Exploring young people's perceptions and attitudes towards their progression to university: A Scottish rural perspective

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Abstract

This paper makes an exploratory analysis of young people's perception and attitudes towards their potential progression to higher education. These young people belonged to three state secondary schools whose catchment areas are mainly rural. All were in S5/Year 12 or S6/Year 13 and aged 16 and more. They filled in a serial questionnaire in November 2014 and again in March 2015. Firstly, our analysis reveals that 40% of the respondents were not aware of any obstacles to their going to university. Secondly, it points out that if the majority of the respondents perceived financial barriers, the perception of these obstacles tended to decline over time. Thirdly, while their enthusiasm and motivation towards their potential progression to higher education remained high in March 2015, more had reported these positive attitudes in November 2014. Finally, if most perceived their parents' enthusiasm about them going to university at both time periods, they were fewer to acknowledge it in March 2015 and many more to recognise that of their school.

Keywords: Rurality, perception, attitudes, higher education

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide an exploratory analysis of young people's perceptions and attitudes towards their potential progression to higher education. These young people belonged to three Scottish state secondary schools whose catchment areas are mainly rural. This investigation had three objectives. Firstly, it wished to determine whether these pupils perceived barriers to higher education access. Secondly, it wanted to reveal how they felt about going to university. Thirdly, it sought to give an indication of their perceptions of their parents', schools' and peers' enthusiasm about them going to higher education.

This investigation builds on the published research of Lasselle, Kirby and Macpherson (2015) and complements that of Lasselle (2016). Lasselle et al. started to gather evidence on the access to higher education of Scottish rural communities, in particular those in the areas of Highlands and Islands in the north and the west of Scotland They notably reported that:

1. most of these communities are not located in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland; and
2. the three-year average progression rate to higher education of the 47 state secondary schools located in these areas is lower than the Scottish national average of 36%.

It is in light of these two facts that they examined real and perceived barriers to higher education access from these communities. This paper focuses on some of the quantitative aspects of this research, the qualitative aspect having been presented in Lasselle (2016). It is emphasised, however, that the analysis is an exploratory analysis and it does not include all potential analyses that could be applied to the data.

The literature usually distinguishes four types of real or perceived barriers to higher education in the UK: financial barriers, geographical barriers, educational barriers and personal barriers (*e.g.*, Connor & Dewson, 2001; Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; Gorard, Adnett, May, Slack, Smith, & Thomas, 2007; Hartas, 2016; Kintrea, St Clair, & Houston, 2011). Lasselle et al. (2015) explored each of these barriers in the case of these rural communities. They highlighted that all pupils from these areas faced large pecuniary and non-pecuniary costs to study in higher education. In many cases, these costs were thought to be higher because of where these young people lived.

Links between geographical factors and low participation in higher education have recently been studied in Ireland by Walsh, Flannery and Cullinan (2015), in England and Wales by Gibbons and Vignoles (2013) and in Scotland by Skerratt et al. (2012). Frenette (2004) explained the low participation of rural young people by the costs of moving from 'home' and the fact that they might not see the benefits resulting from tertiary education. However, it is the link between socio-economic factors and participation in higher education that is usually studied (Croxford & Raffe, 2013; Gorard et al., 2007; Raffe & Croxford, 2015; Riddell, 2014). Multiple factors affect progression to higher education, including parents' occupations and income, peers, low educational attainment or the area where young people live.

The over-representation of students from the most affluent backgrounds studying at university has made widening access to higher education a priority for the Scottish Government. The geographical aspect has driven the government agenda and its dimension is measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD thereafter) (see Scottish Government, 2012). As part of SIMD, Scotland is divided into data zones, with each zone measuring the level of deprivation according to different factors, including employment, health, education, geographical access to basic public services, and crime. All zones are aggregated by quintile from the 20% most deprived zones to the 20% least deprived zones.

In November 2014, the First Minister of Scotland strongly advocated that her government's ambition was that "a child born today in one of the most deprived communities should, by the time he or she leaves school have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of the least deprived communities" (Scottish Government, 2014). The Scottish government appointed a Commission on Widening Access whose final report, with 37 recommendations, was published in March 2016. The government accepted the Commission's targets and indicated that it would give careful consideration to its recommendations (BBC, 2016). Recommendation 32 clearly stated 2030 as the deadline year to achieve the First Minister's ambition of equality of access to higher education in Scotland and it set intermediate targets for each Scottish higher education institution to meet, in order to progress the equality goal (Commission on Widening Access, 2016). All these targets and the equality goal are set against the 20% most deprived areas, that is, the first SIMD quintile.

