THE RELEVANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN RECENT ASPIRATION RESEARCH IN SOUTH READING

Study Higher Feedback Report

FOREWORD

The Whitley Researchers is a participatory action research partnership between the Whitley Community Development Association, local residents and the University of Reading to engage and involve communities in conducting their own research. We believe that communities should devise their own solutions to local issues as knowledge generation is located at community level and not just in an academic or policy domain. Top down assumptions about local communities, particularly those most disadvantaged, often miss the more relevant issues that most impact on residents. Community research is also an exercise in partnership and communications – it enhances the sharing of knowledge across and beyond local communities. Through this research we hope to empower communities in South Reading to co-create and manage the research design, analysis and identify recommendations in collaboration with the schools and other partners.

We are currently participating in the Whitley for Real initiative (W4R), which is being co-developed by Reading Borough Council and Reading University, in partnership with the community, Study Higher and other stakeholders, to access this 'local voice' in South Reading. The aim is to influence both current and planned activities in the area, so that resources can be targeted more effectively, ultimately helping to enhance family lives and reduce deprivation. As part of the W4R programme, a piece of academic research was commissioned by Reading Borough Council's Decent Neighbourhoods Fund (DNF) which focused on young people's aspirations and the school/family relationship. The final report entitled 'Aspiration in Whitley: Improving the collaboration between schools, families and the community' was published in September 2018 and our partnership is now focusing on developing the recommendations into an 'action' phase.

Study Higher has played a key role in supporting our action research and this second report synthesizes a number of interrelated research activities and data that helps us understand young people and their families' thoughts on the opportunities and barriers they face in accessing Higher Education in Whitley. It reflects on what we have learned about higher education in our research journey to date, offers some reflections on the challenges we've encountered in our exploration into 'aspiration' and it outlines the next steps in our partnership with Study Higher.

The Whitley Researchers, February 2019:

Liz Ashcroft, Aneta Banas, Sandra Clare, Sonia Duval, Naomi Lee, Sally Lloyd-Evans, Mo McSevney, John Ord, Lorna Zischka.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, commissioned by Study Higher, synthesises the findings of a series of participatory research activities to advance understanding of young 'aspiration' for higher education in Whitley. It also reflects on the ways in which schools, families and the wider community can better collaborate in order to help young people navigate the different pathways they might take.

The report is presented in three parts: 1. Background 2. Findings and HE relevance 3. Conclusions and recommendations

Background

The background to the aspiration research reveals its genesis in a Whitley based partnership of agencies and organisations known as Whitley for Real (W4R) who collaborate to access and stimulate the 'local voice' and target resources more effectively to reduce deprivation. In 2018 Study Higher joined the W4R partnership in a collective task to better understand the links between young people's aspirations and the relationships between schools, families and the wider community.

Funding was limited but key to the continuation of the research project was additional financial support from Study Higher which enabled continuation of the work from January to December 2018 – this helped provide further support including continuation of a young researchers programme at the John Madejski Academy (JMA) and development of the Year 9 'aspiration game'. It also supported publication of a 'community practice' report to enable Study Higher to disseminate good practice in local resident led research, to other HE partners.

Effective partnership arrangements and a collaborative ethos underpinned the success of the research programme, best manifested in the involvement of the Whitley Researchers – a local community group formed to explore local issues together and give residents a voice. This encouraged the development of a team of young researchers at JMA who led on several activities that extended the reach and the responsiveness of our research programme.

The report includes a section on the Whitley community outlining a range of deprivation indices for two wards – Whitley and Church; the most deprived wards in Reading. This is the context for the aspiration research and it adds to the growing body of research into the reasons why young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are under-represented in higher education. One explanation offered at policy level is that there is a lack of aspiration.

A clear conclusion from our research is that there is no lack of aspiration among adults and children in this area of South Reading. The report refers to the prevalence of deficit models including lack of attainment which place responsibility on schools, families and communities rather than on wider social and political processes reinforcing inequalities and restricting social mobility. We are reminded that the concept of 'aspiration' remains largely unchallenged in practice.

The introductory section of the report concludes with a narrative on what we did including how we engaged young people, the face-to-face surveys conducted and how we engaged the wider community and how the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data was carried out.

Findings and HE relevance

The opening section here focuses on factors that shape aspiration and while no shortage of aspiration among young people and their families was evident, there are constraining factors including place, relationships, pathways and voice all discussed in some detail. Resolving issues around these limitations could make a significant difference to increasing academic attainment and aspiration to HE.

Other sections focused on parental expectations for their child at age 19 and how these were influenced by parents' own experience of schooling. Wanting their children to be happy and in a good job was universally important but not without some vagueness about future ambitions. Thinking through options and having the confidence to 'take control' is key to attainment.

Pupil happiness at school was found to be an important barometer of well-being and increased likelihood of aspiration to HE. Additionally, family circumstances e.g. anyone having a job also linked to aspiration to HE – the most limiting family factor being lack of money. While financial constraints put limits on what a child can experience parents do expect support from the wider community - crucial here is provision of social or activity clubs in school and community. One very important influence is parental attitude to school and to the learning they transmit to their children.

The report then provides an extended discussion on improving collaboration between schools, parents and pupils and the central importance of relationships between parents and teachers and how the school communicates with parents. A mutuality of trust and respect is crucial to children's happiness and attainment. This extends to the need to provide skills to enable teachers to teach effectively and pupils to learn how to learn – most conducive to both is good behaviour, regular attendance and collaboration around future planning. Improving attitudes to learning is a task for all parties – parents, pupils, teachers and schools. This is also an effective strategy for tackling anxiety – an issue that came up repeatedly.

Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions emphasise the importance of place, relationships, pathways and voice. Parental co-operation with school is vital and links directly to the attitudes and aspirations of children. Happy teachers likewise make happy schools which, in turn, help better manage child behaviour – one of the teacher's biggest challenges.

Recommendations address in some detail measures to improve communication between parents and teachers such as cultivating mutual respect and providing roles for parents on school premises. Helping young people to work through their options post school and provision of careers information is vital and several recommendations are made including providing work experience and careful guidance through the process of applying for and enrolling in higher education.

Continuing to address socio-economic disadvantages and empowering young people to take an active part in the services provided for them as well as recruiting local community assets and talents all contribute to the notion of an aspirational community – a learning community.

The report concludes with some specific recommendations for Study Higher.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This report, commissioned by Study Higher, synthesises the findings of a series of participatory research activities from the wider Whitley for Real programme in order to better understand young 'aspirations' for higher education in Whitley, a so called 'working class' neighbourhood of Reading, Berkshire. It explores the perceived opportunities and barriers facing local families in accessing higher education and reflects on what we have learned about where 'going to University' fits into their visions for the future. The report also reflects on the ways in which schools, families and the wider community can better collaborate in order to help young people navigate the different pathways they might take. The final section of the report offers some tentative suggestions for the next stage of the Study Higher programme in South Reading.

In 2018, Study Higher[1] joined a partnership of agencies and organisations in Whitley, Reading, that is working together to better understand links between young people's aspirations and school-family-community relationships to enhance the life chances of young people. The 'Whitley for Real' initiative (W4R) was developed by Reading Borough Council and the University of Reading in collaboration with the Whitley Community Development Association and other stakeholders to access and stimulate the 'local voice'. The aim is to influence both current and planned activities in the area so that resources can be targeted more effectively, ultimately helping to reduce deprivation. Our method emphasises a grounded and participatory approach, joint working between partners and a strong commitment to implementing action for positive change and social justice. The programme was funded initially by Reading Borough Council's Housing Service's Decent Neighbourhoods Fund (DNF) in 2017 with additional financial support given by Study Higher from January to December 2018.

The on-going support and funding from RBC and Study Higher was a significant benefit. This helped to co-produce one of the most intensive neighbourhood -based research exercises ever conducted in South Reading with local residents and young people. The research was undertaken by the Whitley Researchers[2].

Our remit investigated:

- Young people's aspirations and how they feel they might achieve them
- School/family/community relationships and how relations between these three may be improved to help young people reach their potential

In order to achieve this, the research project had several objectives including equipping participants with skills and confidence; engaging local people of all ages as researchers, evaluating changes in attitudes to learning and access to higher education and training, particularly among young people; extending understanding of productive links between home and school and inspiring and empowering higher student attainment. The objectives embrace individuals, families, schools and neighbourhood – in effect, a learning community. The detailed findings of this research, which challenge the assumption that children and families in Whitley lack 'aspiration', can be found in our 'Aspiration in Whitley'[3] report launched in September 2018.

While the research programme had an overarching remit addressing young people's aspirations and the school-family relationship, the wider development of the W4R programme attempts a series of discrete but linked pieces of hands-on research activities focusing on a range of agencies and groups using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods – and primarily, an evolving community-based research process.

Key to the continuation of our project was a funding resource from Study Higher to build the capacity and availability of local residents as researchers and complete the 'Aspiration in Whitley' project. One of our ambitions for this project was to create a participatory project with young people, schools and parents that engages local people in a co-produced, qualitative research programme that seeks to explore, understand and share the attitudes, experiences and feelings held around youth aspirations and transitions to work, higher education and future lives. In 2018, we applied to Study Higher for additional funding to expand our most exciting initiative; the development of a 'young researchers' team at John Madejski Academy of Year 9's who created their own methods, including an 'aspiration game', to explore issues around aspirations and future lives with their peers. The prime outcome was a young researcher led impetus among students in Year 9 and 10 to study and qualify at higher levels of education and training. Study Higher was also keen for our community and young researchers to unpack the opportunities and barriers associated with higher education in South Reading.

The Study Higher element of the project ran over 12 months from January to December 2018 and provided support for several strands of the W4R programme:

- Continuation of the young researchers programme in JMA
- Further development of the Year 9's 'aspiration game' and other participatory/peer-led research methods, including the production of aspiration game toolkits to be used by other schools

---

- In-depth interviews and focus groups with students and parents in Whitley and Church wards to unpack opportunities and barriers associated with higher education
- A series of community dissemination events and showcase celebrations
- An in-depth socio-economic profile of South Reading that synthesises existing qualitative and quantitative research data from the Whitley Researchers and other sources
- A co-produced 'community practice' report to assist Study Higher in building and maintaining aspirations and widening access to HE with other partners

1.2 Research partners and ethos:

The report was commissioned by Study Higher and as stated previously, it overlaps with the 'Aspiration in Whitley' report funded by Reading Borough Council's Decent Neighbourhoods Fund. It was produced by the University of Reading working together with its funding partners and with Whitley Researchers and the Young Researchers.

