findings from a series of five group discussions with Year 13 students. All students were predicted A-level grades of AAB+ or in a few cases ABB or similar, and were applying to universities in this UCAS cycle (for possible entry in 2013). Groups were held in the course of February and March 2013 i.e. after the deadline for UCAS applications, but before the deadline for acceptance of offers. Further details are included at the end of the report.

For various historic reasons, the schools selected were all drawn from the Midlands and the South of England. They are therefore not intended to be geographically representative of England as a whole. Similarly all schools were selected as traditionally having a reasonably large cohort of students achieving high grades at A-level. They are therefore not intended to be representative of secondary schools across England as a whole.

However, the report does hope to represent a robust flavour of the thoughts and opinions of Year 13 students in schools that traditionally have a high number of students achieving high grades at A-level.

We are happy for you to share the report or its findings with others, but would ask that Vanilla Research is credited appropriately.

Lastly, we would like to thank the schools and colleges who helped organise the groups, and the students who took part with such enthusiasm and honesty – we hope you are all where you want to be come October.

1. The biggest decisions of their lives

But often one of the most exciting.

For most students, the choice of which universities to apply to – and therefore hopefully study at – will be the biggest, most repercussive decision of their lives so far. As well as the short-term implication of where they will live for three or more years of their lives, there are the obvious longer-term issues of it (hopefully) shaping their future careers, as well as the significant debt they will accumulate along the way.

Given the gravity of such decisions, as well as the vast choice facing students these days, it could be supposed that the whole experience would weigh heavily on their shoulders, or be characterised by worries, indecision and apprehension. Happily the research shows this is far from the case.

With choices being mulled over and decisions being made for the most part between Spring of Year 12 and Winter of Year 13, students described the experience in mainly positive terms.

“I like choice.”

“There’s so much information to get through... but it’s really exciting when you look through it.”

“To be honest when we first heard about it in Year 12, and the teachers started going through what we’d have to do, it seemed such a monumental thing, and the actual process was a bit of an anti-climax to me. It wasn’t as stressful as I thought it would be, and it wasn’t hard work (apart from the personal statement).”

“I don’t think I was ever nervous about anything. There was a lot of research to be done, but it was relatively easy I think.”

“Going up and seeing universities, where you might be studying for 5 years, was exciting.”

It was in most cases enjoyable, even exciting, and most of the negative emotions were associated with the nitty gritty of the process rather than the wider choices themselves. The wide array of both institutions and courses was seen to be a positive, and helped create those moments of enlightenment when the one 'perfect' course emerges from the masses.

"It's quite intangible, but there are some where you go 'I can see myself here.'"

As mentioned, most of the stress and worry or frustrations came from the more prosaic elements of the application process – meeting deadlines, working through numerous drafts of a personal statement, or waiting for offers.

**"It's the waiting
that's horrible."**

"The UCAS form itself stressed me out, but in terms of Open Days, choosing where to go and that sort of thing, I found it quite enjoyable."

Personal Statements were seen to be the biggest cause of angst, rather than having to choose between universities in the first place. With such emphasis placed on statements as one of the keys to a successful application, you wonder whether students themselves would choose to do away with them completely if they could.

"It was soul destroying – you'd write one, get it back, rewrite it, get it back..."

"I found it draining – you're constantly told 'it's not right, rephrase this, rephrase that'"

Shortcuts and filters

Although in theory students can choose from over 100 universities, and from thousands of courses, in practice the choice is of course more limited. Most students had a fairly good idea of what they wanted to study before they began choosing where to apply – even if the exact nature of the course was still up for grabs.

Coupled with the fact that the students in our research were generally focused on the universities with higher-grade requirements¹, this made the consideration set much more manageable.

Even at this stage though, a set of shortcuts or filters was generally used by each student to narrow the options even further. Although the shortcuts varied by student, they usually had the effect of focusing a student's attention at an early stage on a long list of no more than 10 or so possible universities.