This is problematic for Scottish rural areas as the SIMD is known to better capture deprivation in urban areas than in rural areas (Scottish Government, 2012, p. 7; Skerratt et al., 2014, p. 79). As highlighted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1997), Scotland is mainly rural. However, although more than 75% of the territories are rural, 75% of the population lives in urban areas. Indeed, Lasselle et al. (2015) pointed out that none of the 47 state schools in Highlands and Islands have a postcode in the 20% most deprived areas; 10 have a postcode in the 40% most deprived areas, while 19 have a postcode in the 40% least deprived areas (p. 6).

Lasselle et al. (2015) also highlighted the greater variation of progressions to higher education year-on-year than other areas of Scotland. They noted that 28 out of 47 schools have a lower

than three-year average progression rate to higher education. However, these differences in terms of SIMD quintiles and progression need to be interpreted with caution. Only those pupils who live in the close vicinity of the school share the school's postcode. As the secondary schools in rural areas usually have large catchment areas, most of their pupils' home addresses do not have the school's postcode. As these schools can be very small, any change in number can lead to large variations in percentage.

A second problem for rural areas arises from the Commission's final report (Commission on Widening Access, 2016). Access to higher education for those from rural areas could not be examined due to lack of time, to the regret of the commissioners (p. 69). This led them to suggest further work "to support equal access for other group of learners" (p. 70).

This paper aims to fill that absence. It gathers evidence to provide a more detailed understanding of the perceptions of access to higher education and attitudes towards higher education from those living in rural areas. It focuses on S5/Year 12 and S6/Year 13 pupils from three secondary schools whose catchment areas are mainly rural. It proposes an exploratory analysis of the pupils' answers to a questionnaire that they filled in on two occasions, in November 2014 and again in March 2015.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section provides some background information about rurality, perceptions and attitudes. It is followed by a section that presents the research questions and the methodology. The paper then offers information about the exploratory analysis, the key findings and discussion, finishing with concluding comments.

Rurality, perceptions and attitudes

My approach is close to James, Wyn, Baldwin, Hepworth, McInnis and Stephanou's (1999) work in spirit. They examined "the attitudes, goals and plans of Australian senior high school students via a survey of over 7,000 students in grades 10-12 in three states, complemented by interviews with about 350 students in 20 rural schools" (p. 1). Their findings were threefold. Firstly, the participation in higher education for people in these areas was more influenced by socio-economic circumstances than distance to university and "the costs of higher education are serious inhibitors or barriers" for rural students (p. xvi). Secondly, these rural students were more likely to perceive the direct costs of going to university (e.g., living away from home) and its indirect costs, such as the loss of friendship, as barriers. Thirdly, these students were less likely to be encouraged by their parents to attend university and might not have seen the benefit of higher education in terms of careers.

My work departs from James et al.'s (1999) on several aspects. My scale was much smaller. The research questionnaire was not only filled in by senior high school students, but also by some junior high school students. It was less detailed and it was not designed to capture the community aspect. However, it had the advantage of being used on two occasions.

More recent research in the UK and Australia extended the results of the analysis of James et al. (1999). For instance, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2014) reported that "one in three rural school leavers defer their university offer, compared with one in 10 metropolitan school leavers" and "fewer rural school leavers apply for university, fewer were offered places and fewer accept the places they are offered" (p. 3). Spielhofler, Golden and Evans (2011) explained how rural young people's aspirations could be impacted by structural factors, such as transport and distance between education and training providers. So did the Commission for Rural Communities in England (2012), which aimed to tackle rural disadvantage but was abolished in

2013, when it emphasised the problem of public transport and the lack of careers advice in some areas in rural England.

Generally speaking, the main obstacles to access to higher education faced by rural young people are financial and usually link to the lack of access to convenient public transport and work-related issues. As most educational providers are located in urban areas, relocation expenses and housing costs are rather large for those living in rural areas. The lack of public transport prevents young people's mobility, while the work-related issues can affect their aspirations towards higher education. Indeed, there are limited work opportunities in many rural communities; few of these require a tertiary education and earnings are usually low. These conditions might prevent people from leaving their community. On the one hand, they cannot leave because it is too expensive to do so. On the other hand, why should they enter into higher education and build up debt if their wish is to return to live in their communities at the end of their studies?