The Whitley Researchers, supported by WCDA, is a local community group formed specifically for the purpose of exploring local issues together and giving residents a voice. The collaborative approach is a defining feature of this research. We believe the most effective work gets done when communities reflect on their own situation and devise their own solutions to the issues they face, rather than having outside 'experts' prescribe solutions that, as past experience shows, the residents never really engage with. For this reason, knowledge generation is deliberately located at community level and not just in an academic or policy domain. Since this research centred on 'Youth Aspiration', it was also considered important to deliver 'with' and not 'for' the young people. The aim was not just to extract information about aspirations from young people, but to provide them with a platform from which they can make their own voice heard and, subsequently, explore their own pathways forward. To this end, the Young Researchers group was formed and they have been key to this research process.

Using participatory methods, a team of young researchers have been co-creating research activities with the Whitley Researchers and the University to explore the aspirations of fellow year 7 – 11 students at John Madejski Academy (JMA) since September 2017. During weekly sessions under the guidance of arts teacher, Mr Paul Allen, the students have been designing a range of different methods, including questionnaires, interviews, a community panel and an aspiration game. The team have also been documenting their research journey through photographic evidence and other creative activities, which were showcased in community events and an exhibition in 2018.

From September 2018, the University of Reading have also funded 2 days a week of Paul Allen's time at the John Madejski Academy to provide additional capacity for the expansion of the Young Researchers Initiative and help develop a community-wide partnership and action stage as an outcome of the Aspiration in Whitley report.

1.3 The location and research context

The 'Whitley Community' is defined here as the two wards of Whitley and Church and adjoining areas of Redlands and Katesgrove wards. Some areas of Whitley (particularly the stretch along Northumberland Avenue and the far South of Whitley Ward) are not only the most deprived in Reading, they rank amongst the 10% most deprived areas in the country – particularly in the domains of education, skills and training, income and employment.[4] Links between deprivation and poor physical and mental health have also been confirmed in local government statistics.[5]

According to Reading Borough Council's ward by ward profiles,[6] Whitley ward (the biggest ward within the wider Whitley community) has 15.2% of its working age population claiming benefits compared with 9.6% claiming benefits across Reading as a whole. 30.4% of working age people have no formal qualifications, and of those who are employed, twice as many as in other wards are engaged in lower paid manual labour.

Many of Whitley's young people consequently fall into the category of 'socially and economically deprived' and many of them feel stigmatised by this representation. The ward profiles suggest that 31.6% of Whitley Ward's children are at risk of living in poverty compared to an average of 18.7% in Reading as a whole. 37.4% claim free school meals compared to 22.1% in Reading as a whole. Another indicator of poverty is the percentage of pupils eligible for the pupil premium, which can be claimed by schools to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. The main secondary school in Whitley, John Madejski Academy (JMA), has the highest number of pupils eligible for the pupil premium in the whole of Reading: 53.9% of all pupils (28.4% of Reading school pupils are eligible for this premium Reading-wide, 22.6% are eligible in the South East of England, and 29.5% are eligible in England as a whole).[7] More of the so called 'disadvantaged pupils' in JMA are from a White-British background than is the case in other areas of Reading.

Poor White British young people are the socio-economic group who are currently the least likely to find their way into university. Whilst in the past, women and ethnic minorities have been under-represented in university, these groups are now over-represented in comparison to the white majority. Progress has been made in some areas, but when it comes to persons from poor, working-class backgrounds, there is little sign of change.[8] A BBC article written in 2017 suggests that young people in the wealthiest areas of England are 18 times more likely to go to university than those in the poorest

4 Office of National Statistics (ONS) (2015).
The English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015.
Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/
file/464431/English_Index_of_Multiple_Deprivation_2015_-_Infographic.pdf

5 Reading Borough Council Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). Deprivation by Ward and Lower Super Output Area www.reading.gov.uk/jsna/deprivation-by-ward

6 Berkshire Public Health Shared Team (2018) Whitley Ward Profile. Reading Borough Council. www.reading.gov.uk/media/4920/Whitley/pdf/Reading_Ward_Profiles_Feb_2018_-_Whitley.pdf

7 2015-16 data. Reading Borough Council Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) profiles. hwww.reading.gov.uk/jsna/children-young-people

8 Tight, M. (2012) Widening participation: a post-war scorecard. British Journal of Educational Studies, 60 (3) 211–226.

areas of England. Likewise, the article reports that in 2015, around half of young people in the least deprived 10% of postcodes went to university, whilst in the most deprived 10% of postcodes, only about 20% of young people went to university.[9] This regional attainment gap is the subject of a recent All-Party Parliamentary Group Report that highlights the need for place-based collaboration to tackle inequalities in the UK education system.[9b]

This report adds to the growing body of research into the reasons why young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are under-represented in higher education but an equally important aim of our research is to challenge commonly held stereotypes that young people and parents from lower income communities in the UK 'lack' aspiration for higher education. It considers the aspirations of Whitley's young people and parents, as well as some of the limiting factors that they face due to wider cultural, social and economic processes (Holloway et al, 2010).[9c]

The 'Aspiration in Whitley' report provides a critique of the existing research on youth aspirations, particularly in the context of so called 'deprived' areas. Despite notable critiques of this 'poverty of aspiration' discourse (Campbell and McKendrick, 2017)[10], we argued that there is a danger that policy interventions on raising aspirations remain unchallenged. There are two main tensions that we encountered in our research journey that we want to highlight.

Firstly, our remit was to explore aspiration in a working-class area and we discovered that there's no shortage of aspiration among adults and children in South Reading. Although we endorse a social justice approach to the widening of higher education in the UK, our research seeks to challenge the belief that gaps in educational
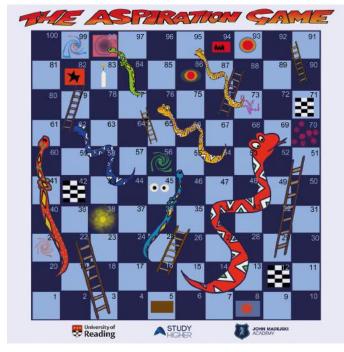
outcomes for certain groups of young people in the UK are due to a 'lack of' aspiration rather than a result of underlying structural inequalities that have worsened under austerity politics (Kintrea, St Clair and Houston, 2011; Morris, Dorling and Smith, 2016)[10b]. Within the 'poverty of aspiration' debates, a fairly widespread assumption is that 'aspiration' is some kind of universal panacea – good for teachers, pupils and parents, and if aspiration doesn't carry you to university where else might different life trajectories take you? In practice it's difficult not to present aspiration as something that is positive and taken for granted and despite a growing body of academic research calling for a more sophisticated understanding of aspiration (Hart, 2016[11]; Grant, 2017)[11a] particularly in relation to poverty and inequality (Spohrer et al, 2018[12]; Frostick et al, 2016[12a]), the concept remains largely unchallenged in practice.

Secondly, if it's not a 'lack of' aspiration restricting young people's life chances then the next assumption is that it is lack of attainment that is the problem. These deficit models tend to place the responsibility on local schools, families and communities to 'aspire/attain higher', rather than on wider social and political processes that are restricting social mobility in an era of austerity. Wider research also tells us that aspiration per se has little impact on attainment (Reay, 2017)[12b] so researchers and policy makers need to think more critically about the neoliberal and individualistic assumptions about this relationship. Moreover, they might radically question why some young people feel so alienated from education, why many parents are detached from local schools and how the 'narrative traps' (Dolan, 2019)[12c], that frequently articulate University as the best pathway for young British youth to achieving ambition, influence young people's understandings of post-school life in different places. As evidenced by the statistics in section 1.3, there is an attainment gap in South Reading but researchers and practioners alike need to be mindful of adopting a 'attainment-aspiration-circumstances' framework where changing aspiration without changing circumstances continues to undermine the wellbeing and life chances of young people and their families. Although, lower attainment levels at school can be an important reason why university is not an option to people from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds[13], we were also keen to understand other factors that influence young people's visions for their future lives and develop a community grounded implementation stage of the research that attempts to action real social change.

1.4 What we did

Our expectation is that improving the life chances of young people in Whitley is a collaborative effort that involves not only the young people, but also their parents, the school and the wider community. For this reason, we engaged all of these parties in designing our participatory action research (PAR) project[14]. We asked parents about their relations with school, and school about their relations with parents, and both of them about the young people in their care. We also found out more about the wider community, working particularly on developing channels of communication between

9 BBC 14th August 2017 www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-40898523

9b All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility and the Sutton Trust (2019) Closing the Regional Attainment Gap. www.suttontrust.com

9c Holloway, S.L., Hubbard, P., Jöns, H., and Pimlott-Wilson, H. (2010) Geographies of education and the significance of children, youth and families. Progress in Human Geography. 34 (5), 583–600.

10 Campbell, A. M. and McKendrick, J. H. (2017) Beyond aspirations: deploying the capability approach to tackle the under-representation in higher education of young people from deprived communities, Studies in Continuing Education. 39 (2), 120-137.

10b Kintrea, K., St Clair, R. and Houston, M. (2011) The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations. Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York. Morris, T., Dorling, D. and Davey Smith, G. (2016) How well can we predict educational outcomes? Examining the roles of cognitive ability and social position in educational attainment, Contemporary Social Science. 11 (2-3),154-168.

11 Hart, C. S. (2016) "How do aspirations matter?" Journal of Human Development and Capabilities. 17 (3): 324–341.

11a Grant, T. (2017) The complexity of aspiration: the role of hope and habitus in shaping working-class young people's aspirations to higher education, Children's Geographies, 15 (3), 289-303.

12 Spohrer, K., Stahl, G. and Bowers-Brown, T. (2018) Constituting neoliberal subjects? 'Aspiration' as technology of government in UK policy discourse. Journal of Education Policy. 33 (3), 327-342.

12a Frostick, C., Phillips, G., Renton, A. and Moore, D. (2016) The educational and employment aspirations of adolescents from areas of high deprivation in London. Journal of Youth Adolescence. 45, 1126-1140.

12b Reay, D. (2017) Miseducation: Inequality, education and the working classes. Policy Press: Bristol.

12c Dolan, P. (2019) Happy Ever After: Escaping the Myth of the Perfect Life. Penguin: London.

13 Croll, P. and Attwood, G. (2013) Participation in higher education: aspirations, attainment and social background, British Journal of Educational Studies. 61 (2), 187-202,

14 Further information on our methodology can be found in the 'Aspiration in Whitley' Report, 2018.

various service providers and local families. The agenda of the conversations was co-produced with Whitley Researchers and the Young Researchers; they were the ones in charge of which issues needed to be explored and followed up. Ideas evolved as the project progressed and more people come on board as the project showed promise. The lines of communication opened up during the course of this collaboration are important – through them, funding can be channelled and agreed actions can actually be carried out. The way we worked with young people, parents, schools and members of the wider community are outlined below:

1.4.1 Engaging Young People

The Young Researchers group began with a 'homebuild' event in which a group of teenagers from JMA constructed an ideal home from giant blocks. The young people who engaged in this way were enthusiastic to continue exploring ideas about their local environment and dreams for the future. A weekly meeting was set up, based on photography and putting the young people in charge of recording their local environment through their own lenses.

