National Collaborative Outreach Programme

SUN SOUTHERN UNIVERSITIES NETWORK

SUN Research Project Report: Phase 1

An investigation using Appreciative Inquiry to establish the key reasons that prevent pupils in some areas of Hampshire, UK from entering Higher Education.

Mary White

Senior Lecturer Leadership and Management

Solent University

*Please note: We are unable to publish the full report. The publicly available report contains the executive summary and key recommendations only.

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Executive Summary

Background

This research aims to identify the true barriers that some young people (aged 14-19 years of age) perceive and experience which prevents their progression to higher education (HE). The project is directly targeted at meeting the aims of National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), which is a project funded by the Office for Students (OfS) which aims to increase the progression of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher education and Southern University Network (SUN), which supports the work of NCOP. The young people and parents for the pilot come from two of the 70 electoral target wards across Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Dorset identified by HEFCE (2017), where HE participation is even lower than expected for their economic circumstances in relation to national participation rates, namely Fareham and Paulsgrove (Portsmouth). The research aims to find out why this occurs.

Methodology

The primary data for the research was a qualitative method using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) based on the work of Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987). This method was selected because it was important to have an approach that would encourage all individuals to have a voice and, enable complexities to be identified and discussed from all their perspectives. Unlike questionnaires, individuals have opportunities to explain in their own words (and discuss with others in groups) their perceptions. Four workshops were conducted of which two sessions were held for students from year 10 and the other two sessions for parents of year 10 students. The AI method was particularly useful in providing reassurance to parents that all their responses were valued and there were no wrong answers. The data was written by the respondents themselves using Post-its and flipcharts to build a story board of the four stage AI process. Then the data was collected by the researcher and transferred into Excel for analysis. AI has previously been used in several studies by the lead researcher and has proven an invaluable way of extracting the voices and recognising the sentiments of the individual participants.

Key Findings

- HE has not sufficiently made the case to all pupils and parents that HE could contribute to the life they see for themselves;

- 87.5% of the pupils identified HE could help with career prospects – for parents this ranged from 0% - 75%;

- 98% of the pupils and parents identified the cost and access as the main inhibitor to engagement with HE;

- The information given to pupils and parents about HE is not consistent;

- There is a correlation between a family member attending HE and pupils' positive perception of HE;

- Perceptions of HE can be attributed to previous experience at feeder school

- Some parents do not perceive that qualifications through HE adds value for the life that they see for their children.

- Fear of leaving home is a barrier to entering HE for some geographical areas;

- Pupils perceived additional positive outcomes of attending HE

Key Recommendations

- SUN should hold a conference workshop with all those involved in education feeder schools, colleges and universities and business on the subject of: "How does HE contribute to the life of a student and their future career?" This would then enable all current practice to be identified.

- Design a communication strategy about HE (which includes some of the components identified in the report,) by conducting a research workshop involving members of HE (colleges and universities), parents, students (all together) using AI.

- Organise for the local colleges and universities to conduct events both at their colleges and universities and in the feeder schools, which give a glimpse of college and university life and the mechanisms in place to support students.

- Identify ways that business can be involved in the HE experiences for young people.

- Further research to be conducted, using AI, with parents and students in another catchment area to compare, consolidate and confirm findings of the research.