“I didn't want to go far from home, so that cut lots of places out the way; and I didn't want to go to a big city, so that cut lots of places out the way.”

Despite each filter arguably closing off potentially attractive avenues to them, they were used to help direct their time and attention to those universities they were most likely to find appealing:

League Table position – perhaps the most unforgiving cut, with the majority of the students in the groups focusing their energies on investigating the Top 15 - 20 or so in their subject.

“I used League Tables to sort out the first ones I wanted to look at, say the first 10.”

Distance – used to rule out both those that were considered to be too far away, as well as those they considered to be 'on their doorstep'.

Size of the city – a two-way street, in that for some students universities in large cities were avoided (especially so in the case of London, with its attendant higher living costs), while others gravitated towards them.

By the time these filters had been applied, students were usually focusing their energies and research towards a long list of 10 or fewer universities, rather than approaching course content and other selling points with a more open mind. Relatively few students started their meaningful search with a totally blank canvas.

1. All had predicted grades in the region of AAB or ABB or better

2. What students look for

From Russell Group to full-body dissections

What students are actually looking for in a university and a course is as would be expected – a long, varied and sometimes surprising list. It is about as far from a 'one size fits all' as can be imagined. But it is compelling listening to what students put emphasis on as well as what they pass over, and it is equally clear that even in the era of £9,000 tuition fees, these students are buying into the wider package rather than just the narrow course itself.

We focused the question on what students were looking for in principle from a university i.e. what they were looking for in initial searches, when reading through prospectuses and websites, and when deciding whether going on an Open Day would be worthwhile or not. As a result it fails to include a couple of significant issues – the course itself, and typical offers. It was not that these factors were considered unimportant, more that they were seen as hygiene factors: students tended not to mention them on the basis that they were a 'given', i.e. they wouldn't consider a university if it did not offer a course in line with their interests, and they wouldn't consider a course if the typical offers were personally unrealistic (for instance A*AA).

Building on this though, there were common themes students were assessing universities on, and the word cloud² below gives some idea of the relative prominence of them:



The factor that stands out first and foremost is the emphasis across nearly all students on League Tables.

“Course is really important, and it’s one of the things I looked at, but you don’t want to end up doing a great course, but at a university that isn’t that well respected.”

They were not the be all and end all, and few if any students simply applied to the top 5 or 6. Similarly, students tended to see them as a guide to overall quality rather than a perfect ranking of it – the sense was a Top 10 university was probably better regarded than one outside the Top 20, but that there wasn't necessarily much difference between say a ranking of six and nine.

Having said that though, the vast majority of these students took them into account in some way, and many used them to filter their initial searches – focusing primarily on the Top 15 – 20 for their subject. Some students did suggest their cut-off was higher, but often had to reassess this once their other filters had applied (e.g. ruling out on the basis of distance or avoiding London).

Interestingly there did seem to be a greater emphasis, in our experience, on the subject tables than in previous years. Both overall and subject League Tables were usually taken into account, but it was the latter students seemed more interested in.

It would also appear that League Tables are to some extent starting to exert greater influence than membership of the Russell Group per se (although there is an obvious correlation between the two). The notion of the 'Russell Group' did loom large among some students (more so in the Independent School), but others were unaware of the label, or were aware of it but did not let it drive their choices.

An illustration of these influences was the student who had applied to study chemical engineering at Edinburgh, Bath, Loughborough and Birmingham – a group that includes two Russell Group members, and all four of which are in the Top 20 of most major League Tables – but was actually hoping to study at Swansea, ranked 88th in the overall Guardian League Table, but 7th for Chemical Engineering.

Whether to study in a **city or not** (or taking the size of city into account) understandably varied in its impact by student, with some studiously aiming for a university in a sizeable city, while others aimed for the opposite.

Linked to this was a decision among a number of students not to apply to London universities. For many the prominence in the League Tables of institutions such as Imperial, UCL and LSE failed to compensate for the perceived disadvantage of living in such a large city, and one with accompanying high living costs.

