

PROJECT REPORT

**BLACK, ASIAN AND MINORITY ETHNIC STUDENT AND PARENT EXPECTATIONS
AND PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRESSION IN SHEFFIELD**

**A Report for Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire +
(HeppSY+)**

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We are very grateful to all the support and advice received by members of the project advisory group.

Forward

Historically there has been a long commitment to understanding the education and progressions gap and meeting the needs of black, Asian and minority ethnic students with education. Yet despite the research, efforts and strong commitments by government, gaps have narrowed, but inequalities remain at large, in society and at an institutional level that need to be tackled to give black, Asian and minority ethnic students equal chance of achieving success in life.

This report provides valuable evidence to help the Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire Plus (HeppSY+), in its work, and offer some guidance to universities and colleges. It is important that education institutions and HeppSY+ act on what students and parents say to influence change.

The report sheds new light on what students and parents perceive as important to them. It also provides evidence about the information, practice and approach that students, parents and communities need, and how best to deliver.

This informative report has the power to make positive change. I thank all the students, parents who participated in the study and all the staff who supported it.

Nusrat Rehman
Project Lead

Executive Summary

Introduction

There has been an emphasis in recent years on widening participation in higher education (HE). Although there have been some positive changes overall, there are still large differences in the participation rates of young people living in different parts of the country.

In South Yorkshire the number of young people progressing in to higher education is low, particularly for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and young men.

This research project was commissioned by the Higher Education Partnership Progression South Yorkshire Plus (HeppSY+) and undertaken by Sheffield City Council, Lifelong Learning Skills and Communities (LLSC) Sector – Nusrat Rehman (Project Lead). It is part of the ongoing commitment of HeppSY+ to increase the number of young people progressing onto higher education from 45 targeted wards. HeppSY+ and the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) partnered to gather quantitative baseline data of students about higher education and future goals.

The focus of this qualitative research was to identify gaps in current understanding of the reasons why some black, Asian and Minority ethnic young people with the ability, do not progress to higher education, and explore the barriers, factors and enablers to progression.

In the selection of BAME students and parents, participants were selected by schools who identified as non-white British and parent participants were selected from mainly 5 ethnic groups in Sheffield (African/Caribbean, Pakistani, Somali, Yemeni and Bengali heritage backgrounds).

Although the black, Asian and minority ethnic group were surveyed as a homogenous group and similarities and common concerns among students and parents were drawn, there did also emerge differences between the ethnic groups that were more common to one group over the other. These differences need to be further explored to better understand the issues and barriers to progression and aid bespoke initiatives to target the progressions gap of certain under-represented ethnic groups.

Research consisted of conducting interviews and focus groups with 52 students (primarily Years 9, 10, 12 &13) from across 4 schools and 1 college, simultaneously conducting interviews with parents from selected BAME communities.

The findings show that there are many complex and interlinked reasons behind the inequalities with HE progression for BAME communities, issues are more complex with a range of causal factors/ barriers to progression which are inter-related to socio- economic factors, culture, perceptions, and factors at an institutional, parental and community level.

The main issues identified by students include: the lack of Information, advice and guidance on careers and post 16 options at school and college, lack of information about university, finance, course options and student support. Limited opportunities for work experience and

understanding of the labour market, potential income and job prospects to help inform choice, lack of motivational and aspirational support and guidance to achieve and aim high from education settings, parents and community settings.

These issues are mirrored by parents, compounded by the lack of understanding of the UK education system, fears and perceptions of the university life that goes against own cultural practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations are drawn from the qualitative research findings and are designed to address some of the challenges to increasing the number of black Asian minority Ethnic groups progressing onto higher education from the north of the Sheffield City.

Detailed suggestions cover

- bespoke higher education publicity, marketing and communication for BAME groups - review current materials and increase parental engagement
- raise awareness, improve perceptions and benefits of higher education - collaborative work, improve access, introduce role models, recruit BAME Graduate Interns
- improve the quality of information, advice and guidance received by students and parents - improve access, share labour market and destination information, provide more subject linked information, better informed teachers and parents.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the research

Participation in higher education in England has steadily been increasing since the 1990s. Participation amongst disadvantaged groups has grown in line with this overall increase and the gap between the most and least disadvantaged narrowed. However there are large differences in the participation rates of young people living in different parts of the country.

In South Yorkshire the number of young people progressing in to higher education is low, particularly for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and young men.

The Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire Plus (HeppSY+) programme was launched as a partnership of both Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield, to improve progression rates to higher education for under-represented groups.

HeppSY+ is part of a national outreach programme funded by the Office for Students (OfS), with a remit to work with young people from Year 9 who live in 45 target wards. Evidence shows that higher education participation of young people in these areas is both low and much lower than expected based on GCSE-level attainment.

This research project was commissioned by the Higher Education Partnership Progression South Yorkshire+ (HeppSY+) and undertaken by Sheffield City Council, Lifelong Learning Skills and Communities (LLSC) Sector. It is part of an ongoing commitment by HeppSY+ to increase the number of young people progressing to higher education in targeted wards. HeppSY+ and the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) partnership gathered quantitative baseline data of students about higher education and future goals.

The focus of this qualitative research project was to capture student and parent voice, by undertaking in depth focus group and one to one interviews of local students and parents of the school communities from the targeted Sheffield NCOP wards.

The findings show that the issues are more complex with a range of causal factors inter-related to culture, society, institutions, parents and communities. That requires an institutional approach with improved student, parent and community partnership.

Although the black, Asian and minority ethnic group were surveyed as a homogenous group and similarities and common concerns among students and parents were drawn, there did also emerge differences between the ethnic groups that were more common to one group over the other. These differences need to be further explored to better understand the issues and barriers to progression and aid bespoke initiatives to target the progressions gap of certain under-represented ethnic groups.

Aims and objectives

The aim of the qualitative research was to identify gaps in current understanding of the reasons why some black, Asian and Minority ethnic young people with the ability do not progress to higher education; establish the key factors in a young person's life that shape career aspirations and HE progression, explore barriers that influence this process; and make recommendations to assist with narrowing the HE progressions gap agenda.