Finally, low participation of rural people in higher education can be explained by the lack of educational choices and poor educational attainment in some communities. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office report (2014), for example, emphasised two additional challenges that face rural communities and the quality of school education on offer. These included "difficulty attracting and retaining a skilled teaching workforce" and "providing a breadth of subjects and a range of education models to suit all learning types" (p. 23).

The research questions and methods

This paper explores young people's perceptions and attitudes towards their potential progression to university. It rests on the exploratory analysis of a serial questionnaire, which was filled in by S5/Year 12 and S6/Year 13 pupils from three Scottish state secondary schools in rural catchment areas in November 2014 and again in March 2015. It addresses three research questions:

- What obstacles to their going to university did S5 or S6 pupils in these three schools perceive?
- How much were they enthusiastic or motivated about going to university?
- How did they perceive their parents', schools' or peers' enthusiasm about them going to university?

The research underwent the University of St Andrews ethics approval process (UTREC code: MN11198). The serial questionnaire was first distributed in November 2014. At this time, S6 and some S5 pupils wishing to enter into higher education were in the process of completing their application to an undergraduate higher education course at one of the UK higher education institutions. Applications for most courses have to be submitted by mid-January every year and each candidate can apply for up to five courses.

The questionnaire was again circulated in March 2015. By then, most pupils knew if their application for entry to higher education had been rejected or accepted with or without conditions. All participants gave their written consent prior to filling in the survey. Parents or guardians gave their written consent for their child to be part of this research.

The catchment area of each of the three schools was mainly rural. One school was small and was located on one of the Scottish islands. The other two schools were on the Scottish mainland, one being relatively larger than the other one. Each school had a three-year progression rate to higher education equal or less than the three-year Scottish national average of 36%. Two schools

were located in the 40% least deprived areas in Scotland and the third one was located in the 40% most deprived areas in Scotland.

Exploratory analysis of the questionnaires

A total of 218 questionnaires was returned on both occasions. Responses were excluded if participants: (1) gave blank responses when a response was expected, or (2) did not follow the instructions (e.g., they ticked more than one category when only one should have been ticked). 161 pupils responded to all questions about perceptions and attitudes in November 2014 and March 2015. Most of these pupils were in S5 (52.2%), 16 years old (54.7%) and female (51.6%). Almost all of these pupils lived with their parents or guardians during weekdays and weekends during school-term time. The majority had both parents or guardians in paid work. A significant minority of the participants (29.2%) declared that their parents or guardians went to university and completed a degree course. Almost three-quarters of them (72%) indicated that one of their relatives went to university, but 13.7% of the respondents were unable to say if their parents or guardians had attended university or not.

The majority of the participants thought that they would go on to education and training when they left school, with their preferred destination being university. Three-quarters of them indicated that their parents had encouraged them to go to university. Half of them acknowledged their teachers' encouragement and only 30% of them acknowledged encouragement from their peers. More than three-quarters of the respondents thought that they would get a job when they finished their schooling, training or education. More than 45% of them stated that they needed a degree to do what they wanted to do in their lives and a small majority was already ready to go into paid work.

The questionnaire was designed to measure the qualitative change in pupils' perceptions and attitudes and a list of possible options followed the format of a typical five-level Likert scale. The questionnaire comprised three sections:

1. The first section collected the research participants' characteristics, including gender, where they lived during weekdays or weekends during school-term time, and the educational background of their parents or guardians.
2. In the second section, young people could indicate whether they had the intention to apply to university, to go to further education and training when they left school, and their likelihood of getting a job.
3. The third and final section addressed their perceptions of barriers to their going to university, their own attitudes or the perceived attitudes from those who knew them best towards this potential progression. This final section was mainly composed of a list of statements. The research participants could either 'strongly agree' (SA), 'agree' (A), 'strongly disagree' (SD), 'disagree' (D), or 'neither agree or neither disagree' (NA/ND) with each statement.

The exploratory analysis was twofold. On the one hand, I wanted to characterise the perceptions and attitudes of pupils towards their potential progression to university. On the other hand, I wanted to measure if these perceptions or attitudes changed over time.