“The LSE is good for my course, but I ruled it out immediately because it was London – I could go to another uni that was just as good but less expensive.”

“I thought about living costs with regards to London, but not otherwise.”

Facilities were mentioned by numerous students, although its prominence is, in our view, due more to it being of medium-importance to many students, rather than maximum importance to any. The emphasis was also inflated by being spread between academic and non-academic facilities. The former were understandably of more importance to students planning to study subjects such as Physics, or Chemical Engineering, although even here it was described as something that helped form a preference rather than fundamentally underpin it. The attraction of non-academic facilities was primarily in the form of sporting facilities (for those keen to pursue sporting interests at university) – but by implication facilities were relatively unimportant to a language student who wasn't keen on sport.

Given it is the largest cost students will face, after tuition fees, **accommodation** was obviously prominent in their thoughts when considering where to apply. However, there were relatively few references to the swishness or chic-ness of sparkling new accommodation blocs compared to more practical references such as guarantees of a place in the first year, or the proximity to the main campus.

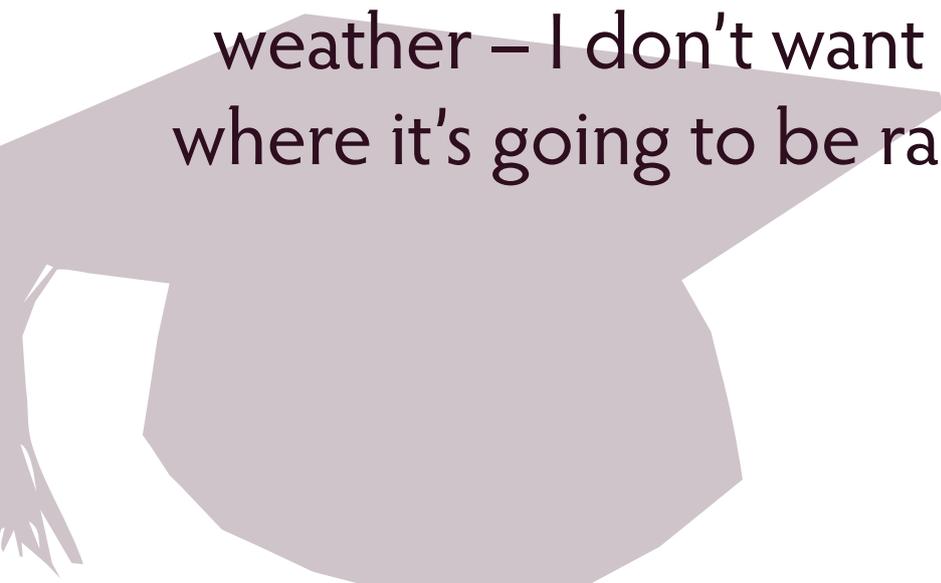
One issue that emerged with relatively less importance than anticipated (or at least less importance than some discussions would suggest) were **contact** hours. They were mentioned by some students, and were something that a small number actively looked up and compared, but were not something that were seen to drive application decisions – those that researched them did not really see them impacting their overall choices. Given some of the factors students happily admitted to taking into account – from the local accents to the weather – our view is that if contact hours were having a meaningful impact on perceptions, more students would have said so.

In contrast, the existence or nature of a **year out** is seemingly becoming increasingly important to a number of students. Whether it was the location for a year abroad for geography students (Paris was a persuading factor for one), or the inclusion of a year's paid placement for an accountancy and finance student, in a number of cases these elements were seen to influence final choices.

Finally, aside from the predictable factors such as distance, League Tables and nature of the campus, a number of other, more individual influences emerged – emphasising the challenges a university faces appealing to the full range of students.....

- the availability of full-body dissections on a medical course;
- the ease with which a student could keep their horse nearby;
- whether the university offers suitable courses for a student's twin sister;
- and local accents.

“Course, and Russell Group, and Open Days are all really big things, but you have to take the small things into account as well, and that might sound stupid, but for example weather – I don't want to go somewhere where it's going to be raining all the time.”