The research project brief provided by HeppSY+ was to undertake:

- **Community audit:** Research and consultation to understand barriers/ issue to higher education progression from across black, Asian, minority ethnic communities (parents and young people).
- **Target schools (BAME young people within target wards):** gather baseline data & focus groups to understand knowledge, experiences, barriers, attitudes and future aspirations towards higher education - to inform policy and practice.
- **Higher education - BAME conference** – to raise awareness, motivation and aspirations to progress onto higher education and university.

Terminology

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) – This term is used to refer to people of minority ethnic status who are not white British, including Irish people and other white minorities.

Methodology

The early stage of the research involved collating demographic black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups/ organisations for the area, as well as mapping current services and key contacts.

HeppSY+ identified the target schools and college to work with. The research involved conducting focus group interviews with school and college students, supported by HeppSY+ Higher Education Engagement Assistants (Graduate Interns), who proved invaluable in organising focus groups within a tight timescale. Parent focus groups were planned, but proved difficult to arrange on specific date/s and times, with parents expressing difficulties with childcare, work and other household commitments.

Methods Used

Reference group - the research was advised and guided by a reference group made up of representatives from Sheffield Hallam University, The University of Sheffield, HeppSY+ staff and Sheffield City Council research staff. Their role was to oversee the decisions made about whom to include in the research and to use their contacts to ensure participation.

Community mapping – this took place to identify the key contacts and interest groups who would be contacted in the course of the research (see Appendix 1).

One to one interviews and focus group discussions with students and parents/ community members- A set of key questions were devised that formed the basic structure of the interviews and discussions. The questions helped guide the interview and notes were taken. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face and a few via telephone where face-to-face was difficult to arrange. Participants were also encouraged to add any additional information they felt relevant.

Informal visits and contacts - These took place as a way of publicising the research, **one to one interviewees, and focus group participants**. These were selected from the lead researcher's own contacts, other colleagues within LLSC knowledge of the area and community mapping by LLSC staff.

Staffing

Project Lead/ researcher was appointed by HeppSY+ as the Targeted Interventions Manager within LLSC – Nusrat Rehman - drawing on her experience of working within the area, with a particular focus on education and attainment of BAME communities.

The student and parent interviews were conducted by the lead researcher and colleagues within LLSC (Huda Ahmed and Daina Cummings) and aided by interpreters where necessary.

2. STAGE 1 - Community Audit

Research and consultation took place by a combination of outreach & consultation methods:

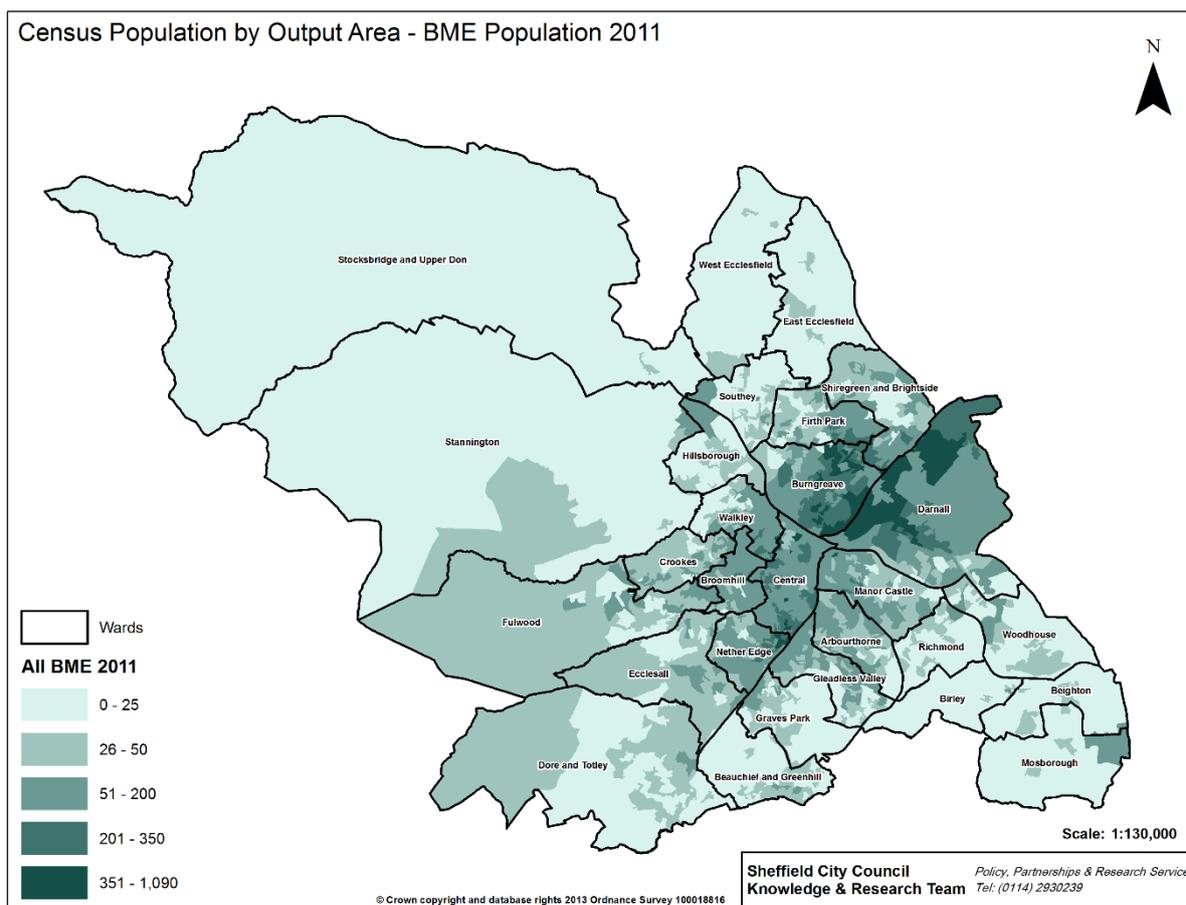
- Mapping of BAME groups within the targeted ward
- Identifying key contacts within wards/ networks
- Producing a student and parent survey (in consultation with HeppSY+)
- Work with organisations and local contacts to assist with organising one to one interviews
- Questionnaire/surveys - self completion, focus groups in community settings, outreach (supported by interpreters as required)

The Local Picture

2011 Census Ward Profile

Ethnic Group

BAME residents comprise of around 19% of the total population of Sheffield. Burngreave has the highest proportion of BAME people at 62%, whilst in Darnall and Central wards nearly half of the population are BAME and in Walkley, Nether Edge and Firth Park over a quarter. In contrast, in Stocksbridge and Upper Don, East and West Ecclesfield and Birley wards, less than 5 percent of the population are BAME. The map below shows how BAME residents are spread across the city, with higher populations in wards located in the centre, east and North East of the city.