I measured perceptions and attitudes from the response frequencies to the statements in the questionnaire. Firstly, I grouped the 'I agree' and the 'I strongly agree' options. I also gathered the 'I disagree' and the 'I strongly disagree' options. The number of categories for each statement then dropped from five to three: 'strongly agree, agree' (SA/A), 'neither agree, neither disagree' (NA/ND), and 'strongly disagree, disagree' (SD/D). This process was designed to ensure

that, for each statement, there were: (1) a clear indication of agreement or disagreement, and (2) a clear movement between categories when performing this exploratory analysis.

Secondly, I aggregated answers from each of the three categories for each statement, regardless of gender, school year (S5 or S6) and location, and I examined the result. This meant that I considered that the respondents perceived financial barriers to their going to university if most participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "it will cost too much for me to go to university." In the same way, I considered that many respondents did not perceive geographical barriers to their going to university if a significant proportion of participants disagreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I would like to attend a university as close to home as possible." I interpreted the statement 'neither agree/neither disagree' as 'I don't have much of an opinion'.

Thirdly, for the over-time analysis, I compared the aggregated answers (in each of the three categories per statement) obtained in November 2014 with those obtained in March 2015. I assumed that any five percentage-point difference between the aggregated answers represented a change in perceptions or attitudes. I realise that my decision to use the five percentage-point cut-off was arbitrary. In the context of this paper, however, a five percentage-point difference represents a movement of eight responses (out of 161) from one of the three categories to the other two. For instance, if the percentage-point change from November 2014 to March 2015 for the category 'SD/D' was + 7.0 for a given statement, I considered that there was a change in perceptions or attitudes regarding this statement over time. If the percentage-point change from November 2014 to March 2015 for the category 'SA/A' was - 2.3, I considered that there was no change in perceptions or attitudes over time.

Key findings about perceptions of the barriers to higher education

I shall begin by highlighting that almost 40% of the respondents felt that there were no obstacles to their going to university. This relatively high percentage should not overshadow two facts. Firstly, a significant minority of participants (almost 30%) felt that there were obstacles to their going to university. Secondly, respondents reported specific types of barriers in other parts of the questionnaire. Table 1 provides details of the data based on each of the questionnaire statements.

With the noticeable exception of the financial barriers, more than 60% of participants in November 2014 or in March 2015 did not feel that there were geographical barriers or qualification obstacles to their access to higher education; nor did they have much of an opinion about them. Specifically, the strongest barriers felt by the participants were financial barriers. In November 2014, more than half of them indicated concerns that "it will cost too much to go to university". The participants did not think that distance was an issue. Only a quarter of them would like to attend a university as close to home as possible, regardless of the time period they filled in on the questionnaire. However, qualifications were perceived as an obstacle by a stronger minority (almost a third of them) of the respondents in November 2014.

The perceptions of financial and geographical obstacles seemed to decrease over time. The percentage of pupils reporting financial barriers decreased by eight percentage-points between November 2014 and March 2015. There was a five percentage-point increase in the volume of answers in the 'SD/D' category for the statement "I would like to attend a university as close to home as possible", making it close to 47%.

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages from the November 2015 questionnaires and how these data changed at March 2015