What's not important is as interesting as what is

Finance and careers support were just as interesting to us as researchers simply because they were of less interest to students. Dealing with finance first, although it is has been widely understood that overall tuition fees have limited influence on the choices of such students, on the basis that nearly all the institutions in their consideration sets charge the same £9,000 per year, there are still a lot of efforts by universities to work around this figure through bursaries, awards and in particular financial inducements to AAA/AAB students who firmly accept their offers.

In the groups though these efforts appeared to have had limited impact on students' considerations. No one in the research mentioned that such inducements had had a role to play in defining their choices, and, given the other factors they happily admitted to taking into account, we would be surprised if it was in fact playing a meaningful part. When prompted in the groups the reasoning from students was that the decision over which course and institution was best for them was such a significant and personal choice, and one that might result in a debt upwards of £40,000, that it would be disproportionate to drive that choice on the basis of a £2,000 or £3,000 inducement, which they often only become aware of after they have already formed an emotional attachment to their preferred choice.

"I didn't even think about them (financial awards or support) because how I see it either way it's going to be a big debt."

"They're all a similar cost and you're going to be in debt anyway."

"I wasn't going to go to a worse university just for a bit more money, I'd rather go to a good one and have less money."

"I would have been a lot better off at Bristol regarding money - given what my parents are on I would have got a £2,000 maintenance grant, whereas at Cardiff I won't." (But Cardiff is still her preferred choice).

"I've already been offered a £1,750 a year bursary by Leicester if I get my predicted grades... so if I don't get Cardiff I might accept Leicester (as my 2nd choice), but I still want to go to Cardiff."

Incidentally, this is not inconsistent with the earlier findings of students choosing not to apply to London universities on the basis of higher living costs, since the higher cost of being a student in London is widely known at the start of a student's search, and can be factored into considerations before strong emotional attachments are made.

Careers support and employability evidence was another issue that was perhaps more notable in its absence. Future employability is of course central to most applicants' considerations – few will willingly take on such a level of debt with no consideration to what happens next. However, in most students' minds the reassurances of employability are provided in broad brush by the institution (e.g. the reputation and League Table standing of a university), the discipline (e.g. civil engineering), or the inclusion of significant work placement (e.g. a year-long placement in an accountancy course).

"I'm self confident, and maybe a bit naïve, but I just thought with that degree (French and Business Management) I'd get a job."

"I really stuck to the Russell Group as it's a non-vocational degree I'm doing (English and History), so if I get the best degree I can, the Russell Group will give me the push (in terms of employability) that I otherwise wouldn't have."

The fine detail of reassurance in terms of recent graduate destinations, the % of recent graduates now in full-time employment, or the quality of the careers service has much less impact for the majority of students (although it did for some).

"I'm a female doing engineering so it's almost a given that you're going to come out with a job anyway."

Students did often read employability and average starting salary statistics, but there was little evidence they used them to help decide between courses. In a similar vein, a high quality careers service will no doubt be of immeasurable value to students once they are at university, it just tended to be of less concern to students at this stage.

"I'm not really looking that far into the future, I'm just focusing on my course and enjoying it."

3. Can the decision really be 'simple'?

Complicated in theory, easier in practice



Universities UK

135x



x Open Days = 1

We outlined earlier how many of the students described the experience of choosing where to apply in positive terms. Adjectives such as 'exciting' and 'simple' were used to convey the impression that they saw the choice as the first step towards an exciting and rewarding future.

"I thought it would be quite hard to choose, but when it came down to it, it was quite simple."

As well as the optimism of youth though, this positive approach was partly a function of the fact that for many of the students the decision, whilst still being very important, quickly became a relatively simple one to make. Once preferences such as distance, League Tables, typical offers, setting of the university and course content had been taken into account, many found themselves quickly whittling down their consideration set down to just a handful.

"You look at the League Tables, you choose those 10, think 'they look nice', and you go on the websites, and you think, 'no actually, that looks terrible, that looks OK', and you narrow it down to 5."

