

Networks of influence and educational aspiration in a deprived UK community.

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Abstract

This paper reports on initial findings from an exploratory piece of research aimed at creating a profile of educational engagement and aspiration in a community that faces many social and economic challenges. The research has been carried out using data collected from a community living in and surrounding one of Bradford Metropolitan District's most deprived wards.

The research reported in this paper has been developed in the context widening participation work carried out by the Open University and the need to better understand the context and impact of widening participation work in a deprived community. A multi-method approach was adopted to explore ways in which the Institution (and as the project progressed its partners in the community) could become better informed about: the impact of this widening participation work, educational aspiration in the community and the networks influencing aspiration and access to higher education located within this community.

Interviews conducted with young people and adult learners from this Bradford community have attempted to explore how and to what extent such networks influence an individual's decision to take up university-level study. In doing so, the research has sought to examine the aspirations of the people in the community; the extent to which "becoming a university student" features in their future planning; and, finally, how families and social networks influence individuals' aspirations and engagements with higher education. Additionally, analysis of historical engagement with the University by members of community provided an insight into changing patterns of enrolment and the relative success of recent widening participation outreach work.

Introduction

The UK-wide widening participation agenda focuses attention on specific social groups, their under-representation in higher education and strategies for increasing

their access to and engagement with higher education (Gorard and Smith, 2006; Jones and Thomas, 2005; House of Commons Public Accounts Committee Report, 2009).

However, doubts have been raised over the quality and relevance of research associated with widening participation activity (see Gorard and Smith, 2006). Gorard and Smith argue that work in this area typically involves a small number of interviews with a group of “participants” usually from the same institution as the researcher. Gorard and Smith claim such work is often difficult to generalise from and reveals little about non-participants.

Issues about the inadequacy of widening participation data and approaches have also been highlighted in a recent report on widening participation produced by the National Audit Office (2008). Recognising that participation has increased nationally for some populations, the report claims that some groups still remain underrepresented in higher education. In particular, the report highlights that white people from lower-socio-economic groups are most underrepresented in higher education. The report also calls for more rigorous evaluation of widening participation activity and makes recommendations for more accurate participation rates including the capture of participation rates in local areas.

The research reported in this paper has been developed in the context of a higher education institution’s need to better understand the context and impact of its own widening participation work. Specifically, the research has examined one of the Institutions widening participation programmes of activity which has focused on a deprived community located a few miles outside the centre of Bradford. A multi-method approach was adopted to explore ways in which the Institution (and as the project progressed its partners in the community) could become better informed about: the impact of this widening participation work, educational aspiration in the community and the networks influencing aspiration and access to higher education located within this community.

Factors influencing participation – the family versus community

Previous work has revealed a set of individual goals and wider influences which have an impact on the decision of individuals from deprived communities to participate in higher education. Potential higher earnings and career aspirations are common drivers for individuals from socially disadvantaged backgrounds wanting to pursue higher education (see Gorard, 2008). Beyond individuals’ motivation for entering higher education, research has also explored the influence of external agencies, such as family, friends, work colleagues, on the decision to enter higher education (for example, Connor and Dewson, 2001). Typically, this research emphasises the influence of the family, in particular the influence of parents in decision-making associated with going to university. Over twenty years ago Rudd (1987) indicated that the children of graduate parents were more likely to enter higher education than children from families where there was no parental experience of higher education. More recently, Purcell et al (2008) report that parents’ socio-economic background and experience of higher education are likely to have a significant impact on a student’s decision to apply for higher education.

Recent government publications have also highlighted the influence of family in relation to participation in higher education, but more broadly in relation to the aspirations developed and held by individuals. Aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities has been explored by a joint project between the Social Exclusion Taskforce, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008). Furthermore, in 2009 the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions produced its report on open and fair entry to professional careers.

Whilst both reports highlight family, educational attainment and social capital as influential factors in social mobility and the development of high aspirations they also highlight the importance of location and locality.

The Social Exclusion Taskforce et al's (2008) argues that there is a common misconception that all deprived areas result in low aspirations and non-participation in higher education. Instead, the report points to evidence which suggests that in often ethnically diverse, mobile, urban neighbourhoods young people tend to have high aspirations for the future. In contrast, in traditional working class communities in ex-industrial areas where there are insular social networks, low population mobility and a sense of decline there is likely to be an enduring legacy of low aspiration. Cuthbert and Hatch (2009) claim that the lowest educational aspirations amongst young people are often found in the ex-industrial communities of the North of England. The authors also argue that, compared to the importance attributed to the influence of parents and families, less attention is paid to the ways in which people are influenced by the people and places in which they live.