Statement	Response category	Nov. 2014 (frequency)	Nov. 2014 (percentage of participants)	Change in frequency from Nov. 2014 to March 2015	Change in percentage-points from Nov. 2014 to March 2015
I do not feel that there are any obstacles to my going to university	SA/A	63	39.1%	+ 0	+ 0.0
	NA/ND	52	32.3%	+ 1	+ 0.6
	SD/D	46	28.6%	- 1	- 0.6
I would like to attend a university as close to home as possible	SA/A	41	25.5%	- 2	- 1.2
	NA/ND	45	28%	- 6	- 3.7
	SD/D	75	46.6%	+ 8	+ 5.0
I feel concerned that it will cost too much for me to go to university	SA/A	84	52.2%	- 13	- 8.1
	NA/ND	40	24.8%	+ 0	+ 0.0
	SD/D	37	23.0%	+ 13	+ 8.1
I do not think I will have the right qualifications to go to university	SA/A	53	32.9%	- 5	- 3.1
	NA/ND	47	29.2%	+ 2	+1.2
	SD/D	61	37.9%	+ 3	+1.9
I feel that I will enjoy going to university	SA/A	119	73.9%	- 10	- 6.2
	NA/ND	29	18.0%	- 3	- 1.9
	SD/D	13	8.1%	+ 13	+ 8.1
I am motivated to go to university	SA/A	104	64.6%	- 6	- 3.7
	NA/ND	25	15.5%	- 6	- 3.7
	SD/D	32	19.9%	+ 12	+ 7.5
My parents are enthusiastic about me going to university	SA/A	113	70.2%	- 8	- 5.0
	NA/ND	24	14.9%	+ 7	+ 4.3
	SD/D	24	14.9%	+ 1	+ 0.6
My peers are enthusiastic about me going to university	SA/A	80	49.7%	+ 3	+ 1.9
	NA/ND	41	25.5%	+ 6	+ 3.7
	SD/D	40	24.8%	- 9	- 5.6
My school is enthusiastic about me going to university	SA/A	94	58.4%	+ 11	+ 6.8
	NA/ND	41	25.5%	- 8	- 5.0
	SD/D	26	16.1%	- 3	- 1.9
I do not need a	SA/A	43	26.7%	- 8	- 5.0

degree to do what I want to do in my life	NA/ND	44	27.3%	+ 9	+ 5.6
	SD/D	74	46.0%	- 1	- 0.6
I am not ready to go into paid work yet	SA/A	45	28.0%	- 10	- 6.2
	NA/ND	30	18.6%	+ 14	+ 8.7
	SD/D	86	53.4%	- 4	- 2.5

Legend: SA/A: strongly agree/agree; NA/ND: neither agree/neither disagree; SD/D: disagree/strongly disagree. The means and the standard deviations associated with each statement (at both time periods) are available upon request from the author.

Key findings about students' attitudes and others' perceived attitudes to potential progression to higher education

The vast majority of the participants had positive attitudes about their potential progression to university. Almost three-quarters of them (73.3%) felt that they would enjoy going to university and almost two-thirds of them (64.6%) were motivated to go to university in November 2014. Although these positive attitudes continued to dominate a few months later, the former decreased by more than six percentage-points and the latter by slightly less than three in March 2015. In both cases, it is the category 'SD/D' to the statements "I feel that I will enjoy going to university" and "I am motivated to go to university" which marks the change in attitude, a seven percentage-point increase for the former and an eight percentage-point increase for the latter.

More than 70% of the participants reported that their parents were enthusiastic about their going to university. The percentages were also high when they referred to their school (58.4%) and their peers (49.7%). However, there was a change in these perceived attitudes over time. Fewer respondents acknowledged the positive perceived attitudes from their parents and their peers in March 2015. More pupils recognised the enthusiasm of their school. Indeed, there was a noticeable increase in the number of pupils disagreeing with the statement "My peers are enthusiastic about me going to university" and a decrease in the number agreeing with the statement "My parents are enthusiastic about me going to university". The percentage-point increase regarding the schools' perceived enthusiasm almost reached seven, making the percentage similar to that of parents (65.2%).

Discussion

My exploratory analysis of the participants' responses has addressed my initial three research questions concerning young people's perceived barriers to university access and their attitudes towards their potential progression to university. Four main research findings have emerged. Firstly, a significant minority of research participants did not perceive any barriers to their going to university. Secondly, if the majority of the students considered cost as a major issue, the perceived obstacles tended to decrease over time. Thirdly, although the students' positive attitudes remained high over time, they were weaker in March 2015 than in November 2014. Finally, although the enthusiasm they perceived from their parents persisted over time, fewer pupils acknowledged it in March 2015 and more recognised their schools' enthusiasm.

Some of the results on barriers to higher education access are similar to those available in the literature. For instance, costs were a major issue for our rural pupils as demonstrated in James et al. (1999). As Gibbons and Vignoles (2013) have already highlighted, the geographical factor was regarded as having little or no impact on going to university for the majority of the respondents.

My simple quantitative investigation complements the qualitative analysis presented in Lasselle (2016). The latter rested on the analysis of the interviews with young people and their educators who were living in remote and rural communities of Scotland. The exploratory analysis of the

participants' responses to the serial questionnaire allowed me to shed new light on these interviews. I am now able to offer some suggestions about how the perceived barriers to access of higher education, as identified by young people, might be mitigated.