Rather than reflecting a (negative) paucity of choice though, this was more a positive case of a few universities/courses quickly emerging ahead of the pack, and in some cases a moment of clarity when one course simply shines through.

"There's definitely a moment when you find that one course that you want to do, and then it gets easier."

One possibly unanticipated result though of such clarity around choices was the number who found themselves 'padding out' their UCAS form at the last minute simply to fill up the five slots. Given the number of courses available, and the length of time students have to decide, we were quite surprised by the frequency with which a course was described as a 'last-minute filler' rather than a positive choice.

"I think a lot of people have 3 or 4 they really like and are set on, and they're definite, and then they need a reserve, and then they have maybe 3 they're batting around to fill their reserve, and then they end with one other just to fill the space."

"I put university X down on my UCAS form, don't know why, just did."

"To be honest there's just no good reason why they're there. I needed an insurance offer and just looked to what asked for ABB or BBB – I was never going to go there, they're just filling up the five."

The impact of Open Days

The final piece of the equation in terms of deciding where to apply was usually the Open Day. It was no surprise to hear of the pivotal importance many students placed on Open Days, but what was possibly more surprising were the number of stories students offered of Open Days that fell short of basic expectations – one would guess few other multi-million pound organisations would treat potential customers with £27,000 in their pockets in a similar way.

The poor experiences were far from universal, but they stood in starker relief compared to the professional efforts that students saw elsewhere. Furthermore, it was no hidden secret as to what made for an impressive Open Day, with a few common themes running through the positive stories:

Impressive, articulate and informed lecturers and lectures

“University A had really dynamic ICT/slides – but when I went to B it was a lot more slapdash, the PowerPoint looked like it had been put together the night before.”

“The (Physics) lecturer at Bristol had just come back from working at CERN, and I thought that was really impressive, and in the PowerPoint that he showed us he gave us a little hint about the news they were giving out in the next month. I liked the fact that they picked someone who was so in with it.”

Impressive, articulate and informed students

“The Open Day is so key... the subject talks that you go to are really instrumental in deciding where to go, it's that first impression. Some talks are really disorganised and the speaker doesn't talk for long, or it's the way they speak. At Bath they brought in students who had just done their year abroad and they spoke confidently and informatively, and that really stood out to me.”

And friendly students

“Cardiff was really nice when you walked around - everyone smiled at you when you smiled at them.”

Make the bricks and mortar (accommodation and academic facilities) accessible to as many as possible – it might not be possible to see every element of campus life, but the key ones should be accessible

“Have regular tours of things, rather than one big one and then you don't know when the next one is.”

Enthusiasm over arrogance

“When I got there (Exeter) I found that they were all really friendly there, all the students and academics were really enthusiastic, and they do a lot as a Department, and I just thought that if I went there I'd be really happy.”

“At one university the students there were like ‘Oh nooo, when I worked in the City there were no students from University X there...’”

Show you care

"At Nottingham there were simple little things but while we were all waiting to go on tours and things there were tea and biscuits, and every time you went back there were refills and water bottles, but when I went to University Y there was nothing like that."

"Durham: Very personal, every talk you went to they were available for questions, as you went out they tried to greet you, which I know is very hard, I understand that, but they just made that extra effort."

In contrast were the numerous examples students gave of less than impressive Open Days, and while nothing can be done to force the sun to shine, or move a quiet rural campus to the heart of a vibrant city, the following examples would appear to be more controllable:

"When I went on a tour at one university the girl spent the entire time talking about where she'd been passed out, and it really put my parents off – that probably wasn't a strong point."

"At one university the talk wasn't really organised, and we asked a lot of questions and the guy who did the talk didn't know any of the answers."