Since the last census the BAME population citywide has increased by 90%. The highest increase at a ward level occurred in Walkley where the number of BAME residents has risen by more than 180% from 6,590 in 2001, to 18,139 in 2011. Overall, the BAME population has more than doubled in 12 of the 28 wards. Broomhill is the only ward in the city where there has been a less than 20% rise in BAME residents, with an increase of just 6%.

Almost a quarter of the population in Burngreave ward is of Pakistani origin. There are also large Pakistani communities in Darnall and Nether Edge. Burngreave ward also has the largest black African and Arab communities. There are large numbers of Chinese, Indian and Arab

people in Central ward. Many of these are likely to be students. Walkley ward also has large Chinese and Arab communities.

Country of Birth

Citywide, more than 88% of Sheffield residents were born in the UK. In Stocksbridge and Upper Don only 2% of residents were born outside of the UK, compared with 44% in the Central ward.

The majority of these respondents were born in Asia or the Middle East, around 6% citywide. However, this figure is significantly higher in Central and Burngreave wards, around 20% and 18% of residents, respectively.

Religion

In Sheffield, 31% of people stated that they had no religion, an increase of 88% from 2001. This figure is highest in the Broomhill ward (47%), however the highest increase since the previous census occurred in Central ward where 221% more people have no religion than in 2001.

Christianity has decreased city wide, nowhere more so than Southey ward where there are 26% fewer Christians than there were in 2001.

The number of Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus has nearly doubled citywide. In particular, across the city there are more than three times as many Buddhists living in Richmond, Shiregreen and Brightside and Stannington, six times as many Hindus and nearly three times as many Muslims living in Firth Park. There are also more than six times as many people of the Jewish faith living in Darnall and around three times more living in Stocksbridge and Upper Don and Woodhouse wards, despite an overall decline of 5% citywide.

3. STAGE 2 - Community/ Parent Consultation

A number of organisations were contacted, to set up focus groups with service clients; it soon became apparent that to arrange focus groups within the time scale and gain consent was fraught with difficulties and challenges. The decision was taken by the lead researcher to conduct one to one interviews to consult with parents.

A total of 48 parents from mainly African/ Caribbean, Pakistani, Somali, Yemeni and Bengali heritage backgrounds were consulted through school parents evening events and community events - linked to several community organisations. All interviews conducted were on a one to one basis, with exception of Bangladeshi parents which were part of a focus group interview.

The following organisations were contacted to link with community members and parents: Verdun St Somali Women’s Group, ZEST BME Health Project, The Cube Foundation, SADDACA and Duke Street Christian Centre, The Pakistan Muslim Centre.

Ethnicity	Number of Parents Consulted
Somali	5
Yemeni	8
Bangladeshi	2
Black African/ Caribbean	10
Pakistani	21
Other	2
Total	48

4. STAGE 3 - School/ College Student Consultation

A number of schools and a college were identified by HeppSY+ to set up focus group interviews, of between 6-8 students per focus group, targeted from students from the NCOP survey. Student year groups targeted were Y9 and Y10 from across Firvale, E-Act Parkwood, Firth Park Community Arts College and Hinde House schools, and students in Y12 and Y13 at Longley Park College. Consultations took place over 3 months (Nov 2017 – Jan 2018).

Student Profile

Total participants

School/ College	Number of students consulted				Total
	Y9	Y10	Y12	Y13	
Firvale	4	4			8
Firth Park Community College	6	6			12
E-act Parkwood	5	5			10
Hinde House	5	6			11
Longley College			7	4	11
			Total		52

Participants by Gender

School/ College	Gender	
	Male	Female
Firvale	3	5
Firth Park Community College	4	8
E-act Parkwood	5	5
Hinde House	3	8
Longley College	4	7

Participants by Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Number	Ethnic Group	Number
<input type="radio"/> White - British		<input type="radio"/> Other Black background	3
<input type="radio"/> White - Irish		<input type="radio"/> Mixed White and Black Caribbean	1
<input type="radio"/> White - Scottish		<input type="radio"/> Mixed White and Black African	
<input type="radio"/> Other White background	1	<input type="radio"/> Asian or Asian British - Indian	
<input type="radio"/> Black or Black British - Caribbean <input type="radio"/> Black or Black British - African	13	<input type="radio"/> Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	10
<input type="radio"/> Other Asian background	2	Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	
<input type="radio"/> Chinese		<input type="radio"/> Mixed White and Asian	4
<input type="radio"/> Irish Traveller		<input type="radio"/> Arab	9
<input type="radio"/> Other ethnic background Please	7	<input type="radio"/> Gypsy or Traveller	
		<input type="radio"/> Any other mixed background	2

5. Stage 4 - Data Analysis

In both one to one surveys and focus groups with parents from school and wider communities, parents were asked a series of questions to explore factors that influence choice to higher education progression for the children. It was reported that there was a complex interplay between societal and institutional factors.

When exploring factors that affected black, Asian and minority ethnic student's progression into higher education respondents commented on their education, parental support, socio-economic background, communities they reside in, motivations, aspirations, gender, ethnicity, discrimination, school effects and widening participation and outreach.

The data collection methods were designed to allow free discussion from respondents on a wide range of issues concerning parental engagement, issues and barriers to progression at a personal and institutional level.

Qualitative data from both the focus groups and one to one interviews underwent examination by the lead researcher to identify common patterns within responses.