More broadly, recent research by Fuller et al (2008) has explored the relationship between the decision to participate in higher education and the influence of networks comprised of family members and friends. Interviews with non-participants did not produce narratives which indicated particular barriers to participation. Instead, the decision to participate in higher education appeared to be influenced by the perceived relevance and value of higher education in a broader context of individuals' life-stage and life-course. The authors conclude that "patterns of participation in [higher education] are anchored socially, historically and biographically".

The work of Fuller et al and Cuthbert and Hatch, along with recent government publications mentioned, highlight the need for institutions to consider participation as a decision making process that in some cases, may extend beyond individual desire and aspiration. Instead, recent work underlines the importance of understanding the geographical spread and diversity of aspirations and the influence of social networks on those aspirations.

The Open University and widening participation

The Open University was established in 1969 as a national provider of "distance" higher education. Today, it has approximately 170, 000 undergraduate students and delivers courses to over a third of part-time undergraduates in the UK. The University is unique in the UK in operating an open admissions policy which places no formal entry requirement on students wishing to study undergraduate courses (modules).

Widening access and participation in higher education are central features of the University's mission and a dedicated Widening Participation team co-ordinate work across the University's thirteen regional/national centres situated across the UK. As part of this strategy, the University continues to invest in a range of activities aimed at raising aspirations and providing access to education for individuals from families and communities traditionally excluded from higher education. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are a target audience for the University. As a population, these students are defined as those living in the 25% most deprived areas measured by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (see later section for explanation), who also have no previous experience of higher education.

The Open University in Yorkshire has led a number of initiatives designed to widen participation amongst students from low-socio-economic areas in the Yorkshire region. In recent years, outreach workers from the OU have been working with community groups in some of the most deprived areas of Bradford to plan and deliver programmes of study targeted at people who would be unlikely to consider higher education without intensive, local support. The Eccleshill ward is one of many sites where this type of outreach has been delivered and is also the site of the research reported in this paper.

The University's outreach workers are familiar with the areas in which they work; drawing on the partnerships and relationships they develop with local stakeholders (eg schools, community groups, community centres, local council and government bodies) and local students to increase their understanding of "local needs". Additionally, government deprivation data provides an insight into the geography of deprivation associated with Yorkshire. However, the Widening Participation team and associate outreach workers report these approaches provide a good but incomplete picture of local needs, aspirations and drivers/barriers to higher education. Additionally, it has been difficult to establish a measure of the success and impact of outreach work not just on individuals but their community.

Eccleshill: the research site

The focus of this project is the Eccleshill ward, one of thirty wards in the Metropolitan District of Bradford in the North of England (highlighted in Figure 1). Eccleshill is located only a few miles from Bradford City Centre and is not only one of the most deprived areas in Bradford district but also in England.



Figure 1: Ward boundaries in Bradford Metropolitan District with Eccleshill highlighted.© Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved. Source: Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

In the 2001 census Eccleshill recorded a population of 16, 769, 95% of the population reported their ethnicity as “White” and over 40% of the community aged between 16 and 74 reported having no formal qualifications.

Whilst data collected from the 2001 census provides some insight into socio-economic characteristics of Eccleshill, the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2007 (Noble et al, 2008) provide a more detailed insight into the ward and offers a set of comparisons to other parts of the Bradford District and England as a whole.

The IMD 2007 presents deprivation data in terms of geographic areas referred to as Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). LSOAs serve to disaggregate a ward into areas which have a minimum population of 1000 and a mean population of 1500 and therefore provide an insight into the shared experience of people in a common locale (Noble et al, *ibid*).

Noble et al report that most urban centres contain areas with high levels of deprivation. Noble et al also highlight Bradford as an example of an area with high deprivation with 30% of LSOAs in the area ranked amongst the 10% most deprived LSOAs in England and Wales.

In this paper, an analysis of deprivation in Eccleshill draws on data associated with eleven LSOAs in the Eccleshill ward. Figure 2 locates the LSOAs (by name) in the current research.

Figure 3 highlights variation in deprivation across the Ecclehill ward with six of the eleven LSOAs in the community amongst the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England. Only one LSAO features amongst the 50% least deprived LSOAs in England.

Deprivation in terms of education, training and skills is measured nationally in terms of attainment in compulsory education and engagement with post-compulsory training and education. All of the LSOA's in Ecclehill number amongst the 50% most deprived LSOAs in England in terms of education, training and skills (see Figure 4). Furthermore, the five most deprived LSOA's in Ecclehill shown in Figure 4 number amongst the 5% most deprived LSOAs in terms of education, training and skills in England.

