

Exploring Level 5 students' lived experiences of the barriers to their progression and attainment.

Dr Emma Whewell and Lee Waters, University of Northampton.

This workshop discussed the findings of research conducted in the Sport and Exercise Department of the University of Northampton.

The research sought to understand the challenges to progression, attainment and achievement students faced on their journey through their degree courses. The two female and thirteen male students interviewed were highly representative of the 179 strong student population within the Department, reflecting the heavy dominance of under-twenty-one males, who followed the BTEC route into the University.

The research found that student progression and attainment involved an incredibly complex interplay of a far wider range of factors than staff appreciated. Extending beyond the academic, those factors included the responsibilities of parenthood, of maintaining long-term personal relationships and balancing study with remunerated work. While staff anticipated that studying towards a degree would be the most important thing in a student's life, the research showed that for their students it was a factor in the makeup of their daily lives.

Similarly, while staff may think that students benchmark success in terms of the level of degree awarded, the research found that they considered themselves already successful by being on a university degree course.

Conversations of Creating Change: Widening participation to Higher Education through working-class voices.

Dr Abigail O'Brien, University of Plymouth.

Twelve A-Level high school students, from working-class and middle-class backgrounds, with mixed views on attending university, took part in this research to examine what influences the post-eighteen choices of working-class people. The most striking aspect of the results was the role information had to play and the adverse impact of financial limitations on accessing that information.

Using the framework of hot, cold, and warm knowledge about university, working class students were heavily reliant on cold knowledge, information obtained from university websites and prospectuses, as they lacked any close connections with first or second-hand knowledge of the university experience.

University Open Days were viewed as a game changer by the students, yet working-class students struggled to attend Open Days if they were not facilitated by their school, and where this did happen, only a limited number of Open Days were attended. Working-class students also lacked knowledge of, and access to, financial assistance provided by universities to attend their Open Days. Open Days were seen as giving students a feel for whether they 'belonged' at the institution, a crucial factor impacting on university drop-out rates.

Lou McConnell-Trevillion