On the back of this, the young people together with support staff from JMA, from Whitley Researchers and from the University of Reading developed an 'aspiration game' based on snakes and ladders. The snakes represented barriers to progress whilst the ladders represented things that help a young person along. The game gave young people a platform from which they were able to discuss their dreams, desires and ambitions, reflecting for themselves on the things that hold them back and the things that help them forward. The Young Researchers, by this time an established identity, then facilitated the playing of the game with their peers. The game was played with around 70 young people

and children, partly in JMA, partly in Reading Girls' School and partly in the Palmer Academy with primary school children. Whilst the Young Researchers were key in facilitating the game, the Whitley Researchers were also present at every occasion, helping to record the conversations and to document our growing understanding of where young people were coming from.

Although playing the aspiration game enabled us to collect data about youth aspirations, barriers and things which help, the most exciting development was to see the impact that it had on the young people themselves. Many comments were fed back about how this process helped them to reflect on their future, and how they appreciated the opportunity to voice their own experiences. Some said that discovering 'how others think (and what they are dealing with) helps your own thinking'. The game was a good reflection on life with its opportunities and set-backs, some people getting ahead and others coming more slowly after. The young people were quick to note how different people play differently (some becoming very intense and upset about setbacks, others being very laid back). This also helped to spark conversations about life and our approach to it: How do we get over set-backs? What happens if we just give up? As one young person observed, "There is always another ladder!"

Wider research suggests that this kind of reflection has a particularly positive impact on children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds (more on this in the section 'Life skills and attitudes to learning). Reflection, for example on how lessons connect with real life, or on how difficulties 'fitting in' might be acknowledged and overcome have both been proven to reduce the attainment gap between disadvantaged young people and others.[15] The reflection process helps young people to connect their efforts and actions to their outcomes, helping them break through some unspoken barriers and increasing motivation. Playing the aspiration game is a similar reflection process and may have similar advantages.

During the course of this research, the Young Researchers displayed ever-increasing confidence in expressing themselves, defining and articulating what is important to them. By the end of 2018 they had shown themselves capable of public speaking (including to the BBC), defending their ability to reach their goals, meeting all the challenges of organising public events and being able to clearly define to service providers what they wanted to make their own way forwards. What we experienced were young people making new steps to think about and take control of their lives, and asking challenging questions of the adults, teachers and policy makers about the different pathways they might take in the future.[16]

15 O'Reilly, F., Chande, R., Groot, B., Sanders, M. and Soon, Z. (2017). Behavioural Insights for Education: A practical guide for parents, teachers and school Leaders. London: Pearson. http://38r8om2xjhhl25mw24492dir-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BI-for-Education-A-Practical-Guide-for-Parents-Teachers-and-School-Leaders.pdf

16 Further details on our methodology can be found in the 'Aspiration in Whitley' Report, 2018.

1.4.2 Face to face surveys

Three complementary questionnaires[16a] were devised together with the Whitley Researchers. In first place a face to face survey was aimed at parents, but then we approached teachers and young people with similar questions in order to get their varying perspectives on the same questions. Again, the work of devising the questionnaires was a collaborative effort, intended to be empowering/steered by the local people who were involved in taking it out. The learning process belonged in first place to this community. One of the Whitley Researchers, Aneta Banas, commented: "Being present during the whole process of creating the parent's questionnaire felt very rewarding. I felt part of the group and went then proudly to use it."

122 parents from primary and secondary schools were interviewed using this questionnaire. Also 38 teenagers and 38 primary and secondary school staff members were interviewed using the complementary questionnaires.

Besides these more structured questionnaires, a smaller number of parents, teachers and young people were interviewed more in depth. These interviews and discussions, along with the experiences we gained during the course of the research regarding what motivated the people and what did not work all added to our store of findings about how to aid the progress of young people.

The young people themselves initiated a snap appraisal of teacher aspirations. Becoming interested in the topic, they wanted to find out what influenced their teacher's career paths, along with the helps and hindrances that others had encountered in their journey. They also wanted to find out what teachers thought of JMA pupil aspirations. They devised their own questionnaire and collected responses from 15 teachers in a lunch break.

Exclusively for Study Higher, we undertook further questionnaires[16b] with an additional 25 secondary school parents about their views on higher education and particularly on the perceived barriers their children might face when it comes to enrolling at university. We also interviewed an additional 19 school pupils from Year 10 on these matters, and are able to report back on both their questionnaire responses and on the findings from a group discussion.

1.4.3 Engaging the wider community

Nine representatives of Whitley for Real partners (all service providers in the local community) were interviewed in order to engage with their perspectives on Whitley community. Their comments added to our understanding of the concerns service provider feel, and aided us in our questionnaire design. Moreover, three neighbourhood meetings were held, each involving over 40 persons. The aim was to facilitate communication between service providers and local residents, helping to coordinate efforts and to establish shared goals and aspirations.

One of the neighbourhood meetings involved a panel of ten service providers responding to questions from the Young Researchers on how local service agencies and Whitley community might address the hopes and aspirations of its young people. The event used a 'Question Time' format and was designed and facilitated by the Young Researchers at JMA. A wider audience of community stakeholders were also given the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

Although Whitley is a well-established community, there can be significant differences between its residents and its service providers; differences which potentially generate mistrust and a blame game rather than a pulling together with common purpose. However, in each of the neighbourhood meetings there was evidence of a real will to collaborate for the betterment of the Whitley community. As one participant wrote after the community panel event, "From today I've learnt that Whitley, the community, has so much potential, so many people who want to make a difference, that anything is possible. People working together, people believing in each other and themselves is what will make the greatest difference. I think that is on the way to happening."

1.4.4 Analysis

Some of this data was analysed using qualitative techniques; recording opinions and identifying reoccurring patterns that make sense of the local situation. The more structured surveys on the other hand could be analysed using quantitative methods. This allowed us to compare how different groups of people respond to a question, or to see how one type of response is linked to another. Where the report affirms a specific link or a contrast between two variables, the link will have been checked for statistical significance. Regressions have been carried out and there is at least a 90% certainty that the way one variable links to another is not just down to chance. This provides a measure of confidence in the reliability of the findings.

16b See Appendix 4.

16a See Appendix 1, 2 and 3.

2. FINDINGS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS AND TEACHERS THAT RELATE TO HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1 Factors that shape aspiration:

There was no shortage of aspiration among young people and their families in Whitley, although these aspirations were found to be shaped and constrained by four key issues: place, relationships, pathways and voice. These four issues are discussed in turn below.

2.1.1 Place

The ideas young people are exposed to over time impact their choices, as do the structural inequalities they face. Although young people and their families fiercely resisted any sense of stigma and disadvantage, there remained some evidence of struggle in relationships with school and service providers.

A significant number of students mentioned, during the playing of the aspiration game, circumstances that suggest a testing social and emotional environment. Family trauma such as missing family members, crowded and unhappy households, eviction and illness were all mentioned, besides bullying at school and emotional distress. Anxiety was an issue that came up repeatedly. The familiar 'safe' circle of the young people's engagement was relatively small (home to school and maybe taking in the park or some local shops). Trips and experiences outside of Whitley were mostly initiated by the school.

Our data revealed that difficult economic circumstances, challenging family situations and stress factors along with poor parental experience of education all affected the aspirations of children to go on to higher education. Understanding and addressing these place-based stress factors is important in order to allow aspirations to be better supported.

The wider literature also makes it clear that aspirations are, to some extent, a product of a young person's present circumstances. Although raising youth aspirations is seen as a means to increasing attainment in school and then career success as an adult,[17] future attainments cannot respond to a change in aspiration unless those external circumstances change also.[18] Changing aspiration without changing the circumstances brings only a misalignment between aspirations and educational attainment (big plans but without

the school attainment levels to match), and in this scenario, a young person is more likely to become NEET (not in employment, education or training) at the age of 18.[19] One study involving over 17,000 persons who were followed from their teenage years through to adulthood finds that teenage aspirations combined with educational attainment have in important impact on the future occupations of young people, but that the importance of the educational element is increasing over time, and this can actually have a negative effect on the aspirations (and outcomes) of students who do not make the grades[20] (it discourages positive aspiration amongst those with low grades). A paper by Croll and Attwood (2013) stresses that although early aspiration is one predictor of whether or not a child ends up in university, the attainment gap that has to do with social background is the much bigger explanatory factor. Improving school level achievement is therefore the biggest consideration, although introducing ambitions for university education can also help at the margin.[21]

In our own study, we could compare the aspirations/hopes/expectations of children, their parents and their teachers in primary school to the expectations expressed in secondary school. Amongst children and their teachers, expectations became more modest as the child grew up. The teenage Young Researchers themselves commented, after facilitating the aspiration game in a primary school, on how much bigger one's dreams are when you are younger. The same constraint was reflected in the Whitley Researcher notes of conversations on aspiration which were recorded in primary and secondary schools.[22] Teachers in secondary schools were significantly less certain of a bright future for the young people they taught than teachers in primary schools. They also did not rate the happiness of their pupils so highly as primary school teachers did. It would seem that aspirations were indeed being modified to meet reality as socio-economic circumstances work themselves out into school attainment levels that thereafter constrain the growing child's options. For some of these children then, it is not just the wish to achieve, but the means to achieve that needs attention.

17 See three papers produced by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) in 2005:
• Higher standards, better schools for all; more choice for parents and pupils White Paper (Cm 6677) London: DfES
• Education and skills White Paper (Cm 6476) London: DfES
• Youth matters, the Green Paper on young people (Cm6629) London: DfES

18 St Clair, R. & Benjamin, A. (2011). Performing desires: the dilemma of aspirations and educational attainment, British educational research journal. 37 (3) 501-517

19 Yates, S., Harris, A., Ricardo, S. & Staff, J. (2011). Early Occupational Aspirations and Fractured Transitions: A Study of Entry into 'NEET' Status in the UK. Journal of Social Policy 40 513-534.

20 Schoon, I. & Parsons, S. (2002). Teenage Aspirations for Future Careers and Occupational Outcomes. Journal of Vocational Behavior. 60 (2) 262-288

21 Croll, P. & Attwood, G. (3013). Participation in Higher Education: Aspirations, Attainment and Social Background. British Journal of Education Studies. 61 (2) 187-202 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00071005.2013.787386

22 Aspirations change. They become more modest and less exclusively career-focussed as children got older. Moreover, teenagers were more discerning about the people in their lives than children. Children do not necessarily see parental attitudes as something separate from themselves which affects their development – home is just part of who they are. Only later do they become more discerning/critical of the role of other people, being more aware of how those other people influence them.

2.1.2 Relationships:

Good peer friendships make a huge difference to young people. Constructive, two-way, communication with the adults in their lives was also found to affect both present happiness in school and future outlook. Constructive relationships might be found in family, one's friendship network, with teachers in school or with leaders in an extra-curricular group or activity. Any of these may provide positive or negative influences, but helping each young person to feel securely attached within at least one positive environment may be an action point. Knowing that there are other people with our best interests at heart aids a sense of security. Some students who felt supported also expressed a desire to make their supporters proud. Certainly our research showed that young people who indicated that they experienced good relationships in each of these areas were more likely to be happy in school and were more likely to want to go on to higher education.