This mapping of deprivation reveals a spread of deprivation in the area and significant educational deprivation in Ecclehill.

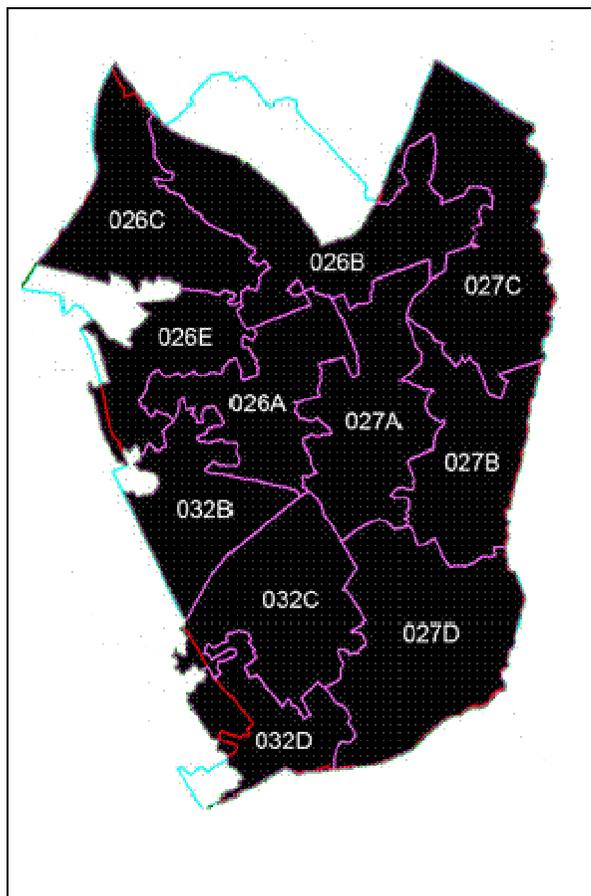


Figure 2: 11 LSOAs in Eccleshill reported upon in the project.

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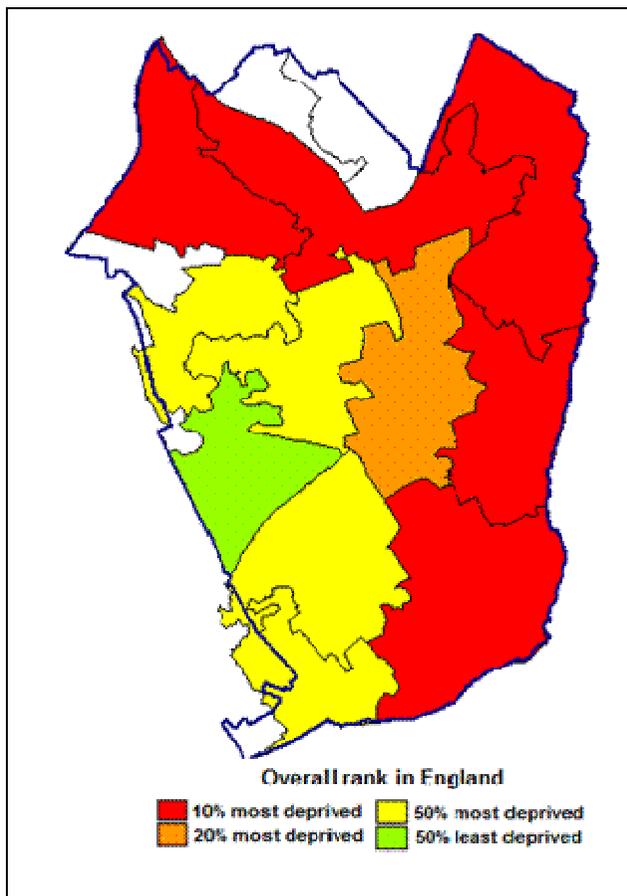