6. Research Findings

The findings show that the issues are more complex with a range of causal factors, inter-related to culture, society, institutions, parents and communities. That requires an institutional approach with improved student, parent and community partnership.

Although the black, Asian and minority ethnic group were surveyed as a homogenous group and similarities and common concerns among students and parents were drawn, there did also emerge differences between the ethnic groups with diverse, distinct differences in religion and cultural practices which need to be considered when developing guidance for higher education progression. These differences need to be further explored to better understand the issues and barriers to progression and aid bespoke initiatives to target the progressions gap of certain under-represented ethnic groups.

Migration also needs to be factored in to the approaches and support offered to parents and students, recognising that there are different needs and experiences of early settled migrants such as Pakistani groups- whom are 2nd and 3rd generation compared with more recent arrivals of Eastern Europeans.

Qualitative Findings 1 – Student Focus Groups

Student Expectations and Perceptions

Higher Education Aspirations

Q 1: Have you thought about what you want to do after leaving school or college?

- Aspirations to progress onto higher education were very high amongst the group, namely progression onto university.
- Students were unsure of the course/ careers they would like to pursue in the future, due to limited knowledge and exposure to careers. There was a strong desire to learn more about courses and links to employment opportunities to help inform and shape choice.

“Yes I want to go onto university, but not sure what I want to study?” Year 10 Student
Firvale School

Factors that Affect Post 16 Directions

Q 2: How did you come to make that decision? What influenced your decision/ career path?

Family, Friends and Community

The responses from focus groups reflected the importance of parents and other relatives when choosing courses and which institution to study at.

- Parents are the greatest driving force over student choice and what course to study at post 16. Students felt they had to live up to parental expectations, and didn't want to let them down. A few students reported that parent expectations of them of becoming a doctor, engineer or lawyer for example are unrealistic and unachievable, mainly due to unachievable grades and lack of interest in their parents chosen field. A few students felt the pressure from parents to succeed was intense and that parent's lack of understanding had a negative impact on motivation.

"I like biology and want to become a nurse, but my mum says I'm clever enough to become a doctor"

- Siblings, wider family and community links that had experienced university, influenced student aspirations to progress onto higher education.

School/ College Effects

- Schools and college played a valuable role in shaping up student post 16 direction and aspirations to progress onto higher education. It was reported that teachers and lessons inspired students as well as university outreach sessions, through talks and presentations. However it was also strongly felt that selection to participate in outreach activities is unfair, and opportunities should be widely opened out to access for all irrespective of ability, aspirations or motivation. Examples given were selection for university outreach activities/university visited only benefited a small group of students, mainly high achievers.

Factors that influence progression onto higher education

Q 3: What do you think are some of the reasons why BAME students who are on track to get the grades at GCSE don't progress onto higher education routes - college and university? Tell me more, why do you think this?

Provision of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

- Many drew attention to the lack of Information, advice and guidance received in school. Sources of IAG were not always known to students, in particular out of school sources. Students felt that the lack of aspirations, motivation, positive influence and role models around them are all strong contributory factors that need to be inbuilt throughout the secondary years.
- One group of students from a particular school were aggrieved over the abolishment of the work experience scheme by school leads, perceived as unfair and denied students the opportunity to experience work and help make better informed decisions.

“Thinking higher education is hard; you don't feel you are clever for university, so you give up.” Y10 Firvale Student.

Parents Attitudes and Educational Experiences

- Parent's own personal and education experience, or lack of understanding of education in the UK, are limiting factors to assisting children developing a sense of direction and career path. Many students reflected on their own parent's education experiences which were mainly from abroad and the limitations and impact this has.
- Parents not understanding the UK education system, post 16 pathways/ options and financial support, impacted student progression and choice.
- Concerns about the cost of higher education and affordability for parents are significant, with some parents steering children into employment on leaving school and helping towards the household income and not having an understanding of the long term benefits that higher education can offer.
- A few students felt that parental attitudes and lack of interest with their child's education is a barrier to student motivation, achievement and progression.

“My dad doesn't ever go to parents evening, not bothered or interested. I would like him too but he says he's busy working”. Y10 Student Firvale School

- Parents also push or pressure their child into following pathways or chosen careers that doesn't interest the child and as a result student lose interest or desire to progress further in higher education.

“Parents push kids into doing what they want them to do and not what the child wants, so they lose interest, as there’s no support if they want to follow their interests.” Y12 Student Longley College.

Financial Constraints

Financial worries and constraints were identified by students and parents. Fees and cost of living was seen as too expensive and unaffordable for parents from deprived/ lower income backgrounds, which was highlighted as a main cause for not wanting to progress onto HE.

“My parents say university is too expensive and that they can’t afford it”. Y10 Student Firthpark School

Cultural and Religious Factors

It was reported by a few students particularly from Muslim heritage backgrounds, that taking out loans, goes against religious practice which can deter some parents and students from studying further.

Others reflected that for some girls in particular, depending on their family attitudes and culture, marrying in your late teens or early 20’s is seen as the right thing to do and study can come later. These added pressures from parents to get married and settle down affected girls motivation and aspirations. The possibility of study after marriage was not seen as a viable option or one that would be supported by husband or in-laws. For these girls, achieving at school level was a realistic achievable goal and they lacked aspirations to study further with the looming pressure of potential marriage.

“For some girls parents might want them to get married, so they want to study further”. Y10 student, Hinde House School.

Labour Market, Graduate Prospects and Employability

- Many students expressed concerns over the number of graduates they know in their family and community circles, who have degrees and struggled to find employment in their field of study, with the added pressure of debt.

Employment prospects for graduates from higher education qualifications affected aspirations and the fear of debt. It is important that students and parents understand the potential benefits of higher education, future employment prospects and earning potential, to help inform decisions.

Academic and Exam Pressures

- Students also reflected on the pressures of study, homework and exam stress. It was felt this was a contributory factor to low progression rates.

“Feel university is too much work, no guarantee of getting a job afterwards” Y9 Student – Hinde House School.

Community Geographical Factors

Aspirations and motivation in higher education can be affected by where an individual lives, as well as their ability or desire to learn.