"I wasn't sure beforehand (choosing between the two), but my experiences at the two were worlds apart. At one when I got there for an interview they had a whole group, they took us round, they had medical students explaining their situations, talking about the interviews. I was nervous when I got there but after speaking to the students and the other candidates it settled me down so much. Before the interviews the Head of Admissions came down to talk to us about it, and I got a vibe that they cared about me. However, when I went to the other university I went in by myself, I went to reception and the man said to wait, for 20 minutes, I then got called up, no-one was there... I don't want to say they didn't care, but it made a massive impact."

It is impossible to say from this research the exact impact of Open Days, and how many application decisions hinged on them - either positively or negatively. The number of students though who told glowing Open Day testimonies about their favoured UCAS choice does illustrate the impact they can have.

"I hadn't ever heard of Lancaster before, so it was only looking at League Tables (for Geography) that made me think 'hang on there could be an opportunity here', but as soon as I did see it I fell in love with it."

"I'm surprised I loved Sussex – I just went there because I thought it looked like a nice place, and then I went there and I thought 'wow, it's a really nice feel and a nice vibe'..... They do work, Open Days."

The wealth of information

Encouragingly, given the importance of the decision, students usually felt they were able to make informed choices, and on the whole felt relatively comfortable with the rationale behind their applications. There was little if any sense of a lack of information available to them, or a lack of people to turn to for opinions.

It was also reassuring that there was an underlying, common belief that they had to make the decision that was right for them, that it was a personal choice, and not one where they could just follow the herd (although the herd might well point them in the right direction).

“The worst thing to do is listen to other people’s opinions.”

“This year Bath’s a popular uni at our school; I know so many people from here have applied to Bath, so you think ‘oh, I’ll check them out!’”

Within the predictable sources of information though (e.g. prospectuses, League Tables, Open Days, peers views etc), there were some interesting recurring themes:

The printed prospectus is not dead!

While the vast majority of students relied at least in part on university websites to help them make their decisions, there was also a (sizeable) majority view that printed prospectuses still had a vital role to play. This is in part because of a greater sense of confidence with a printed version – everything is easy to find and all in one place, without the worry that you might miss something entirely – but also a result of the need to compare across universities. This is why students commonly used printed prospectuses when looking to initially compare a number of courses/institutions, and then subsequently used the university websites when they wanted detailed information on one specific element.

“I think to compare two unis you use the prospectus, but if you just want to find one thing you might go online.”

“It’s easier to read from it, you can pick it up there and then, and all the info is in one place.”

“I used the printed version to get a feel for the uni as a whole, and then if I liked it I used the website to be more subject specific. I didn’t feel like I needed all the detail online immediately as it was a bit overwhelming.”

“Online always has greater information, but I just like the hard copy, I like having something in my hands to flick through.”

This was also in some cases a part of the filtering process. The view was often that websites have a vast amount of detailed information, which to some extent is unnecessary and overwhelming when making the first trawl across 15 or more universities (many of which will be quickly discarded). Once there is a shorter list of more credible candidates, then more detailed effort can be invested, and websites play a more central role.

Peers over teachers

Despite the central role teachers play in many elements of the application process, from advising on personal statements to actually teaching the subjects, it was perhaps surprising the limited emphasis the majority of students placed on teachers' opinions of universities.

The common view was that the majority of trusted, senior teachers by definition would have gone to university 15 or more years ago, and so their personal experiences and opinions were felt to be less relevant in comparison to those of older siblings, friends and relatives who had more recent experience of university life.

It wasn't for a moment that we felt students didn't trust teachers and tutors to give good advice, more that they often felt this was a personal decision they should make on their own, and in that light they felt more comfortable asking their peers (equals) than their seniors.

In line with this it was often the case that when they did seek advice from teachers and tutors as to where to apply, it was often with a view to generating a couple of additional, less crucial suggestions to fill up the form – in essence 4th or 5th choices.

“I wouldn't recommend that in terms of a starting point (asking Teachers for suggestions), as I would have had that from my own experiences of Open Days and stuff.”

This was of course not a golden rule, and a number of students had put great store in teachers' and tutors' valuable advice. However it seemed clear that the greater role for staff was in successfully setting students up to make their own decisions, rather than directly influencing the decisions themselves.