Figure 3: Overall deprivation in Eccleshill from IMD 2007

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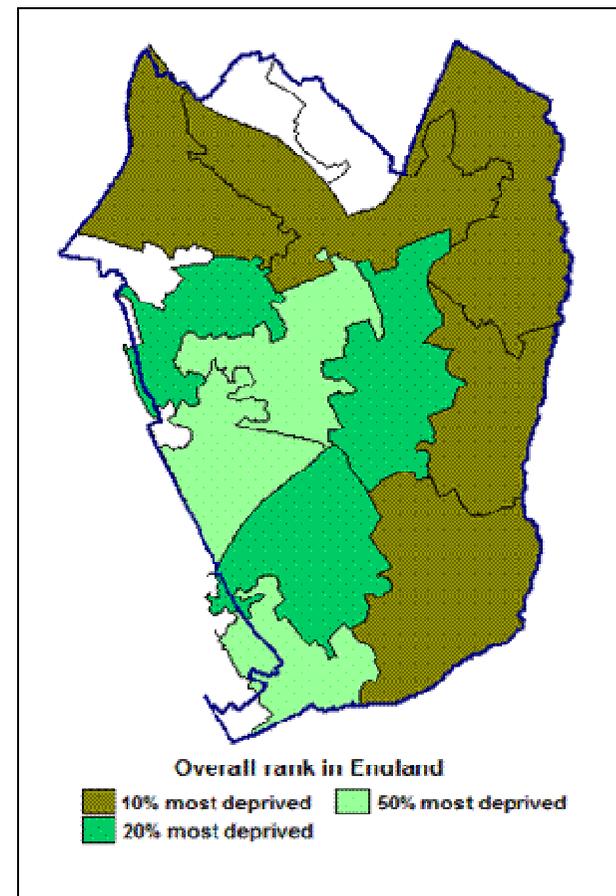


Figure 4: Education, training and skills deprivation in Eccleshill from IMD 2007

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The research programme

This exploratory research sought to create an in-depth profile of educational engagement and aspiration in a community that faces many social and economic challenges. In particular, the work sought to look at the main factors or agents influencing community members' decision making to engage or not engage with higher education.

A multi-method research programme organised into three stages addressed these issues.

Stage 1- analysis of historical engagement with the OU

The Open University first offered courses in 1971 and in this phase of the project university records were searched for details of past and present students living in the eleven LSOAs in Ecclehill. A total of 207 student records were identified from this search. Each student record was examined individually to explore course registration, award completion and attrition.

Stage 2 – interviews with OU students in the community and those opting not to study with the OU

This stage comprised semi-structured interviews with adult members of the community using the Gateway Community (and Children's) Centre in Ecclehill. Interviews were conducted with three OU students living in the community (referred to as OU students in this work) and three Centre users who were not engaged in OU study (see Table 1).

During the interviews informants were asked about their previous and current educational experience; the response of family and friends to their studies; and, their future aspirations and plans.

Name	Studied OU course	Future
Heather	Yes	Enrolled on Level 1 OU course
June	Yes	Enrolled on Level 1 OU course
Kate	Yes	Unknown
Liz	No	Previous experience of adult learning course Study NVQ3 – Team Leading
Nora	No	Taking numeracy and literacy courses Aspires to be mid-wife and student at Bradford University
Sally	No	Has a degree Full-time carer of disabled child Wants to do an OU course but not eligible for funding

Table 1: Interviews with OU and non-OU students at the Gateway Centre.

Additionally, an informal group interview was also conducted with a further eight residents undertaking a Adult Literacy class at the Centre as part of the national Skills for Life strategy. All the informants in these interviews were female.

Finally, three informal consultations with practitioners were conducted as part of Stage 2 including a literacy tutor, a health promotion worker and adult learning tutors in the Gateway Children Centre.

Stage 3 – interviews with young people in the community about their educational aspirations

Data in this stage was collected from two mains sites both serving the Eccleshill community: a youth centre serving the Eccleshill community and Year 12 students at the sixth-form of a secondary school.

At the youth centre five young people aged between 16 and 18 years (3 females and 2 males) were interviewed about their plans for the future, in particular whether higher education was a prospect.

At the sixth form, ten Year 12 students who had just completed the first year of the sixth form were interviewed about their future plans.

Research findings

This section presents the findings from each of the three stages of the research project. Pseudonyms have been used when referring to informants and persons they mentioned during the course of their interviews.

Stage 1 – Historical engagement with the OU

In May 2009 University records were searched for details of past and present students living in eleven LSOAs in Eccleshill. A total of 207 student records were identified from this search.

The spread of these 207 students across the eleven LSOAs in Eccleshill is to some extent uneven (see Figure 5) with the greatest number of students in LSOA 027A (n=29) and the least number of students in LSOA 027B and LSOA 27D (n=11).