Some students felt the area they live in, street culture, norms and people you associate with, play a key role. Crime, drugs and guns are common in these areas, which influence and impact on their aspirations. Drugs in the area is widespread and easily accessible, which also lures young people into making quick, easy money, so some young people do not see the value of education, and long term benefits, when they can make money on the streets. The company and friends you associate with on the street who haven't experienced it do not see higher education as a favourable path. Young people who mix within these circles lack the aspirations and role models to aspire to progress on to higher education.

“Depends on background, where you live, the streets you grew up in and people you hang about with”. Y10 Student Hinde House School

Q 4: What could be done to help overcome these issues or barriers and help BAME young people progress to university?

Student led solutions

Improve and Promote Opportunities in Schools and Colleges

- Offer tailored Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for students and parents (optional), to improve young people making the right choice and prevent drop out.
- Offer students the opportunity to undertake work experience, undertaken in school time or support students to find placements in school holidays and/or weekends.
- Increase opportunities to meet BME role models (undergraduate and postgraduate) in schools and colleges. Increase role model mentoring opportunities for students and engage with parents to help guide informed choices.
- Offer student counselling in schools and colleges to support students with stress, anxiety and mental health issues.
- Promote access of opportunity for all and not just for a selected few (often from higher sets). University and college promoting post 16 options, sharing course options linked to job prospects.

Parental Outreach and Engagement

- Schools and post 16 institutions to improve BAME parental engagement/ partnerships and open channels of effective communication and sharing of information.

- Increase opportunities to access careers IAG, through open days at higher education institutions (universities, sixth forms and colleges).

Financial Support/ Incentives

- Offer financial incentives/ bursaries to students from lower income BAME backgrounds and from areas of low higher education progression. Incentives could be lowering university fees, offering free or cheap accommodation for families on low income, promote and increase access of sponsorship and bursaries.

Improve Employment Opportunities

- Improve links with employers and the labour market, to offer work experience and employment as an incentive to achieving a high class of degree.

Effects of Culture, Religion and Gender

Q5: Do you feel your culture, religion & or gender has an impact on your decision about what to do when you leave school/ college? How/ why?

- There is a link between culture and some restrictions imposed or expectations set by parents over choice with studying out of Sheffield, or on chosen careers, such as a career in dance or acting. Some students expressed inequalities that exist for girls in particularly from Muslim heritage backgrounds, where there are less restrictions imposed on boys than girls in the same household. This is fuelled by the perceived negative image parents have about student life in the Western culture and a fear that their children could become embroiled within this lifestyle which goes against their religious, cultural beliefs and practices. It was also felt that some girls within these households have added pressures or expectations of getting married in their late teens or early 20's.

“People hear bad things about students who go to university, which scares parents. Some parents might put their child off from going to university, or let them go to the ones in Sheffield, so they can keep an eye on them”. Y9 Hinde House School.

- Students from non-Muslim backgrounds, mainly African heritage students reflected on parents high expectations of their children getting into university, irrespective of gender. African parents follow tradition and set boundaries, but these tend not to impact student progression into higher education or choice of career.
“African parents are traditional and restrict children to stay within boundaries, but this doesn't impact on what students do or want to do”. Y9 Student Firth park School

Race and Equality

There is a perception by a few students that race or the colour of your skin hinders or makes it harder for graduates to find a job.

“I think as black women, we will struggle and find it harder to get a job than say white people”.
Y10, Hinde House School

Knowledge and Perceptions of Higher Education

Q6: Have you heard of higher education? And what is your understanding of HE?

- An even split amongst students who had heard of the term and those that hadn't. The overall understanding and perception was about going onto study A-levels, attend college, university and to a lesser extent, an awareness of degree apprenticeships. Students that were more informed reflected on a recent talk by a university. Students that were less informed wanted to learn more about higher education.

“Not heard about HE, is it university/ college?” Y9 student, Firth Park School

“Degree apprenticeships, not aware of them. Not aware of routes that can lead into different courses and jobs”. Y10, Firth Park School.

Aspirations and perceptions of going to university

Q7: Do you want to go onto university? Which one and why?

Family Expectations

- The overall consensus was students do want to progress onto university, as families have high expectations and students wanted to make their parents proud and feel a sense of personal achievement.

HE Affordability and Graduate Employment Prospects.

- A few students are unsure or clearly not wanting to progress onto HE at this stage, due to unaffordable university fees, living expenses, parental pressure of getting a job on leaving school, no guarantee of a post-graduation job and a perception that university is too difficult and stressful.

University Choice

- Students in Y12 and 13 were familiar with Russell Group universities and aspired to progress on to these more prestigious universities. Although the aspirations were there, students also expressed concerns of making it to a Russell group university, as it is too competitive.

Study Local/ Away

- There was an even split between students wanting to study in Sheffield and move away. Those in favour of staying in Sheffield, mainly girls from Muslim heritage backgrounds and a few boys from the BAME cohort, wanted to for a number of personal reasons: course choice available in Sheffield – no need to move away, family pressures and expectations to study in Sheffield, as well as personal choice of studying and supporting family financially by working a part-time job. There was also some anxiety or fear of keeping safe whilst studying away from home/Sheffield and not being able to manage or cope living independently, especially as students within this group shared that they've not lived away from home before and lack confidence or skills.

“As a girl if I’m attacked living in university halls, I can’t protect myself”. Y12 student, Longley Park College

- Students wishing to study away from Sheffield wanted to for a number of reasons; course led choice, develop independency, away from parent control, make new friends, to enjoy the night life, gain new experiences and were only able to study away if there were family/ friend connections in other cities.

Influences on University Choice

Q8: What do you consider when choosing a university?

The reasons given were similar to why students wanted to go to university.

- **Course Led Decision**
Course preference led university choice, wanting to stay in Sheffield and the cheapest/ most affordable option were the main factors in deciding on which university to study at.
- **Family and Internet**
Main source of careers/ course IAG was through family networks (older siblings) and internet. There was little or no reference to seeking IAG from schools, college or external organisations for information. This highlights the need for education settings to do more to raise awareness of available sources of IAG support and encourage access.
- **Russell Group Universities**
A number of students from Y12 and 13 shared views on wanting to pursue admission into the more reputable prestigious universities (Russell Group Universities) like Cambridge or Oxford as their first choice, but felt they may struggle to make the high

set entry grades or may not be accepted, as the majority of undergraduates are mainly from white British backgrounds and that discrimination may play a part in selection.