Attachment cannot be manufactured from nothing (research carried out by 'Fusion' for example suggests that young people have no desire to be 'placed' into mentoring relationships).[23] Instead, positive relationships grow as people invest into one another's lives. In terms of action then, we might ask ourselves whether each young person has a positive role model spending one-to-one time with them from some sector of society. Relationships are two-way affairs and as young people receive input from others, so they are inspired to give something back into their community.

When asked about their aspirations, students were often inspired by the paths taken by people they knew or admired. Those the young people know also act as their role models. How well adults collaborate with each other was also found to influence the outlook of young people. Young people whose parents expressed a collaborative attitude towards the school were more likely to have a similar attitude themselves and, as before mentioned, being happy at school is closely linked to the desire to go on to higher education.

2.1.3 Pathways:

In our discussions, ideas for the future tended to be quite fluid and very open to suggestion during discussion as one or another group member took a lead. Despite this significant level of uncertainty, great ambitions were expressed, with educational attainment playing a prominent part in the conversation. 'Getting the grades' always came up early in any conversation about 'ladders' to progress.

However, in keeping with research carried out elsewhere,[24] it was found that young people need help exploring the pathways to fulfilling their dreams. When young people were asked about what they expect to do after school and what their prospects were, our data showed no link between a desire for higher education and an expectation of better job prospects or a brighter future. Higher education was given little consideration when after school options were asked about in an open question; young people being more focused on the end job. In parent data, a correlation (a link in the data) could be observed between desiring higher education for one's child and foreseeing a brighter future for that child, but this obviously had not been transmitted to teenagers.

Parents who had not gone through higher education and into non-manual jobs themselves, or else who come from overseas and are not familiar with the UK education system have less information to go on and may find it harder to guide their children through the enrolment process. Certainly it could be observed that parents with no close relative who had been through university were significantly less likely to discuss the option of university with their child at home. The information provided by schools is therefore very important, and schools may need to work extra hard to get the message across. Live examples (contact with someone from the same background who has gone on to university) has been found to be more inspiring to young people than long explanations of the advantages and disadvantages of higher education. This finding comes from wider research,[25] but some small steps in this direction that we tried ourselves also gained some extremely positive feedback. The messenger matters. The inspiration process through making higher education seem relevant and attainable is one aspect, but pupils also need more step-by-step guidance through the whole application process, which was found to be a complete mystery to teenagers unless they had siblings who had gone before them.

2.1.4 Voice

Although role models and positive influences provide guidance, young people want more opportunities to find their own voice. Young people are not easily inspired to engage with events that are 'put on' for them – rather, they want the opportunity to develop their own agendas, and they seek adult support in developing these agendas. This is a completely different approach – a child centred approach that involves delivering 'with' and not 'to' the young people. Our own research methodology was able to take this approach thanks to the visionary support of JMA school and could prove its effectiveness from the way that young people rose to the challenge and grew into their roles. The 2-way interaction was what made the Young Researcher's initiative so successful.

It is not just about helping students have a voice towards outsiders that impacts young people; thinking through these issues also helps them to clarify where they are going in their own mind. Helping low performing students from less privileged backgrounds to think deeply, reflecting on what is important to them, where they want to get to, what they need to overcome in order to get there and how that might happen, plus linking what they learn to where they want to get in life is known to help close the attainment gap between

23 Fusion (2015). Research Report into the needs of the Youth and Community of Whitley, Fusion Youth & Community UK. Reading.

24 Menzies, L (2013). Educational aspirations: how English schools can work with parents to keep them on track. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/england-education-aspirations-summary.pdf

25 Soon, Z., Chande, R. and Hume, S. (2017). Helping everyone reach their potential: new education results. Behavioural Insights Team. http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/education-and-skills/helping-everyone-reach-their-potential-new-education-results/

privileged and less privileged young people.[26] High achievers have a questioning, exploring mindset that believes improvement is possible with hard work and who are motivated to put that work in.

Young people from less advantaged backgrounds are particularly in need of help to think these things through. In our own research, it could be seen that students who did not feel that the school is providing them with skills they need for life were less happy in school and were less likely to aspire to higher education. Moreover, a full 55% of the young people we interviewed via questionnaire did not feel that the school was providing them with all the skills they need for the future – and if pupils are not seeing value in the education they are receiving, then they are hardly likely to excel in it! Parents and even teachers felt the same way, both being particularly concerned that the young people need help with their attitude to learning and their life skills in order to do better.

Giving young people a voice – the opportunity to reflect on what they want and take control of where they are going, learning in the process about cause and effect, effort and result, learning to manage relationships with others and to overcome difficulties… all these things are not so easy for families in difficult circumstances to provide for their children, but they are essential for increasing academic attainment and the options available to young people.

2.2 What young people will be doing at age 19 and barriers to higher education

Parents were asked an open question about what they wanted their child to be doing at age 19 (the usual end of college, sixth form or other training period). 62% definitely wanted their child to be in higher education. A further 12% said either in higher education or some other occupation (usually work). The majority of those mentioning higher education did not specify which form (especially as for many of them, their children were only in primary school), but of those who did, more mentioned university than college.

Parents who had had a bad school experience themselves or had no one in the household in a job were significantly less likely to aspire to higher education for their child. Perceived lack of ability in a child (mentioned by just 14% of parents) was also associated with less expectation of going on to higher education.

In the higher education questionnaire, a further 25 parents were asked not only where they thought their child might be at the age of 19, but also what they thought about their child going to University. 16 of the 25 parents responded positively. Some of these saw university as something to be proud of, others as a necessity or at least as a positive step that they would be very happy to support. Four responses were more neutral – parents not being enthusiastic, but at least willing to support their child if that is what their child really wants. Five responses were negative, thinking it unlikely that their child would get to university or else benefit from university.

26 O'Reilly, F., Chande, R., Groot, B., Sanders, M. and Soon, Z. (2017). Behavioural Insights for Education: A practical guide for parents, teachers and school Leaders. London: Pearson. http://38r8om2xjhhl25mw24492dir-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BI-for-Education-A-Practical-Guide-for-Parents-Teachers-and-School-Leaders.pdf

The 25 parents were also asked what factors make it difficult for their child to go to university. Cost was perceived to be the biggest barrier, and particularly by parents who wanted their child to go on to higher education. Getting the grades was the next concern, and particularly for secondary school parents, for whom this represented the biggest of all barriers. Lack of confidence was the third biggest barrier, and parents without any family members who had been through university were particularly likely to cite 'confidence' as a barrier to their child's attendance. Confidence about going to university was also associated with coping well at school. Some parents also mentioned competing priorities their children had, such as wanting to earn money or wanting to keep close to family and partners. A few thought their children simply had no interest in university or no clear plan about what they want to do. Besides all this, some parents felt that not knowing how to go about the process of applying and enrolling for university was a barrier.

Going back to the main parent survey, when asked what holds their child back generally, the most common response picked from a list was 'lack of confidence'. 50% of parents selected this barrier. There was no significant difference between boys and girls in terms of confidence issues, and the problem was noted in primary schools as well as in secondary schools. Although lack of confidence was seen by parents to be a widespread barrier to progress, its presence was not linked in the data to lower aspirations for higher education or to less optimism about the future. In the course of discussion, it emerged that confidence can grow with small successes as problems are confronted and overcome. It also grows in the presence of supportive relationships with other people. Getting into the right mindset also makes a difference. These are the areas that can be worked on and will be expanded on in the following sections.

The second most important general constraint selected by parents was lack of money (mentioned by almost half of parents). This was followed by its close associate, lack of opportunity. These financial barriers are described under the sections, 'place' and 'home influences'.

Concerns were also mentioned regarding getting necessary qualifications, and having vision or direction. These problems were felt significantly more by secondary school parents than by primary school parents (a third of school parents mentioned each of these respective issues). Getting grades and having vision/direction were not associated with perceived lack of ability, but rather with poor behaviour. At least for the problem of vision/direction, the issue here could have to do with attitudes to learning. Parents especially expressed concerns over vision/direction for their sons (and indeed, our questionnaires revealed that boys were less likely to be thinking about higher education than girls). Parents with concerns about their child's progress were just as likely as other parents to hope their child went on to higher education, but were clearly concerned that it might not be possible, and all the more so as their child got older; more on 'attitudes to learning' in a later section.

Parents in Whitley, and even more so their teenage children (only 43% of whom mentioned higher education when asked what they saw themselves doing at the age of 19), tended to be more

job-focussed than higher education focussed when compared with aspirations in other parts of the UK. Moreover only very few mentioned an interest in travel opportunities. Mums and Dads did not significantly differ in their aspirations for their children in this study, and neither was there any differentiation in higher education aspirations for sons compared to higher education aspirations for daughters. Aspirations to do with having a family were mentioned by some, but did not feature strongly.

As was mentioned in the 'Pathways' section, parents who aspired to higher education for their child were also more likely to foresee a bright future for their child, but young people's responses did not show this correlation; their expectations for a bright future were not correlated to whether or not they aspired to higher education. Instead, it was young people who were confident about being able to get a good job after school who were the most positive about the future.

From questionnaires put to 19 Year 10 pupils, it could be seen that wanting to earn money was a key reason why young people were not sure about university (though others simply had an alternative career path in mind). Having a job and studying was quite a popular concept. Getting the grades for university or covering the costs of university was of secondary concern when it came to the question of why young people think they might not go to university. Most of the young people interviewed simply had no idea about the significance of university for their progress. For example, even young people with education-intensive ambitions (like 'doctor' or 'lawyer') had not really thought about going to university. Nor did young people have much idea about the process of getting to university. For example, of the 19 interviewees, only one had heard of UCAS, and that was because she had a sibling in university. Parents and teachers clearly need to do more to transmit to the young people in their care the advantages of higher education, and also do more to map out the process of getting there.

Some parents we spoke to, when asked what they want their child to be doing at the age of 19, responded along the lines that they wanted things to go well for their child and for their child to be happy and fulfilled, but offered no clear picture of what that might look like. This kind of response tended to be associated with the parent saying the child him or herself did not know what they wanted to do after school. Such responses were also associated with parents who had had a bad school experience themselves or who had no one in the household working. Much as good was wished, there is advantage in having a clear plan, a clear view of the barriers, and clear steps to overcome. It was likewise noted that parents who felt that the responsibility for influencing children to go to university lay rather with schools than with parents tended to have less aspiration to see their child at university. Where 'setting a direction' is not being learned from parents, exercises like the aspiration game can help. They help young people to think through different options and to and identify specific action points where necessary. Once again, it can be seen that thinking and talking things through, and then taking control is key to attainment. This is expanded upon in the section, 'attitudes to learning and life-skills'.