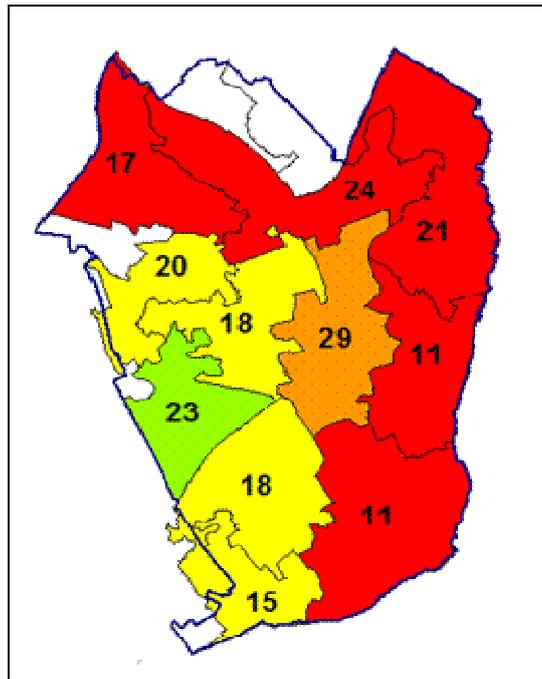


Figure 5: Location of OU students in Eccleshill since 1971. © Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved. Source: Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

Almost two-thirds of the records related to female students and on average students in the area were in their thirties at the start of their studies. Additionally, the student records revealed a range of past educational histories.

The University has no formal entry requirements for students wanting to study undergraduate courses but students are asked to report on past qualifications. Of the 207 students, 25% reported no formal qualifications or did not supply this information. In terms of highest past qualification, 12% reported a University-level qualification, 20% reported at least 1 A-level or equivalent qualification and a further 13% reported having 5 or more GCSEs. Arguably, those engaging with the Open University tended to be residents with a history of educational success.

Student numbers over the last four decades

There have been significant increases in the number of Eccleshill students registering on OU modules over the last four decades (see Figure X). In the 1970's three students from the area registered on an OU module. In the 1980's this figure increased to 17 students and in the 1990's this figure doubled to 34 students. However, the most

significant increase has occurred since the start of 2000 with 153 students from the Eccleshill ward registering with the OU.

Since 2008 the OU’s regional centre in Yorkshire has conducted extensive recruitment activity focused on widening participation students in parts of Eccleshill. Interestingly, 2008 stands out as the year of record student registrations in Eccleshill.

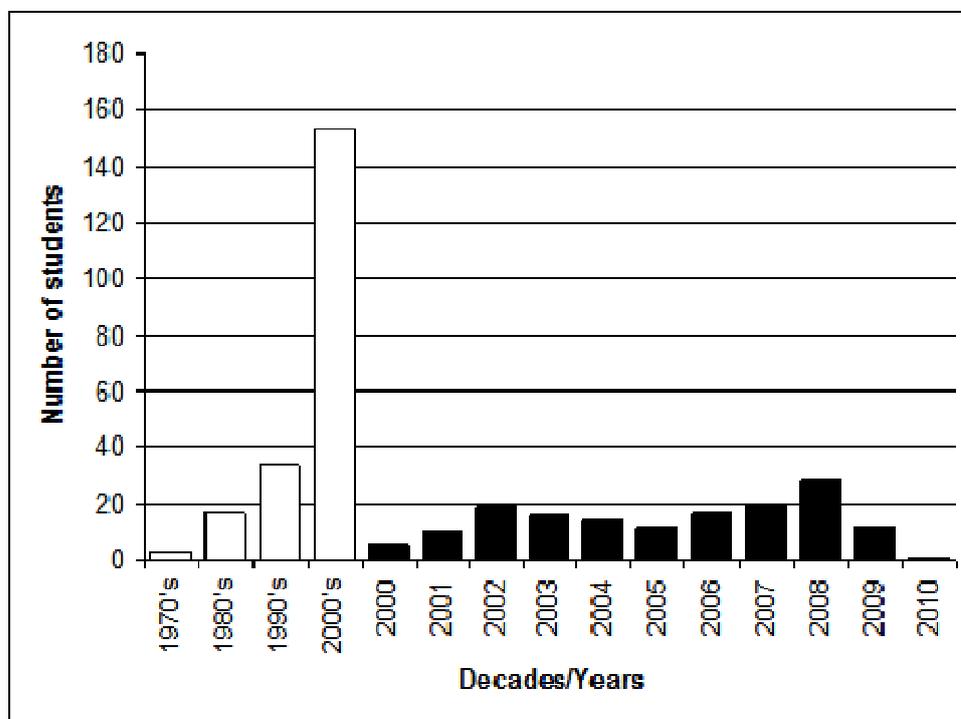


Figure 5: Eccleshill residents registering on OU modules since 1971 (with aggregate of enrolments since 2000 and disaggregate of years since 2000)

Diverse types of “engagement”

So far, this section has referred to the Eccleshill residents identified in the University’s records as “students”. However, this population had a range of different engagements with the University. A detailed analysis of students records revealed that 43% of “students” from Eccleshill (n=90) did not progress beyond registration or reservation on an OU module. Furthermore, 15% of students (n=30) failed or did not achieve a pass on the first module they studied and subsequently ended their studies. Of the remaining students, many appeared to have ended their studies after the study of a handful of modules and from 1971 only seven Eccleshill residents have been conferred a degree by the University.