Benefit of a University Education

Q9: Why do you want to go to university? How do you think it will help you in your life?

Family and Economic Status

- Students felt a university degree would make parent's proud, gain respect and status within the community, improve job prospects, gain higher income, independence and develop new skills to build a better future.
- A few students counter balanced the argument, expressing that work experience and moving up the ladder can offer the same benefits as a university degree. Students shared experiences of university students they know of, who had dropped out or had degrees – but couldn't get a job in the field.

"My sister dropped out of university, but I still want to go, but now my parents don't feel confident with me going". Y9 Hinde House student

- Students expressed the need for schools and colleges to promote apprenticeships as an alternate post 16 pathway. This suggests that the right level of IAG is not reaching or filtering out widely to students.

Impact of Outreach Initiatives

Q10: What has helped you make up your mind about going to university?

Widening Participation/Outreach

- Widening participation and Outreach programmes by universities had a positive impact, helping to shape up pre and post 16 progressions. Discover US – an outreach programme and summer school programme offered by the University of Sheffield, were noted as being useful. Students felt opportunities need to be opened out for all students to access and experience and not just for the selected few. Some students felt it had a negative impact on self-belief and confidence, and felt marginalised.

"Discover US programme is good, but should be open to all students and not for the selected ones". Y9, Hinde House School

BAME Role Models

- Role models from diverse BAME backgrounds and professions have a positive and motivational impact on students in school and colleges. Students in the survey made reference to people in the community and family that had succeeded, gained a

university degree, working in a good job and are highly respected by friends, family and community.

Student Led Solutions

Q11: What could help you more with going onto university and help you choose the right subject/ course to study?

Outreach/Widening participation

- Outreach/widening participation activities by universities made a difference, and students welcomed more outreach from colleges and sixth forms to help with understanding next steps and options.

Work Experience

- The opportunity to experience work was important for students, particularly for students from schools that no longer offered work experience. Work experience was strongly felt as a valuable opportunity to help shape future decisions.

Improve Student and Parent Communication

- Education institutions need to improve communication and engagement of students and parents to improve dissemination of information.

Encouragement and Raising Aspirations

- More encouragement from schools and college staff, helping students feel motivated, with developing self-belief with achieving and aiming high.

Factors Influencing Alternative Routes to University

Q12: When did you decide you didn't want to go to university? Why do you not want to go to university?

University Course and Finance

A few students from the group surveyed were unsure or clear about not wanting to progress onto university, for reasons of; no job guarantee, university fees and living expense – too costly, length of courses 3-4 years, course work and exam stress and coping on your own.

Cultural/ Religious Factors

Students shared worries and anxieties that parents have with children studying away from Sheffield and mixing with the wider western society and practices, that go against their own cultural and religious beliefs, such as going to clubs, drinking or having relationships.

Alternatives to university

Apprenticeships on leaving school were favoured as an alternative route to higher education, with the potential of earning money, gaining work experience and progressing up the career ladder.

Qualitative Findings 2 - Parent/ Community Interviews

Parent Feedback

Knowledge and Perceptions of post 16 pathways

Q1: When your child finishes school/college what do they want to do? What is it? Do you agree with their choice? What would you like them to do and why?

Aspirations

- Parents have high aspirations of children progressing onto higher education, and value education. A few parents expressed alternatives to HE as preferred pathways - employment/ apprenticeship route, or are happy with what route their child decides on.
- When asked about course choice/ career paths, the majority of the parent group were unsure of what their child wants to pursue in the future.

“Yes would like daughter to go to university, but I have an older daughter who’s been and can’t get a job, this has put her off going to university”. Arab- Yemeni parent

Q2: How did they come to make that decision? What influenced their decision about taking this path/ career choice?

Parents as influencers

- The choice of subject and career was strongly linked to the need and desire to earn money in order to support parent household or be self sufficient.
- Many parents expressed that they hadn’t been to university and struggled with finding employment and financially in the early days. Parents want better life opportunities

for their children and not to see them struggle in the ways they had, through having improved job prospects, social class and economic positions. Parents are the main influence over children's decision to progress onto higher education.

"No one in the family has been to university, and would be good if she was the first, get a good job and raise the family name". Asian British Pakistani parent

Personal and Cultural Factors

- To pursue paths in subjects that children are good at and enjoy.
- Parents from African backgrounds highlighted strong family and cultural support and high educational expectations set by parents.

Schools as influencers

- **Teachers**
Teachers in school and inspiring lessons were noted as influencing student's subject/ career choice.

Raising Awareness Events

University talks, outreach events and employer taster sessions were addressed as contributory factors which positively influence choice.

Q3: Do you feel as a parent/carer that you know enough about guiding your child, after leaving school/college? Where would you go to get information and advice to support your child?

Source of Information, Advice and Guidance

- Half of the group felt they knew very little or nothing about guiding and supporting their child with post 16 choices/options and shared a strong desire to learn more.

"I know very little and need more information. I've looked on the internet, but it's too much information and I get confused". Iraqi male parent

- The main source of information, advice and guidance was from school, but there were disparities with the level of satisfaction of IAG received, parents wanting more and in more accessible forms, with some parents expressing that language was a barrier and the lack of understanding of the education system.
- Internet and family/ friends are other key sources of IAG to support young people. Parents were also happy with their children taking the lead and making own choices, as parents felt ill equipped to fully support and guide their child.

"Don't know much, studied in Pakistan and don't know how works here, but would like information, but struggle with English". British Asian Pakistani male

Q4: What do you think are some of the reasons why BAME students who are on track to get the grades at GCSE, don't progress onto higher education? Why do you think this? What could be done to help overcome this?

Parents placed a strong onus on parents as a key barrier to progression. Echoing all the factors raised by students surveyed as detailed in this report, with some additional factors identified:

Parental Boundaries and Peer Pressure

- Lack of parental control, discipline and boundaries set for children, to support with study and progression. Allowing too much freedom for children to hang out with friends and be influenced by negative peer pressure.