2.3 Happiness in school

Parents, teachers and young people were all asked to rate child happiness at school. Secondary school parents tended to rate the happiness of their children higher than their children did, although secondary school teachers had it about right, rating happiness mostly around 3 and 4 out of 5. Pupil happiness at school was found to be an important barometer of wellbeing since it was linked to expectations for a brighter future, greater confidence about job prospects, lower levels of absenteeism, better behaviour and being more likely to aspire to higher education.

In our conversations with young people, teachers and parents, it emerged that the things most likely to affect happiness at school included:

- Positive relationships with peers;
- Feeling that teachers are approachable and ready to listen;
- Managing well with the school work;
- Feeling that the school provides relevant skills;
- Parental influences;
- The positive influences of extra-curricular activities.

Each of these factors will be discussed in more detail in the following sections. Young people were consistent in their requests for 'fun lessons' and school trips too!

Girls tended to rate themselves as less happy at school than the boys did, being particularly affected by the ups and downs of interpersonal relationships, whilst the school-work side was no different from boys. In spite of these feelings, the girls were more likely than the boys in our survey to anticipate going on to higher education.

2.4 Home influence on aspirations for higher education

Our study also found that family circumstances (for example, whether anyone in the household has a job) links to aspirations to higher education and almost half of parents mentioned lack of money as being a barrier for their child. Parents mentioned the costs associated with going to university, and also the cost of housing such that it is hard for young people to launch out independently. Government cuts were seen to be an issue damaging to the prospects of young people. Meeting day-to-day costs, especially for transport, also weighed on the minds of parents – even parents who had jobs. Parents who mentioned money barriers were also more likely to feel that their child lacked opportunities to try new things. Just over a third of the parents we interviewed cited 'opportunity' as something holding their child back, and apart from the statistically significant link between these this and lack of money, many parents themselves volunteered the information that lack of opportunity for their child to try new things, go to new places, pursue interests or get the tailored help that they require was directly linked to cost.

Financial restrictions may directly impact the options available to a child, but it is not just the things you can or cannot buy with money that matter. There are a whole set of attitudes and life skills that parents can or cannot pass on, and teachers insist that these wider parental influences and capabilities are crucial to children also.

In our data, it could be seen that bad personal experiences of school were linked to parents being less likely to aspire to higher education for their children, and more likely to say, in an open question, that their child does not know what they want to do after school (instead of mentioning job, higher education, travel or family ambitions). Likewise, it could be seen that those who already had someone in the family at university were significantly more likely to talk with their child at home about the possibility of them going to university. In a focus group with female Year 10 students, the only participants that had heard of UCAS had siblings at University.

Personal school experiences also affected parental participation in school events, and the likelihood of their picking up on school information, both of which have knock on effects for the cooperation between schools and parents. Likewise parents with bad personal experiences of school were less likely to help their child with homework, and this lack of homework help was also linked to being less likely to aspire to higher education. It was even the case that bad personal experience of school was associated with parents being less likely to send their child to clubs that benefit and inspire a child.

Out of all the parents we interviewed in Whitley, 11% gave the worst possible score to their own school experience (1 out of 5) and 38% gave a score of three or under out of five – a substantial proportion of parents without a positive school experience. The persistence of struggles with the education system from one generation to the next is clearly demonstrated in the fact that parents with negative school experiences were more likely to report their children as being unhappy at school also.

We also asked young people directly about their school experiences and about what their parents thought about the school that they (the child) went to. Here it was found that students who reported their parents as being less positive about the school were less happy in school themselves. Children with parents who were negative about the school were also less likely to aspire to higher education (unhappiness at school, parental negativity about school and not wanting to go on to higher education all go together). Interestingly, being negative about school has been raised as a key issue for action by the parents' forum that has developed as an outcome of the main report. Moreover, these teenagers with negative parents were less confident about approaching teachers and they were less positive about their own future. It is not clear to what extent parent's perceptions affect children, or child school experience affects parents. Certainly parents of children who have concerns with bullying are much more likely to report negatively on the school. The need of schools to address parent concerns and the need of parents to speak in supportive and cooperative ways about school to their children both affect the outlook of a child.

Parents who felt their child was in a good school, or who felt that the teachers there were welcoming and approachable were more likely to aspire to higher education for their child.

Poor parental experience of school was linked to variables indicative of constrained life circumstances such as feeling money is a barrier to their child's progress, not having anybody in paid work in the household and to picking the school just because it was local. Some teachers felt that home issues need to be addressed with more funding, social care and support for vulnerable families. Secure, decent places of work need to be available also for people without qualifications, not only for people with them. Discouragement was expressed about school league tables in which it seems that educational achievement is all down to the school when actually, because of differences in wider structural opportunities, the playing field is not level to start with.

It is clear that parents are a key support base and role model for young people but parents also want to feel supported by the wider community. Financial constraints put limits on what a child can experience, but parents also input into the education of their child in other ways. One very important influence is the attitudes to school and to learning that they transmit to their children. These attitudes affect the child's enthusiasm to work for good grades and to aspire to university education.

2.5 Extra-curricular clubs

Children who attended school clubs tended to be happier at school, more likely to aspire to higher education and more positive about their future generally. Part of this may be parental influence (engaged and aspirational parents were more likely to send their child to a club) but even controlling for multiple elements of parental influence, there was still evidence of significant links between attendance of a school club, happiness at school and wanting higher education. It could be that these clubs give young people new skills and experiences and open up new horizons in multiple areas:

- New experiences in terms of things to do and places to go (many young people had only ever been on trips or outings that were organised by the school);
- New skills and experiences in terms of hand's on learning experiences and new thought patterns;
- New people to get to know. Clubs provide opportunities for constructive relationships to be built with adults and peers alike. Club attendance is, for example, associated with more confidence in approaching teachers.
- An experience of other people giving something up for the community (especially where volunteers are involved) provides a role model of how community thrives. This may influence the choices that young people go on to make also.

Community-led activities tend to be less prolific in Whitley compared to more privileged areas of the UK, but this is rapidly changing due to the 'Whitley for Real' partnership and the community development work undertaken by the Whitley Community Development Association. Almost half of the

teenagers we interviewed in 2018 did not go to an extra-curricular club, and this is an area in which parents and the wider community could invest. Of the ones who did go to clubs, most of them were sports-related, but a desire for creative activities and for career related clubs was also expressed. The wider community could work with and alongside schools to provide extra-curricular clubs, and a few features of these clubs emerged as factors of importance. Clubs should be:

- Local. Transport is a problem for many Whitley residents, and ideally, children need to be able to get themselves to the club. The sense of 'safe place' for the Whitley teenagers we interviewed was quite limited geographically. Half the students we interviewed did not feel safe about venturing off their usual routes to and from school.

- Free. Money is seen as a constraining factor, and cost will affect attendance.

- Shaped with and around the young people: Young people are not so much attracted to events 'put on' for them; they rather want adult support in developing and shaping an extra-curricular activity themselves.

- Since the school is a known and trusted point of reference for many children, advertising clubs through the school can help.

One of the first outcomes of the 'Aspiration in Whitley' research has been greater collaboration between Whitley for Real partnership, WCDA, the University, Study Higher, Whitley Excellent Cluster (WEC) schools/Aspire2 and local parents to develop a programme of after-school and holidays clubs shaped by young people.

2.6 Improving the collaboration between schools, parents and pupils

2.6.1 Parent school communication

Parent-school cooperation is vital and links directly to the attitudes and aspirations of children. Most parents found school staff welcoming and approachable (84% of the parents we interviewed rated teachers in the top 2 of 5 categories) but 3 issues damaging communication (or else arising from poor communication) were noted from conversations with parents:

1 Parents' feeling that concerns are not being addressed. Concerns about bullying in particular were strongly correlated with more negative feelings about schools in the area;

2 Parents not feeling informed. Around 20% of the parents we interviewed felt that they did not have enough information. These tended to be mainly parents who were not picking up on the various channels of information available. Some of these simply did not get the system, especially when it was their first child. Besides the parents who were missing the information available, there were also some highly engaged parents who still wanted more involvement with their child's learning.

3 Lack of mutual respect. Parents know that their involvement affects child outcomes. However, most parents strongly resisted the idea of their own family circumstances holding their child back. Any sense of feeling judged made parents put up defences, damaging collaboration/communication. The concern of parents for their children came through very strongly, indifferent of family background, and this provides a more positive basis for parent-teacher relations.

Parents facing difficult family circumstances or whose own school experience was poor were less likely to feel that they had enough information about what is happening to and for their children, they were less likely to pick up information from multiple channels, and their perception of teachers and their ability to fix the things that concern them was poorer. This may be contributing to their lack of engagement with school events and clubs - and so the cycle of poor communication is reinforced.

Since a substantial number of parents have had bad experiences of the education system, trust and cooperation between parents and schools cannot simply be taken for granted. Instead, special attention needs to be directed into building these assets into communications. An example of how easily things can go wrong was seen in the insistence of one group of parents we spoke to that the school did not want them involved. Such perceptions need to be recognised and addressed before they generate a hostile atmosphere. It may be helpful for parents to know that teachers get a great deal of motivation from seeing a child progress. Parents who believe that teachers want the best for their children will feel less need to defend their child from school.

In our data, the approachability of teachers critically affects how both parents and their children view school. Parents who felt that teachers were welcoming and approachable tended to be much more positive about school generally. They rated their child as happier at school, they were more likely to feel the school does enough to support their child, they were more likely to be engaged with the school, they were more positive about the future of the child and more likely to aspire to higher education. Whatever the family circumstances, and even if parents were not picking up on all the communications, these associations still held. Soft skills are extremely valuable then, and may be the place to start communicating with parents who have had a bad experience of school themselves.

We asked both parents and teachers about how communication might be improved, these are a few points that emerged:

- Texts, phone calls and (to a lesser extent) emails are the modes of communication parents are most likely to have picked up on. It helps if school staff pick modes of communication which do not require parents to do something proactive (like download an app) in order to participate.[27]

- Leaflets and letters, although now the least popular mode of communication between school staff and parents, still tend to get attention and remain the best form of communication in terms of helping parents to feel in the loop. Face-to-face contact is also appreciated by parents and indeed, was the only way in which a few parents picked up any information at all. Teachers also put a lot of effort into parents' evenings (although they know that some parents will not attend) and into school reports (which were appreciated by about half of the parents we interviewed as an important form of communication).

- Short, regular updates (such as texts) of what is being taught in school help parents to engage in discussion with their child about school work. It helps them to know exactly what to ask questions about and what to encourage the child to do. An external study suggests this kind of mentoring has a significant effect on the attainment of children who are falling behind.[28]

- Homework is a key way for parents to engage in their child's learning. Homework which mirrors what is being studied in class was wanted by the more engaged parents as a way for them to become more involved.

- Working parents would like more notice of events and timelier reminders such that they can plan attendance into their schedule.