In May 2009 there were 65 “active” students. That is, individuals who had registered or completed a module in the period between the start of the calendar year for 2008 and May 2009. This figure includes a number of students who have registered for a course starting in the second-half of 2009 or 2010 but who may not proceed to actually studying the course. Figure 6 maps active students onto the LSOAs in the area and reveals a concentration of active students in the most deprived areas of the Ward.

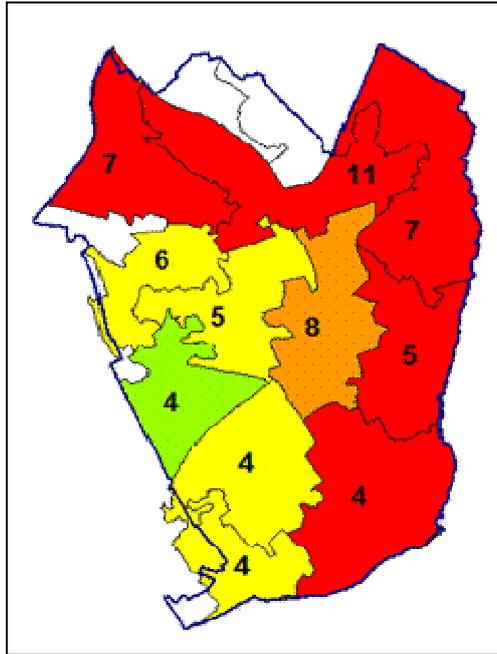


Figure 6: OU students considered “active”. © Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved. Source: Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

Openings and outreach work in Eccleshill

Openings courses are positioned as preparation for undergraduate study and an opportunity to experience the Open University’s approach to supported distance learning. The courses enable students to develop study skills (such as essay-writing, planning your time and taking notes), enhance self-confidence and in many cases provide a taster of a subject. Eccleshill is one example (nationally) where specialist outreach workers employed by the University work in deprived communities to highlight the benefits of Openings courses.

Openings courses were first offered in 2000 and since then 26 of the 207 Eccleshill students have had some level of engagement with the University’s Openings Programme (see Figure 7). A large proportion of students (n=10) from the area completed an Openings course but did not achieve a pass and effectively ended their relationship with the University. A handful of students have passed an Openings course and either ended their engagement with the University at that point or after studying a course at undergraduate level. One student has gone on to gain a Diploma in Higher Education in Adult Nursing and currently 6 former Openings students are building up a profile of courses from across the OU’s undergraduate curriculum.

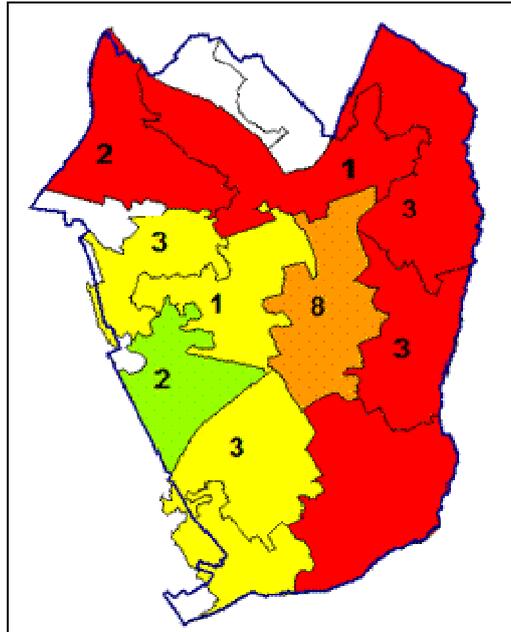


Figure 7: Enrollments on OU Openings courses in Eccleshill. © Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved. Source: Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

There is also evidence of recent outreach work having had a significant impact on registrations from Eccleshill residents on Openings courses. The outreach work began in 2008 and in a period spanning 18 months, 13 students have been recruited (at minimum “registered”) on Openings courses.

Stage 2 – interviews with adults in the community (students and non-students of the OU)

Interviews with adults from the Eccleshill area were carried out at the Gateway Community Centre which serves the Eccleshill residents and also offers a range of learning opportunities for users. Like many of the residents who engage with these opportunities, the residents interviewed for this project generally had no formal qualifications. The Centre offers government sponsored classes in basic Literacy, Numeracy and ICT skills but also serves as site where OU staff provide an outreach service and support for students studying what are termed “Openings” courses.