The minimal role of social media

Though we didn't have time to explore it in the groups, we'd have no hesitation in assuming that nearly all of the students made use of social media in some form³. However, it would appear that use of social media sites in the context of their university decisions is far more limited than this.

A minority of students had visited www.thestudentroom.co.uk, but this was mainly in the context of seeking views on very specific issues such as personal statements, or applying to Oxford on the basis of re-sits. Few had visited TSR or similar web forums to help more generally in terms of shaping their overall choices.

The rationale was that such forums are by their nature subjective, and that the opinions could not necessarily be taken as relevant to them personally (in contrast to seeking the views of people they knew, such as friends or relatives).

“There's definitely a danger from forming an opinion on a university based on someone else's opinion.”

Similarly there was minimal, if any, use of universities' Facebook pages or Twitter feeds – it was just not something these students considered relevant when researching where to apply.

3. YouGov figures suggest 95% of 16-20 year olds have used Facebook within the last month; source: www.yougov.co.uk, Feb 2012

KISs, what KISs?

The 2011 Students at the Heart of the System White Paper envisaged Key Information Sets playing a central role in helping students make informed decisions about which university course was best for them.

“(Key Information Sets) will help applicants to find quickly, and compare easily, the headline items which students consider most important.”⁴

Our research suggests the move to publishing such information has been helpful, but that it still falls far short of enabling the central principle of comparison.

We cannot recall a single student who was familiar with the phrase Key Information Set, or who had proactively searched and systematically compared the information across possible courses. Instead, students had sporadically happened upon individual pieces of information - on university websites, or at Open Day presentations, or, in the case of student satisfaction, in League Tables.

“At the Reading Open Day they referred to it as a Government thing, bla bla bla, go have a look, it’s all our stats... but no, I never did.”

However, this unintentional approach was by its nature piecemeal, and meant students were more often exposed to it in terms of marketing by the universities (e.g. ‘our graduates typically start on £25,000 per year’), rather than objective evidence provided about them (e.g. ‘students spend 23% of their time in lectures, seminars and similar, vs. 21% and 19% at universities X and Y’).

“You kind of look at them (contact hours) out of curiosity rather than comparing them.”

Given this was in effect the first UCAS cycle that such information was widely and systematically available, the concept was always going to need time to get established in students minds, but the aim is laudable – students were clearly attracted to the idea, even if they weren’t aware of it in practice.

“I’ve never heard of Key Information Sets... but this could have been very useful.”

It should be acknowledged at the same time though, that with decisions driven by personal preference as much as objective evidence, it is debateable how many students will actually sit down and use KISs in the way they are intended even when they are more pervasive.

“I don’t think I would have time to compare all my unis.”

4. Students at the Heart of the System, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, June 2011.

4. Research Background

This report presents the findings from a series of 10 mini-group discussions with Year 13 students. All students were predicted A-level grades of AAB+ or in a few cases ABB or similar, and were applying to universities in this UCAS cycle (for possible entry in 2013). In all we spoke to 30 students. Groups were held in the course of February and March 2013 i.e. after the deadline for UCAS applications, but before the deadline for acceptance of offers. The profile of the five participating schools were as follows:

- An Independent Co-educational School in London
- An Academy in Cornwall
- A girls Grammar School in the Midlands
- A Community College in Devon
- A Comprehensive School in Berkshire.

For various historic reasons, the schools selected were all drawn from the Midlands and the South of England. They are therefore not intended to be geographically representative of England as a whole. Furthermore, the universities that the students had applied to are to some extent a function of the particular locations of the schools, and so in turn we would obviously not claim that they are representative of applications across AAB/ABB students across England.

However, the report does hope to represent a robust flavour of the thoughts and opinions of Year 13 students in schools that traditionally have a high number of students achieving high grades at A-level.

With the above caveats, we also feel it is of interest to see the universities that the students in the research had applied to, and their choices are represented in the form of a word cloud below:





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research

www.vanillaresearch.co.uk