- Parents ask schools to do more to communicate their child's successes and achievements. The majority of communication was found to revolve around behaviour and attendance, or disputes with other children. These are all highly charged subjects and make school-parent communication seem more negative than it actually needs to be. More positive communications will help shift this balance.

- Schools need to be seen to address parental concerns, especially bullying.

- The messenger matters. Parent-to-parent encouragement and information-sharing can be more acceptable to some than the school-to-parent information flow.[29]

- Both aggression and disengagement are very hard for teachers to deal with. Parents appreciated teachers who are approachable and welcoming. Teachers wanted parents to try and understand the way the school works and to cooperate with it, attending meetings and maintaining communication. Common ground needs to be emphasised in the fact that both teachers and parents are interested in the welfare of the child.

- Engaged parents help the school by ensuring child attendance and timeliness, encouraging responsibility for kit and behaviour, encouraging the child in their attitude to learning, ensuring homework is done and praising achievements, and backing up the school line rather than working against it.

- Parents who engaged with the school, attending school events and helping out with homework were also more likely to send their child to extra-curricular activities and to aspire to higher education for their children. Keeping parents engaged is important then. One of the key things associated with parental engagement was the feeling that teachers are welcoming and approachable. This was even more important than parents picking up on all the school communications. It is so important that it has its own heading below.

2.6.2 Teacher pupil communication

Almost half of the young people interviewed expressed problems with approaching teachers or with feeling understood. Over one third of students could not identify someone to talk to in the event of a problem at school. All of these indicators were associated with feeling less happy at school and less confident about the future.

Young people might also complain about class management style, but few saw it as a major problem and those who mentioned it were no more or less happy at school. It seems that class control does not affect pupils so much as their personal relationship with the teachers does. Young people particularly appreciated teachers who showed them respect and took the time to try and understand where they are coming from.

Note that many of the young people we interviewed were talking about the same teachers and the same schools – some found the teachers to be approachable and some did not. This begs a question as to how much the approachability problem starts with the teachers and how much it depends on the attitudes of the young person (and/or their parents). Certainly, teachers need to be aware of how hard it is for so many pupils to approach them and keep working on their soft skills. But helping young people to change their attitudes towards adults' matters too, which is a point that comes up under 'attitudes to learning and life skills'.

2.7 Relationships with peers

Two thirds of children mentioned problems with peer friendships, and all parties agree (parents, teachers and also the young people themselves) that this is a key determinant of happiness at school. Relational upsets were especially an issue for girls. One third of all young people interviewed also mentioned concerns with bullying, both inside and out of the schools. Injustice (where problems like bullying were not adequately addressed) was a burning topic for the young people we spoke to. More work needs to be done to reassure children (and their parents) that bullying is being addressed and the schools are committed to this.

27 Sanders, M. & Groot, B. (2018). Why text. The Behavioural Insights Team. [online] http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/trial-design/why-text/

28 Soon, Z., Chande, R. and Hume, S. (2017). Helping everyone reach their potential: new education results Behavioural Insights Team. http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/education-and-skills/helping-everyone-reach-their-potential-new-education-results/ The specific study involved young people needing to retake Maths and English GCSEs. Over 1,800 students in 9 institutions took part, half of which were sent texts and half were not. Comparing students whose study supporters were and were not texted, the supportive text messages resulted a 7% increase in attendance and being 27% more likely to pass their exams.

29 O'Reilly, F., Chande, R., Groot, B., Sanders, M. and Soon, Z. (2017). Behavioural Insights for Education: A practical guide for parents, teachers and school Leaders. London: Pearson. http://38r8om2xjhhl25mw24492dir-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BI-for-Education-A-Practical-Guide-for-Parents-Teachers-and-School-Leaders.pdf

2.8 Managing well with the school work and feeling that the school provides relevant skills

The research also found that 45% of young people interviewed expressed struggles with schoolwork. This is another factor which links to happiness in school (struggling children are less happy). It also links to less optimism about the brightness of one's future. However, only very few children rated school work as being as a major struggle. The importance of making lessons interesting and relevant however came up repeatedly as a motivating force for young people.

A parallel issue is that 55% of young participants were not sure that the school is providing them with all the skills they need for their future. This lack of connection between what is being taught and real life affects the all-important attitudes to learning and motivation.

A further problem to do with school work is the problem of supply teachers/having no regular teacher for a subject. Young people brought this up repeatedly, without prompting, as something which was holding them back. Happy and motivated teachers make for a happy school with reduced staff turnover[30] and the Whitley for Real partnership is hoping to develop a teacher/school focused action group that explores ways of supporting teachers (and teaching assistants) through CPD and other support mechanisms.

2.9 Careers information and exploring the future

Pupils need help in working through their options post-school. University was not even on the radar for the majority of the teenagers we interviewed. Many did not seem aware of its significance in career choice. As has already been noted, even those who wanted to be doctors and lawyers were not sure they wanted to go to university. Moreover most teenagers had no idea where to apply and how (not having heard of UCAS for example). All they could come up with when asked about the process was that you need good grades, you probably had to leave home, and the whole thing was likely to be difficult. No-one mentioned the issues of getting fees or loans.

When asked about where more information could be found, most young people did not know anything about this either. Some suggested "asking school", but found it difficult to name exactly who should be asked. Looking on the internet was also mentioned (but not where on the internet). No-one mentioned asking parents or family.

Many parents, when asked about where their child might find information on going to university, were similarly vague. Although a minority were confident about finding all the information they

needed, just as many respondents had no idea at all. The remainder (a majority) managed to think of one or another source of information but were not confident that they had enough to go on. In order of mentions, the suggested sources of information were 'internet,' 'school,' 'the University' or 'word-of-mouth'.

Because many parents lack the right information and experience themselves to guide their child through the process of enrolment and university, the services of schools and other organisations are all the more essential. Indeed, 25 parents were asked directly who has the most influence on whether their child goes to university – the school or parents. Around half said the responsibility was shared equally, a quarter leaned towards the school taking more responsibility than that and a quarter leaned towards parents taking extra responsibility. In the eyes of most parents then, schools have an important role, and since the parents who left it to the school tended to have less aspiration for their child to go into higher education, there may be little other source of encouragement for these children.

When exploring how schools could help to make university a more attractive and accessible option to young people, the following points emerged:

- Trips: Provide trips to visit colleges and universities. Knowing that mobility is a problem for Whitley parents, school organised trips and visits may be a valuable consideration.

- Inspiration: Not everyone is aware of what is out there in terms of opportunities. It might help if students or professionals came in to talk about their experiences of going through university to help raise awareness. The choice of messenger is critically important though. People are more likely to respond to those they can relate to personally (it is easier to imagine themselves doing that) so care should be taken when choosing the ethnicity, gender and economic background of the speaker/role model.

- Information: Take on the job of providing information – this was a key request from parents.

- Map out all the stages of the enrolment process for young people and their parents so that they are not only inspired to go, but also understand exactly what needs doing and when in order to get there.

- Provide tailored advice for young people in choosing the right subject and the right university. Walk young people and their parents through the process of connecting with universities.

- Help parents and young people to get to grips with the student loan system. Whitley parents are very averse to getting their child into debt, and cost is perceived to be such a key barrier.

- Start at a young age: Even in primary school, university themed trips and projects can encourage children to widen their horizons and work hard to achieve their goals. The WEC/Aspire2 partnership already fund a programme of residential trips and extra-curricular events.

---

30 O'Reilly, F., Chande, R., Groot, B., Sanders, M. and Soon, Z. (2017). Behavioural Insights for Education: A practical guide for parents, teachers and school Leaders. London: Pearson. http://38r8om2xjhhl25mw24492dir-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BI-for-Education-A-Practical-Guide-for-Parents-Teachers-and-School-Leaders.pdf. This report suggest that empowering teachers/providing autonomy, appreciating hard work and helping teachers to reflect on why they do what they do all helps staff retention.

University is not for everyone however, and young people also need to be prepared/offered careers advice in ways that are closely tailored to their needs. Students feel under pressure to get high grades, which is acutely discouraging to those who do not. Tailoring advice and direction in ways that are appropriate to the circumstances of each person is of more value than generalised pleas to 'raise aspirations'. As part of exploring the future and in keeping with their job-focused mind-set, young people also wanted the school to organise work experience for them.

Pathways to reaching ambitions need to be clearly mapped, but a regular, interactive approach matters too such that young people can find their voice both in current and future affairs. We had a lot of feedback which suggested that young people enjoy group discussions about the future and exploring what next. They felt it 'generates ideas' 'get worries out' and helps with forming one's own opinion. Future direction is also a subject which young people have a great deal of personal interest in. Although the young people liked the freedom to discuss, they also liked to have some kind of activity to help structure that discussion.

2.10 Attitudes to learning and life skills

When the Young Researchers asked their teachers whether they thought students at JMA had any aspirations, the answer was a qualified yes. Most teachers added that young people need the right support, especially to express aspirations and to explore new possibilities. Students could think bigger, but then they needed to act for themselves on what they aimed for. The need to take responsibility for one's own future was emphasised both in the teacher's reflections on their own life, and also in their advice to JMA students.

This introduces the topic of attitudes to learning and life skills. In the wider survey of teachers, many secondary school teachers expressed concerns about the difficulties facing young people, and their need to prepare for the future by acquiring more life skills came up repeatedly. Moreover, managing child behaviour came out as the top challenge expressed by teachers in the teacher survey.

2.10.1 Behaviour

As for behaviour, money barriers, barriers in terms of ability and having special needs were all linked to misbehaviour. Perhaps our system favours the wealthy, the able and the socially dextrous, and those less favoured in these areas resist conforming to it. Young people not engaging with the curriculum can become very discouraged and disengaged with learning. Struggling with relationships (in school and at home) is also linked to poor behaviour. Poor behaviour was linked to parents feeling less positive about their child's future. Many teachers mentioned the need for more time, support and training to attend to pupils with behaviour problems. They wanted to address these needs outside of class (especially focussing on life skills) and to see more support for vulnerable families such that home issues can be attended to.

2.10.2 Absenteeism

Absenteeism is another concern raised by teachers, and was found to be linked to poor relationships both at school and at home. For example, absenteeism in the teenager survey was linked to being unhappy at school, feeling unable to approach teachers, feeling that the student had no voice, problems at home and broken peer friendships. It also links to lack of confidence about getting a job. It was not linked to struggling with the work or feeling the school doesn't equip you with the right skills, suggesting that this is more of a relational matter than a work-based matter – it is the relationships that need to be worked on.

2.10.3 Parental request for school help in preparing young people for the future

Around half of all parents wanted teachers to do more to help their children prepare for life after school, and this was not only with careers information, but also with life-skills and the general management of their affairs. This was particularly expressed by parents who had not had a good school experience themselves or who were struggling with difficult circumstances that make it hard for them to fulfil this role at home. It would seem that these parents hope teachers can fill some of the gaps they know exist in preparing their child for life after school. Attention to this area (and provision of special funding to make it happen) could be an important way of breaking the cycle of disadvantage passing from parent to child. Parents are clearly open to the idea of interventions on behalf of their children even when they are sensitive about discussions of family life directed at them.