Nevertheless, in terms of perceived obstacles to university access, there are two unexpected results:

1. the absence of perceived barriers for a strong minority of respondents, and
2. the feeling that perceived barriers decreased over time.

The absence of barriers could be explained by the fact that some respondents did not want to go to university in the first place and that the three-year progression rate to higher education in each of these three schools is equal to or below the Scottish national average of 36%. The decline in barriers between the first and second surveys could be explained twofold. It may result from the decision of some respondents, between the filling in of the questionnaires, not to go to university after all. It could also be linked to the fact that some of the respondents received offers from the universities they had applied for, especially since the questionnaire was circulated for the second time in March 2015 when unconditional or conditional offers were usually known to applicants. It is easy to imagine that, when an applicant receives one or more offers, potential geographical or educational obstacles to higher education access seem to disappear 'automatically'.

The results on attitudes resembled those available in Lasselle et al. (2015). When asked who encouraged them to go to university, the vast majority of respondents indicated their parents or guardians and, to a lesser extent, their school. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that similar percentages were found on young people's perceived enthusiasm from both groups. The role of parents and teachers on the decision-making process of young people towards the pursuit of higher education study is documented in the literature (*e.g.,* Blenkinsop et al., 2006; Gorard et al., 2007). Nevertheless, there are two surprising results. The level of perceived enthusiasm from parents remained high, but it decreased over time, while that from schools grew. In the first case, that result is unexpected. Indeed, it is usually perceived that parents are less supportive towards potential higher education progression in rural areas (*e.g.,* James et al., 1999). The decrease could be explained by the fact that the outcomes of applications were known by March 2015.

The change in perceived enthusiasm from schools could be explained in two ways. Firstly, teachers in rural communities are among the rare members of the community to have experienced higher education. In the eyes of the participants, they could be well placed to show their encouragement and enthusiasm. Indeed, many participants reported that their parents or guardians did not go to higher education. Secondly, as some of the respondents were in the second half of the academic year of S5/Year 12 when they filled in the questionnaire in March 2015, it was the time when schools might give more information about tertiary education.

This discussion highlights that one should take into account the students' context when analysing barriers. For example, the deadline for applications to higher education courses might be an important influence on students and this might impact on students' perceptions and attitudes towards potential progression to higher education. In November 2014, S6/Year 13 pupils were more likely to apply to university than S5/Year 12 pupils. Information sessions on the higher education admissions process organised by schools were then at their pick for the S6/Year 12 pupils. As a result, perceptions of barriers and perceived attitudes from the school between year groups could be different. In March 2015, S6/Year 13 pupils knew the outcomes of their

applications while S5/Year 12 pupils were probably giving more thought to higher education, as that was the time for their applications to university summer schools and subject choices in S6.

Concluding comments

This short paper investigated the perceptions and the attitudes of young people towards their potential progression to higher education. These young people were S5/Year 12 and S6/Year 13 pupils attending three Scottish state secondary schools whose catchment areas are mainly rural. My investigation was based on a questionnaire filled in by 161 pupils in November 2014 and again in March 2015. It led to four outcomes. Firstly, I highlighted that a significant minority of participants felt that there were no barriers to their going to higher education. Nevertheless, pecuniary obstacles to university access were the most likely to be perceived, although they tended to decrease over time. Thirdly, the research participants were very positive about their going to university but fewer reported these good spirits in March 2015. Finally, the vast majority perceived the enthusiasm about them going to university from their parents. However, fewer acknowledged it in March 2015 and many more recognised their school's enthusiasm.

I am in the process of extending the analysis of data. I will analyse the perceptions and attitudes of these young people according to gender, location and school year. Indeed, as the dataset contains all the responses of the same individuals to the same questionnaire over two dates, I can track if each of the research participants changed their mind over time. For instance, if a female respondent ticked 'I agree' in November 2014 and 'I neither agree, nor disagree' in March 2015 for a given statement, I might conclude that she has changed her mind regarding this statement over time. However, if a male pupil ticked 'I agree' in November 2014 and 'I strongly agree' in March 2015, I could conclude that he did not change his mind. By aggregating these movements, I will be able to assess whether young people are likely to change their minds regarding barriers to higher education access or their attitudes towards their potential progression to higher education. This should allow me to examine more accurately perceptions and attitudes over time, while providing more detailed analysis of the data that were collected.

Acknowledgements

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