Changes in confidence and aspirations through learning

The residents taking courses at the Centre reported hearing about the available learning opportunities through friends and through volunteering work they undertook at the Centre. Regardless of the course they were studying, all commented on their learning experience thus far as positive. Together with volunteering work, these courses have helped people in the community to gain confidence and provided individuals with an opportunity to think about their future.

I think it were a combination of being in the café and them seeing how capable I were dealing with that erm the fact that I were getting on well with everyone

and then doing the courses as well, sort of gave me that step up, because I always thought that the only jobs I could ever get were shop assistant and erm cleaning jobs, I never really aspired to be anything else, because I knew that I didn't have any qualifications.... When they first suggested to me that I go for the job...the woman that were leaving she said ' I think you should go for the job' ... [I said] 'you're kidding, I don't think so' (Liz).

Although many stated that they engaged with learning opportunities primarily for personal development purposes, for some, there was also an association between learning and getting a good job to support their family as shown in Nora's extract below.

I've got kids so I might as well just try and get a career rather than going out and doing a dead end job this, you know and apart from that, I've applied for motor jobs and I can't get any.... You know because I've got no qualifications.....I tired for, you know just cleaning jobs and silly stuff like that, but I ain't got none of them so never mind eh! (Nora)

Additionally, a small number of the Centre's students also reported that they wanted to study with a view to being able to help their children with homework and to give advice on their study/career.

For many, the study of ICT, numeracy or literacy or OU courses represented a shift in aspirations and confidence. In the past, low aspirations and limited confidence, often stemming from negative school-based experiences, dominated their future outlook (see extract below).

Heather: Even when I think – in my psychology book and it tells you to think back – when its on about memory – and I can remember being told at first school that I was thick...

Interviewer: You were told that by the school?

Heather: Yeah, by some of the teachers and even them talking about me – not to me – but about me.

Whilst, confidence was on the rise, some respondents reported feeling uncomfortable at the prospect of going to “college”, instead they felt secure and comfortable in the small groups and personalised provision offered by the Centre. A rise in students' confidence was also noted by practitioners at the Centre but they also noted that many students found it difficult get out of the comfort zones they established in the confines of the Centre.

A number of respondents amongst those not studying OU courses reported that they did not consider university-level study a viable the option, instead they chose to undertake vocational training and/or study courses which would enable them to quickly secure a job to support their family.

The role of family and friends

In addition to the impact on the lives and aspirations of individuals there was also evidence from the interviews which suggest far wider implications of learning that reached into the community. Family were a key feature of the interviews conducted with learners at the Centre. In many cases, family was narrated as a driver as well as an obstacle to learning. The encouragement and support, financial and emotional, of the family is vital for keeping high motivation and continuing a course. In some cases, individuals' own positive experiences led them to being "ambassador's of learning" amongst family members as seen in June's account of supporting her youngest son, as below:

My sister and my dad were right, you know right pleased, they were like, you'll get there, you'll do it!....really supportive. She said you know you've got the confidence and you know you will do it because you're determined to do it (Nora).

I got some prospectuses for my youngest son cos he lost his job – cos he wanted to go into paramedics – and Naomi got me all the things and he actually did a course with the job centre – for personal transport – and he got his certificate – he passed (June).

In addition, friends were often reported as being key sources of information and many of the interviews included accounts of friends learning together or someone taking a course recommended by a friend. Some of the interviews revealed that this cultivation of learning opportunities extended beyond the boundary of immediate family and friends and reached into the wider community.

So I work very closely with volunteers and it were just a young lad who'd come in to do a cook and eat course....and he looks after his Nan....and he started telling me what he would like to do, so because his Nan suffered from, I don't know whether it's Alzheimer's or dementia, something like that he were looking for something to work along... so he could help his Nan even more. So, I said, well I'll tell you what I've got, I said if it will help, I said I've got 'Starting with Psychology'[OU Openings course] I said which I learnt at university, oh, he said I'd be really interested in that, so I brought the book in for him, so of course each time he comes in now, he tells me what he's got to in book and what he's found interesting (Kate).

Interviews with those studying OU courses, those studying other courses offered by the Centre, along with interviews conducted with practitioners working at the centre, revealed a need for well structured and ongoing advice and support for community members. In particular, there appears to be a need for greater advice on what options are available post Level 1 and 2 qualifications. Additionally, comments made by practitioners indicated a need for more holistic information, advice and guidance shared across different agencies serving the community. With high levels of unemployment in Eccleshill, many community members use the Job Centre to seek out employment. However, some of the interviewees reported that staff at the Job Centre had in the past discouraged them from taking classes, instead urging them to

“look for a job”. For example, a participant in the group interview explained that when she expressed her aspiration to be a social worker recently to a job centre adviser, she was told that she needs to get a job immediately rather than thinking of doing a Level 2 course. She was suggested that she should think about earning, as her child is becoming 16 and she would be losing her child benefit.