2.10.4 Improving attitudes to learning and life skills

Teachers expressed a desire for outside resources, training and support in working with young people on their attitudes to learning and with helping them through the life issues that they face. This involves continuing professional development[31] as well as extra school staff and paid time to deal with these issues. Teachers suggest pulling in the collaboration of parents where possible, and they want access to specialist help from child therapy specialists and social workers. Good communication is necessary to make this work, but it also takes time. It involves having space in the school programme for things besides direct teaching but which aid the development of the child. Students who do not get high grades particularly need to develop a positive attitude towards learning and their life options. A more tailored curriculum with enriching activities could be of especial benefit to this group.

External research suggests that conveying concepts like the 'growth mindset' (effort and progress is more important than specific results based on fixed natural ability); getting students to think about how their learning links to real life-situations, thinking about belonging in the classroom and what you have in common with other people, sharing on the sort of problems people face and how they overcome them, equipping students with tools for

---

31 See report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility and the Sutton Trust (2019) Closing the Regional Attainment Gap. www.suttontrust.com

self-control, increasing their own awareness of what is important to them... all these things help young people from underperforming social groups to dwell on and personally connect with their learning experience, and subsequently to close the attainment gap between them and other students.[32] A questioning, exploring, reasoning mindset that is able to set clear goals, recognise the barriers and plan how to overcome them is key.

The desired outcome is for students who are self-motivated rather than steered only by external rewards, punishments and other circumstances. Why this matters so much is illustrated in one of the parent surveys. Parents were asked what sort of things encouraged their children to try their best at school. Some parents responded that their children were motivated relationally (by the praise and encouragement of others). Also by their interest in the subject, by achievement, and by what they know this contributes to their future. Other parents said that their child was motivated by getting rewards (bribery!). It could be seen that children who were motivated predominantly by reward tended to be coping less well with school (according to parental assessment) and also their parents tended to be less expectant that they would go on to higher education. It is so important for learning outcomes that a child understands for themselves why they do what they do, and underperforming pupils need help to reflect on these matters.

2.10.5 Dealing with anxiety

Support is needed to help pupils deal with anxiety and this is now being addressed through the Whitley for Real action groups. Anxiety was an issue that came up repeatedly – young people were very familiar with the vocabulary. Part of this stress was related to problems at home or with school relationships. Having supportive personal connections with peers and adults is an important part of dealing with anxiety. Knowing there are powers out there with your best interests at heart is a great source of encouragement.

However, a great deal of anxiety was also expressed about getting school grades, and those aspiring to higher education tended to be significantly more anxious about the school work and about negative influences in the community than other pupils. Anxiety tends to extend especially into the unknown, such that pupils worried about 'not ending up with the career you want', 'not earning much money' or 'not making it' generally.

Young people did not feel that their circumstances held them back. This sense of "the future is up to us" is positive in in terms of motivation and progressive action, but learning not to feel pressured by things that are beyond personal control is also important to wellbeing.

32 O'Reilly, F., Chande, R., Groot, B., Sanders, M. and Soon, Z. (2017). Behavioural Insights for Education: A practical guide for parents, teachers and school Leaders. London: Pearson. http://38r8om2xjhhl25mw24492dir-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BI-for-Education-A-Practical-Guide-for-Parents-Teachers-and-School-Leaders.pdf

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Summary

As outlined in the full 'Aspiration in Whitley' report, four things were found to shape the aspirations of young people in Whitley:

- Place: There are stark levels of disadvantage in Whitley compared with other areas of Reading. This links to weaknesses in the relationships between residents and local institutions, and lower levels of collaboration between the two. Structural inequalities impacts on lower than average school attainment, and this limits life choices.

- Relationships: Good peer friendships make a huge difference to young people. Constructive, two-way, communication with the adults in their lives also affects present happiness and future outlook. Family members (in particular), teachers, club leaders and other role models all make their mark. How well adults collaborate with each other also influences the outlook of young people.

- Pathways: Young people need help in exploring the pathways to fulfilling their dreams. The option of higher education is given little consideration by young people, who are more focussed on the end job. Young people also tend to be unaware of how to get into university or where to access the relevant information, and few have parents able to help them in this.

- Voice: Young people want to be listened to and to have a say in the activities or provisions that directly serve their needs and interests. It is not enough to provide education or other services for young people – they need to connect and engage with that provision, thinking through its advantages and taking control of where they are going. These are attitudes to learning that are often lacking amongst low achievers, and the approach to service delivery may need to be modified or supplemented in order to help young people 'own' what they learn (delivering 'with' and not 'for' young people). Self-motivated children do much better than those who are motivated only by external rewards and punishments.

Parental cooperation with school is vital and links directly to the attitudes and aspirations of children. Almost 40% of the parents we interviewed in Whitley had had poor personal school experiences themselves, and this affected their engagement with the school as well as their ambition to see their child go on to higher education. Gaining the cooperation of parents who do not trust the school system takes extra time and understanding.

Happy teachers likewise help make happy schools! Many secondary school teachers expressed concerns about the difficulties facing young people at home and the way this affects their learning. The need to better prepare young people for the future by equipping them with more life skills came up repeatedly. Teachers are highly motivated by seeing children progress, learn and take responsibility. Managing child behaviour is one of their biggest challenges.

3.2 Recommendations:

- Explore measures to improve communication between parents and teachers.

- It is necessary to go the extra mile to keep parents informed when they not read the information on offer. This is because uncertainty adds to parental concerns.

- Schools need to be seen to address parental concerns (especially bullying).

- Provide short, regular updates (for example text messages) of what is being taught in school, since these help parents to positively engage in their child's learning. Homework which reflects class lessons also helps.

- Do more to communicate a child's successes and achievements (parental request of schools), and parents can also praise and encourage effort.

- Establish a community-wide parents learning group to understand how and what children are learning and to encourage greater community use of schools. Parent-to-parent learning can sometimes be better accepted than school-to-parent instruction.

- Likewise, provide roles for parents on school premises and at school events which promote shared learning (e.g. fundraising groups, reading mornings with parents). Parents need to know that their involvement is welcomed by the school and makes a difference.

- Cultivate mutual respect. Emphasise the common interest that parents and teachers have in the welfare of the child, and the need to cooperate with one another as equal partners.

- Parents need to keep engaging with schools, working together for child progression. They need to talk about the school positively because it will affect a child's perspective and learning.

- Value listening, respectful and approachable teachers, since these qualities critically interact with how both parents and their children feel about school.

- Avoid disjointed learning – young people feel that supply teachers' (having no regular teacher for a subject) holds learning back.

- Young people are happier in school when they feel they are acquiring relevant skills. Help them to make the connection between what they are learning and life outside of school. Provide teachers with outside resources, training, support and time outside of class to work with children on life-skills and attitudes to learning.

- Support pupils who need help to deal with the life-issues they face. Anxiety, exam stress, and peer relationships gone sour all loom large for young people. Again, school access to outside help and resources is needed. Also teacher training in dealing with trauma. Counselling and support groups may be considered.

- Help young people to work through their options post-school, since many are not aware of the pathways to meeting their aspirations. Careers information that involves parents may be particularly helpful.

- Help young people to think through how higher education will be useful and relevant to them. Help them to think through different courses and where each pathway might lead.

- Guide them through the process of applying and enrolling in higher education, and provide direction as to where they can access additional information they need. Also guide them (and their parents) through the process of obtaining funds.

- Organise school trips to universities and colleges.

- Provide work experience opportunities.

- A regular, interactive approach matters to thinking about the future, such that young people can take control of where they are going for themselves. Young people respond well to group discussion, and like activities such as the 'aspiration game' which provide structure and direction to the conversation.

- Make use of role models. Moreover, ensure that these role models relate to the lives of young people in Whitley. Young people are more likely to be influenced by stories of going on to university when they hear it from people with similar backgrounds to themselves.

- Ensure that information is closely tailored to the needs and abilities of the young person in question.

- Start even in primary school, envisioning children as to what they can be working towards.

- Keep redressing the socio-economic disadvantages faced by many in Whitley by coordinating efforts between Whitley residents and service providers to establish shared goals and aspirations.

- Empower young people to take an active part in shaping the services which are provided for them. For example, through school council, leadership and democratic practice in school, and having more interactive sessions in class with listening to one another.

- Run activities to encourage collaboration and improved relationships. For example, 'Art of Conversation' events to explore issues of respect, communication and listening.

- Make an audit or register of local assets to encourage a more positive view of the Whitley neighbourhood.

- Wider community members can work with and alongside schools to provide extra-curricular clubs that are local, free, and shaped with and around the young people. These can give young people an opportunity to gain hands-on learning experiences. Putting something into the lives of young people helps them to give something back.

The aspiration research was about finding things out but equally it was about working together and sharing ideas and hopes between residents, service agencies, community groups and young people. A recent report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Social Mobility and the Sutton Trust (2019) on 'Closing the Regional Attainment Gap' highlights the importance of a developing a sense of place and 'local buy-in' to tackling the attainment gap in the UK.

In this way, new community contacts were generated in Whitley through which change can take place and through which funding can be channelled. Empowering people to explore and pursue a positive direction is considered to be key to change.

3.3 Specific Recommendations for Study Higher:

- The role of Universities: Supporting a joint university and community collaboration sharing responses on a local issue or concern relating directly to higher education access – perhaps in the form of locally offered higher education level introductory programmes or short 'undergraduate' courses focused on local needs such as communication, study skills, creative writing. University of Reading/Study Higher funding to support a secondary school teacher[33] to develop student voice, foster further community collaboration and develop careers and widening participation initiatives could be a model for other areas.

- Curriculum space: Working with targeted schools to open up curriculum space for alternative and open learning activities with an emphasis on group learning programmes or events – the 'university in the school'. One of our partner schools, the John Madejski Academy is leading the way in offering extra-curricular activities, such as the Young Researchers and the Student Leadership team, in school time.

- Teacher training: Providing teacher training and support for more interactive approaches to classroom learning – funded jointly by schools and Study Higher/University.

- Parental learning: Helping to develop parent learning groups designed to support their hopes and aspirations and schools' approach to learning – in effect, parent study groups that help with learning how to learn with access to further learning; might be a validated programme.

- New learning initiatives and the 'young researchers': Offering group learning events in schools – across years with external support reasoning through problems locally identified. Part of an alternative learning experience that includes support for young researcher programmes in selected schools.

- Teacher- parents collaboration: Holding regional discussion sessions or events bringing parents and teachers together to explore challenges in education

- Partnership: Promoting partnership approaches to careers in which higher, apprentice and 'good job' agencies collaborate on future hope sessions. Locally this could be co-ordinated by UKCIC (the RBC economic development agency) and bring companies, charities, colleges and universities in annual 'futures' events.