Racism/ Discrimination

- A few parents expressed that racism/discrimination exists within education settings, with a perception that more support and focus is given to white British children over BAME children. There was also reference made to Islamophobia and the prevent extremism agenda that affected student and parent confidence and trust with establishments.

“Bias from teachers, give more time to white children, BAME children are marginalised and students not encouraged to do well”. British Asian Pakistani

Lack of School Support and Encouragement

- A few parents expressed that schools do not encourage young people enough to do well and progress onto higher education – not enough support and direction offered to students who lack motivation.
- A few parents from African/Caribbean heritage made reference to black children – and their perception that some schools hold children back by not encouraging, or motivating or somehow make it harder for black students to succeed.

“Black kids aren't expected to do well and I feel that schools hold them back instead of supporting them to do really well”. African/ Caribbean Female parent

Role Models

- Lack of positive role models in and out of school was highlighted as barriers to student motivation and aspirations to progress. Some reference by a few parents was made to the negative media portrayal of BAME young people, that doesn't help. Example of this was reporting acts of terrorism/ crime.

“Kids don’t see many BAME role models like doctors saving lives, but when it comes to crime or linked to terrorism, the media’s the first to highlight a Muslim Pakistani male committed the act. I don’t hear of a Christian white British male committing crime, so it’s not ok to link Islam and ethnicity to crime”. Pakistani Male parent

Parent led solutions

- Schools to offer tailored **mentoring support** for students to help raise motivation and aspirations to progress onto higher education.
- Schools and colleges to **build effective parent partnerships and engagement, through outreach activity** – sharing course/ career IAG, information on labour market, skills shortages, employment opportunities.
- Education institutions **to challenge institutional racism and** discrimination which impacts student progression onto higher education and employment.
- Offer **financial/ employment incentives**, such as lowering university fees, offering scholarships/ bursaries to students from low income backgrounds promoting courses with guaranteed job opportunities on course completion.

Q4: Do you feel culture, religion & or gender has an impact on your decision about what your child should do when they leave school/college? How & why?

- Parents on the whole did not feel that culture, religion or gender had an impact, stating children are able to pursue their chosen paths irrespective. When further questioned it became apparent that differences do exist:

Culture and Gender

- Culturally in Muslim households, boys are recognised as having more freedom and with education choices compared with girls. Parents are more cautious and protective over daughter’s education choices/ decisions.
- Some parents wanted their children to stay in Sheffield close to home, as they felt moving away increased the risk of children losing their culture/identity and be influenced by the Western culture.

“Asians find it easier to manage girls, but boys are more spoilt and make wrong choices”. Asian British Pakistani Parent

Discrimination/ Islamophobia

- Parents recognised the underlying discrimination, Islamophobia and racism that exists in society and the effects it is having on children and inequalities in education and employment.

- Parents from African/Caribbean backgrounds shared concerns of discrimination for children from black heritage, and felt that black children have to work twice as hard to succeed compared to white children.
- Islamophobia was an underlying discriminatory factor, in that it influenced parent's decision with studying out of Sheffield, on the grounds of safety.

"A lot of Islamophobia exists, people are more vocal and discriminatory". Asian British Pakistani participant

Q5: What do you think about your child studying locally in Sheffield or in another city? Would you be ok with their choice? Why?

Study in Sheffield

- Reasons given by parents included: cheaper, children can focus on study without worrying about chores of cooking and cleaning, close to family, friends and support on hand, parents also recognised Sheffield universities as leading institutes and encouraged children to attend.
- One of the main factors was a fear that children will be influenced by the Western culture of drink, night life and having relationships, which go against Muslim culture. A fear that children will lose their culture and identity studying away from Sheffield. For non Muslim groups this was not a main factor.

"Studying in Sheffield, so as a parent can support and guide. If they go away I would worry about them and their safety, especially for my daughter". British-African Somali parent

Study Out Of Sheffield

- Reasons given; parents felt children should prioritise the course over city. A few parents actively encouraged studying out of Sheffield, to encourage independency, develop life-skills and explore the world. Parents didn't want to hold children back from following their dreams.

"I'd be ok with their choice. It's cheaper and easier locally, but don't mind if they want to go out of city. They need to learn to cope for themselves". British Arab Yemeni parents

Q6: Do you feel belonging to a black, Asian or minority ethnic heritage background affects your child in school/college? How? Does it affect their choice on leaving school?

- Parents on the whole felt that it does not affect choice and belonging to a BAME group should not factor as a barrier or influence what children want to do on leaving school, but in reality it does as discrimination and inequalities exist in society. Parents made

reference to the reason why this survey is being conducted to understand and address inequalities.

“I believe it makes it harder to get a job if you are from a black and minority ethnic group”.
British Arab Yemeni parent

Knowledge and perceptions of higher education

Q7: Have you heard of the term higher education? Do you know what it is?

- The majority of parents felt they are aware of the term higher education and understand it to be courses studied at college and university, degrees, A-levels and other types of courses. Very little was known about degree apprenticeships.

Aspirations of going to university

Q8: Do you want your child to go to university? Why?

Special Educational Needs (SEN's)

- The findings are captured in previous sections of the report. In addition, a few parents of SEN children felt that their child's disability or learning needs would restrict higher education progression – due to lack of SEN student support in colleges and universities or their child's ability to progress.

“My child has SEN's, school thought he was a naughty kid, so didn't push him to do well or promote university, but now he's in college and getting some support, so I'm looking at a vocational route for him”. British Asian Pakistani parent.

Q9: What are some of the key factors have helped your child/s make their mind about going to university?

As highlighted in other sections of the report, factors include: parent - high expectations/ encouragement, schools/ college – teacher/ staff support, quality of IAG received, positive influence by role models.

Q10: Is there anything that worries you about your child going to university? Do you feel students will have the support around them from family friends, tutors? Tell me more?

Q11: If/ when your child reaches university what support would you like from university to help your child succeed?

Findings to Q10 and Q11 highlighted parent concerns and solutions.