Stage 3 – Interviews with young people

The narratives that emerged from the youth club and the school data present both similarities and contrasts. While it is unlikely that the stories that emerge from interviews with just 15 young people will capture all of the available narratives, they nevertheless provide some useful insights of a younger generation in the Eccleshill area and their networks of influence. In general, the interviews with young people emphasised the role of one or both parents in plans made for the future. In some cases parents steered their children towards particular career opportunities (as seen in the extract of Jon’s interview below).

Interviewer: Who has influenced your plans [to go into the RAF] the most?

Jon: Probably my Dad and school.

Interviewer: And why is that? Has he been in the RAF?

Jon: No. I decided to go in the army and he told me that probably I’d be better suited to RAF and after looking into it I thought it were more interesting ...

[Youth Club Interviews]

However, most parents were reported as providing ongoing support and encouragement to their children. For example, Farah, one of the sixth form students talked about how her father had encouraged her to think about a career in biomedicine to the extent that Farah was already thinking about the prospects of doing a PhD in the area.

Well mine was like , the big one was like my Dad. He really saw, our teachers at school did, like, biology – ‘cos I originally did want to go into medicine but then they sort of helped you get round the fact that you know if you don’t get into medicine, you need to take other options and that’s how I did get to – the option that I’m actually taking now ...

[Farah, Sixth Form Interviews]

Additionally, other individuals known to the young people were also mentioned as direct, and in some cases indirect influences, on their choices for the future. In the sixth form interviews young people mentioned teachers, careers staff and in the case of Laura account there was also an indicated of her boss from her part-time job providing advice and support. Support from family members was valued but in some cases the young people interview highlighted the limits of family members involvement in their decisions about the future and the need to drawn on more “expert advice”.

Interviewer: What support have you had in coming to your decisions [about the future]?

Laura: Miss Read [Head of Sixth Form] and my boss, more than my parents, cos they don't really understand it if you see what I mean, not something, that, I don't know, they don't really understand what I want to do so...It's not that they don't support me – it's like they don't understand what I want to be so they don't – they can't. They do support me as much as they can

[Sixth Form Interviews]

Interviewer: Is there anyone that's influenced what you want to do?

Paul: It's like – I've been influenced with my friends not working – I mean my friends working and me not working

[Youth Club Interviews]

Out of the fifteen young people interviewed, five planned not to go to university – all came from families with no prior experience of university-level education. Of the remaining ten students planning to go to university only two would be the first from their families to enter higher education. Most of the young people interviewed were able to cite family members who had studied at this level and reported the influence this familial experience had on their own planning as highlighted in the extracts below.

Imran: Well my sister's currently doing one now– she's just completed her first year and my uncles have. Don't know if my Mum has.

I: Right, okay, how about you [Chris]?

Chris: Well my brother's just finished his second year at Liverpool – and my Mum's in the last couple of years done a degree in German part-time and then she's done a teaching degree as well in the last couple of years.

Interviewer: so quite a few people in your immediate family...do you think that's helped, having people ...?

Chris: I think so – it kind of like helps you decide what routes you want to take – and how you want to do it really

Imran: It obviously sort of helps like motivate you more – cos like you know that it is achievable and stuff – because you know people who've achieved it themselves

[Sixth Form Interview]

Discussion

Some key outcomes of this work:

- This paper has looked at a particular deprived community in Bradford and in doing so cannot claim to have produced findings that are necessarily representative of other deprived communities in England. However, the research highlights the value of exploiting multiple data sources when wanting to examine participation and aspirations in a deprived community.
- This work highlights it is difficult to establish a measure of the success and impact of outreach work not just on individuals but their community. However, an analysis of historical data combined with an examination of experiences and aspirations in the community appears to enhance our understanding of engagement with higher education and aspiration in a community with diverse features of deprivation.
- Decisions made by Eccleshill residents about the types of learning that they undertake (including higher education) appear to be influenced by a perception that learning leads to (well) paid employment or a career associated with such studies. With regards to higher education in particular, some see university as a way of increasing the chance of well paid employment/a career and others think university only delays entry to such employment.
- Family and broader social networks are key in people's decision to engage with learning. For those who lack confidence, personalised, face to face provision in a safe and comfortable (community) environment is important whilst the prospect of entering a university setting highlights anxieties stemming from a past legacy of negative educational experiences.

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