---

33 The University of Reading and Study Higher are currently funding the John Madejski Academy to release Paul Allen (Head of Arts) for two days a week to work with Whitley for Real and develop a community-based programme for young people in Whitley.

Next Stage of the Programme: Whitley says "yes we can!"

In January 2019, a leaflet[34] outlining the recommendations of our research collaboration was sent to 12,700 households, schools and community organisations in South Reading. Entitled Whitley says "yes we can!" the leaflet also called for local residents to join a movement to use the research findings to action real social change for young people. The collective programme proposes the development of four community-led action groups that focus on young people, parents, schools and the wider community to lead the next steps and shape local services to better meet future local hopes and goals. From January to July 2019, Study Higher will fund the parents' strand of this programme with additional support from other agencies including Affinity Housing, the Whitley Community Development Association, the University of Reading and Reading Borough Council.

---

34 The 'Whitley says "yes we can" leaflet distributed in January 2019 encouraged local families to 'join the movement' by completing an aspiration contact card available in the community café and through local organisations.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Interviewed by: Date: Form number:

Gender of the person you interview: M / F   Form number(s) of linked questionnaire(s):

This survey is being conducted by the Whitley Researchers in order to understand parent-school relationships. This is so that schools, organisations and Reading Borough Council can improve and develop the support they give to families in South Reading. Could we ask you some questions about your relationship with your children's school and how this impacts on their future goals? You can answer any questions you like and skip any you do not want to answer. Continue only if consent given.

1. How many children do you have in your household?

_____

2. How old is your oldest (or only) child still in primary/secondary* school? (*Delete as appropriate)

Age: _____

Please answer the following questions with this one child in mind.

3. Gender of child: M / F

4. Where do your children currently go to school?

_____

5. How did you choose this child's school? (tick all that apply)

☐ Only school available – no choice   ☐ Good reputation

☐ Local – easy to get to   ☐ Offers the kind of support my child needs

☐ Other family / friends there   ☐ Other (please explain) _____

6. On a scale of 1-5, how happy is your child at school?

1 (not at all happy)   2   3   4   5 (completely happy)

Any special reason/reasons for your rating?

7a. What are the main ways your school communicates with you as a parent? (tick all that apply)

☐ Email   ☐ School reports

☐ Text message   ☐ Leaflet and written material

☐ Parents evenings ☐ Phone call

☐ Other face to face interaction ☐ Other _____

7b. Do you feel you are getting enough information in this way that is useful to you?

☐ Yes

☐ No/ not sure. What would make things better? _____

8. Are you satisfied with the way the school has handled any issues and concerns you raised?

☐ Not applicable - no concerns

☐ I have concerns but have not involved school staff. Explain if you wish_____

☐ School staff have not been helpful when I raised concerns

☐ School staff have been of some help when I raised concerns

☐ School staff have been very helpful when I raised concerns

9. On a scale of 1-5, how welcoming and approachable are the school staff?

1 (not at all welcoming)   2   3   4   5 (completely welcoming)

10. If and when your child gets into trouble at school, what are the biggest contributing factors?

_____

11. In an average month, how likely is it that you do the following:

	not at all likely	possible	likely	Comments, e.g. Would like to but not possible
Speak with a member of the school staff about your child				
Help out with a school event				
Pick up your child from school personally				
Send your child to a school club				
H elp your child with homework				
Attend a school event with your child				

12. Looking to the future:

What does your child want to do after finishing school? (tick all that apply)

☐ Further Study   ☐ Raise a family

☐ Job   ☐ Child does not know

☐ Other _____

What would YOU like your child to be doing at the age of 19?

_____

What would YOU like your child to be doing at the age of 25?

_____

Is there anything that might hold your child back (circle words or add words)

Health   Confidence   Opportunities   Ability   Direction/vision   Support from authorities

Money   Family circumstances   Culture   Getting qualifications   English language

On a scale of 1-5, how bright do you think the future is for your child?

1 (not at all bright)   2   3   4   5 (very bright)

13. Do you think the school does enough to prepare your child for their next stage in life?

Yes / No / Not sure

14. Could the school do more to support you and your child?

☐ No, it is good as it is

☐ Yes, the school could do more.

IF YES: Please name one or two things the school could do better:

_____

15. Is anyone in your household: (tick all that apply)

☐ In a paid job   ☐ Full time carer

☐ Volunteering   ☐ Studying

☐ Other _____

16. On a scale of 1 to 5, what was your own school experience like at your child's age?

1 (negative)   2   3   4   5 (positive)

17. Is there anything else you would like to add about your child's education or future, or about this survey?

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX 2

Secondary school student questionnaire

This survey is being conducted by the Young Whitley Researchers in order to give students a voice. We want you to tell us what life is like for you as a student. Schools, organisations and Reading Borough Council will use this information in their attempts to provide a better school environment.

You do not have to take part in this survey, and even if you do, you can skip any questions you do not want to answer.

School:

Personal identification (you can use a number in place of your name to protect your identity):

Gender: Male / Female

Year group:

1a. On a scale of 1-5, how happy are you at school?

1 (not at all happy)   2   3   4   5 (completely happy)

b. What makes a big difference to how happy you are at school?

_____

c. On a scale of 1-5, how positive is/are your parent(s)/guardian(s) about your school?

1 (not at all positive)   2   3   4   5 (completely positive)

2. Are you involved in any groups, clubs or organised activities outside of usual school lessons?

☐ No

☐ Yes. What are they? _____

3. Compared to others in your class, do you miss much school?

☐ I almost never miss school

☐ I miss less school than average

☐ I miss about as much school as others

☐ I miss more school than average

4. If you had a problem at school, is there someone you can talk to for help?

☐ No/not sure

☐ Yes. Who?_____

5. Are any of the following a problem to you:

	No problem	Possibly	Big problem
School work			
Approaching teachers about any problem I have			
The way teachers manage the class			
Fake friends/broken friendships			
Bullying			
Appearance on social media			
Issues at home			
Negative influences in my community			
Getting my voice heard / feeling my views are understood and respected			

Any other problems? _____

6. Yes/no/not sure questions

	Yes	Not sure	No
Do you feel safe when going somewhere other than your usual route to and from school			
Do you feel the school is providing you with the skills you need for your future?			
Do you feel confident you will get a good job after school?			

7. Looking to the future:

What would you like to be doing at the age of 19 (straight after leaving school)?

_____

What would you like to be doing at the age of 25?

_____

On a scale of 1-5, how bright (positive) do you think your future is?

1 (not at all bright)   2   3   4   5 (very bright)

Main thing that helps you forward:

_____

Main thing that holds you back:

_____

8. Any other comments?

_____

APPENDIX 3

Questionnaire for school staff

This survey is being conducted by the Whitley Researchers in order to understand parent-school relationships. This to help schools, organisations and Reading Borough Council to improve and develop the support they give to families in South Reading. Could we ask you some questions about your views on parental involvement with the school, and how this impacts on the pupil's future goals? You can answer any questions you like and skip any you do not want to answer.

1. Your Gender: M / F

2. Name of school:

3. Your role:

4a. In your experience, what are the main ways your school communicates with parents? (Tick all that apply)

☐ Email   ☐ School reports

☐ Text message   ☐ Leaflet and written material

☐ Parents evenings   ☐ Other face to face interaction

☐ Phone call   ☐ Website

☐ Other _____

b. Do you feel that parents are getting enough information in this way that is useful to them (easy to understand and act upon)?

☐ Yes

☐ No/ not sure. What would make things better? _____

c. What are the most common issues or questions that parents raise with you about the school or about their children?

_____

d. What makes it easy and what makes it hard to work with parents on these issues or questions?

Easy if...

_____

Hard if...

_____

5a. On a scale of 1-5, how happy an environment is school for the children you deal with?

1 (not at all happy)   2   3   4   5 (completely happy)

b. What key factors influence how happy children are at your school?

_____

6a. If and when children get into difficulties or misbehave at school, what are the biggest contributing factors?

_____

b. What would help most in dealing with these difficulties?

_____

7a. What is the most rewarding part of your job?

_____

b. What is the most challenging or least favourite part of your job?

_____

c. What might enable parents to better support you and their children?

_____

d. What could the education authorities do?

_____

8. Do you think the school does enough to prepare and inspire children for their next stage in life?

☐ Yes

☐ Not sure

☐ No. What would make things better? _____

9a. On a scale of 1-5, how bright do you think the future is for the children you teach?

1 (not at all bright)   2   3   4   5 (very bright)

b. Regarding children who go to your school:

Things that favour their future:

_____

Things that hold them back:

_____

10. Any other comments:

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX 4

Supplementary Parent Questionnaire for Study Higher

Interviewed by:

Whitely Researchers have been asked to talk to parents about what their children might do after school.

You do not have to take part in this questionnaire and you can skip any questions you do not want to answer.

1. Your Gender: M / F

2a. Think of your oldest child in who is still at school. What is their gender?

_____

2b. Which school year are they in?

_____

Please answer the following questions with just this one child in mind:

3. What do you imagine your child will be doing at the age of 20?

_____

4. Around half the people we interviewed in our last survey told us that 'lack of money' is something that holds their child back. Does this apply to your child?

☐ No

☐ Yes. What are the biggest ways in which lack of money affects your child's progress (both directly and indirectly)?

_____

5. On a scale of 1-10, how well is your child coping with school?

1 (not at all well)　　　　　2　　　　3　　　　4　　　　5 (perfectly well)

6a. What sort of things encourage your child to try their best at school?

_____

6b. What discourages your child from trying their best?

_____

7a. What do you feel about your child going to university?

_____

7b. Did you or anyone in your close family ever go to university?

☐ No　　　☐ Yes

7c. Do you ever talk about the possibility of going to University with your child at home?

_____

8a. Look at the table below and decide which barriers make it difficult for your child to go to university. Which barriers apply to your family (tick yes or no), and are there any other barriers not mentioned?

Potential barrier	Yes, this applies to us	No, this does not stop us
We've never really thought about it		
We don't know how to go about applying, enrolling, getting accommodation and getting a student loan		
Cost		
I have other ideas for my child		
Child is not interested		
Child does not know what he/she wants to do		
My child might not get the grades		
It's too far from home		
Confidence is a barrier		

8b. What other barriers might stop your child from going to University?

_____

_____

9. Do you know where you can get more information about University education?

☐ No/not sure where to find information

☐ Yes. Please list examples of every source of information you can access:

☐ Not applicable: I already have all the information I need

☐ Not applicable: my child is not going to University

10. Who do you think has the most influence on whether children go to University, the school or parents?

_____

11. What would make university education more attractive and accessible to the young people in the school your child attends?

_____

_____

12. Any other comments?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

STUDY HIGHER
FEEDBACK REPORT

i For more information, please contact:

Dr Sally Lloyd-Evans

Russell Building,
Whiteknights Campus,
Reading, RG6 6DW

s.lloyd-evans@reading.ac.uk
Tel (0118) 378 7293