- Parents main concerns and fears are around; children influenced by negative student behaviours at university, choice of friends/peer pressure, safety and wellbeing studying at university, not receiving the right level of academic, tutor and pastoral support, especially for students who have never lived away from home/lived a sheltered life and lack confidence. Mixed gender accommodation posed an issue and concerns that graduates would struggle with finding suitable employment. Overall parents felt these factors have a detrimental impact on education outcomes, loss of student culture, identity, encourages undesired student behaviours and damage family reputations.

“The fear is them being out of control and the influence of others, but you hope as parents we’ve done our best and the values developed in them will help guide them to stay on the right path, even though I’m not with them”. African/ Caribbean parent

University Support Offer

The following are key areas of support parents would like universities to offer;

- **Widening Participation Programmes** – For students who have decided on a course/ field of work. Opportunities to gain further course/ career insight, meet with professionals in the field and with UCAS application support.
- **University Facilities/ Support** - promote academic/ pastoral support with managing course and exam pressures, offer affordable, single gender accommodation and deliver activities to develop student independent living skills and keeping safe.
- **Tailored support for 1st year students** – Tailor culturally appropriate support for first year students to adapt to living independently at university (especially for children who had not lived away from home before), offer mentoring support from 2nd/ 3rd year students studying the same course and mentees.
- **Student Support for SEN Learners** – tailored IAG support for SEN learners and parents from school, college and universities.
- **Employment Guarantee/ Incentives to Study** - Improve/ promote graduate employment as incentive to study - linking courses to guaranteed job opportunities.

Factors and Perceptions that influence Alternative Pathways to University

Aspiration of Alternative Pathways to University

Q12: Why do they not want to go to university? Is there anything that you think is barrier to you wanting to go to university?

Q13: Do you/your child want to know more about university to help you make a more informed decision if it's for you or not? Who would be the best people to help you understand more about university?

Parents felt they had covered the reasons in previous questions, of those parents who favoured alternative routes to university, reasons given include:

- Lack of aspiration and motivation
- Financial Constraints
- Wanting a job, earn money, join the family business
- Lack of information about courses, options available and wider benefits of higher education

Conclusion and Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the qualitative research findings, to address the challenges to increasing the number of black Asian minority ethnic groups progressing onto higher education from the north of the Sheffield city.

I hope these recommendations will be considered as a guide and approach by education sector organisations, to develop and build on existing strategies to address the inequalities that exist within education and the higher education progression gap.

Conclusion

It is evident that the explanation and understanding of low progression rates in higher education for black Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups from the North of the city Sheffield is a complex issue with a range of causal factors and barriers exclusive to some BAME groups over others, one that needs further in depth study of each heterogeneous group and beyond the scope of this study.

The road to higher education can take very different paths, depending on the students experiences and circumstances with attainment, motivation and self belief, socio-economic constraints, family circumstances, parental engagement, rooted cultural practices, school experience – motivation, access to quality IAG and widening participation programmes and effective parental partnerships.

Improving the experiences of BAME students and addressing the concerns of parents to narrow and close the progression gap to higher education requires willingness and a commitment from key stakeholders, and effective partnership working between the higher education institutions, schools, students, parents and the wider community organisations.

As many of the factors are related to wider societal inequalities and at an institutional level, it will take some time to see a significant shift with narrowing the gap. However each student's journey and progression to higher education can be improved by addressing some of the issues and barriers highlighted in this report and the practical guidance offered in order to support an institutional shift to improve progression rates for the North of the City.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations

By improving the regularity of quality information, advice and guidance received by students and parents; building effective parent, student and community partnerships and outreach; targeting publicity material, communication and marketing approaches to reach out to a wider BAME audience, increasing awareness and perceptions of HE are all practical approaches that will help with increasing BAME progression to higher education.

Bespoke HE Publicity, Marketing and Communication for BAME Groups

- **Review current publicity material, communication and marketing approaches** to reach out and communicate effectively with BAME groups. Materials should reflect and promote university for all - promoting a culturally balanced university offer, showcasing a range of facilities, activities and student support on offer that appeal to a wider BAME group. E.g. produce a bespoke BAME Parents' Guide, promote alternative activities and societies that would appeal to BAME students.
- **Develop effective ways to increase BAME parental engagement**– schools and colleges need to improve outreach and engagement with parents as a powerful tool to communicate/share information, raise awareness and improve perceptions of university, particularly parents with a language barrier or hard to reach.

Raise Awareness, Improve Perceptions and Benefits of Higher Education

- **Schools, colleges and universities to work more collaboratively** to raise awareness, improve perceptions of university life, studying away/finance, student support and the wider benefits of higher education.
- **Improve access to widening participation / outreach opportunities for all** students to engage with. For some students, schools selection of students for widening participation and outreach programmes limited or denied access of opportunities for BAME students to engage and learn. Suggestions included hosting HE open days on weekends, at school/college parent evenings or at local community events.
- **BAME HE Role Models** - Recruit and train HE Community Ambassadors – local community members from diverse backgrounds are an invaluable resource in reaching out to young people and parents. They share language, have similar cultural and religious experience, and an understanding of challenges facing communities and knowledge. Celebrate and promote BAME higher education participants achievements and success with students and parents.
- **BAME Graduate Internship Employment** - Recruit BAME graduate Interns to work in schools and college settings – offering job opportunities for graduates, acting as role models, working and engaging with BAME targeted students and parents.

Improve the quality of information, advice and guidance received by students and parents

- **Improve access and regular contact of quality careers IAG support for students from as early as in KS2/3** - the more opportunity and guidance received by students, the more informed decisions can be explored and made
- **Make better use of information on the labour market, graduate prospects, employability, potential earnings and overall benefits;** sharing information with students and parents to help inform decisions
- **Provide better information about the range of careers and employment opportunities related to different subject disciplines** – unconventional career paths and opportunities linked to subject areas need to be better communicated with students and parents, as often BAME students and parents gravitate towards careers in engineering, law, medicine etc. with limited exposure to broader career choices and potential income.
- **Ensure teachers and parents are well informed of IAG and sources of support** in order to guide students make informed choices.