

Has the raise in the tuition-fees rule affected student's degree choices?

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



Introduction

The underlying aim of this research is to identify the impact of the changes suggested and implemented as part of Brown Review of Funding, in 2010, and to establish whether this has changed the overall funding approach to be taken by higher educational establishments, while also approving the raising of the fees' cap up to a maximum of ? 9, 000. The previous maximum was ? 3, 375; therefore, the increase in tuition fees was potentially going to have a dramatic impact on the overall desirability for higher education and the degree choices that are made by students. This research paper aims to ascertain the decisions made by students and the impact that these fees have had on the industry, as a whole.

Literature Review

Issues relating to the funding policy of education, with the fees charged to students arguably being one of the more high-profile elements of the policy, are many and complex. Existing literature in this area has therefore looked at various different aspects of the funding policy, all of which may be relevant when it comes to determining how the student body is likely to react to the changes, at ground level. Research by Chowdry et al., 2010, suggested that the complexity of the repayment system was in itself a potentially negative factor, although this did create a situation whereby the burden of these increased fees does vary, depending on underlying factors among students, such as parental income and the eligibility for grants and loans.

Research by Chowdry indicated that the average debt for students when graduating is likely to be approximately \$59,100. Given this dramatic change, it is unsurprising that there is a relatively large amount of literature looking at student uptake of a university education, although historically this has largely been focused on the links between family background and university participation. For example, research by Blanden and Machin, in 2004, looked at the link between university participation and the achievements of students, based on parental income, both before and after the year 1998, where withdrawals had had a dramatic impact on the way in which university life was funded. This work was then updated in 2008, yet no direct impact was found, creating a gap in the literature.

Research in this area also exists within the United States, with researchers such as Kane, 1994, using variances across the states and within the states to monitor and track student participation, based on tuition fees. This research was undertaken in a quantitative fashion, on the grounds that an increase of \$1,000 in the tuition fees being charged could ultimately result in a decrease in attendance of approximately 3.7%.

Other research has taken a slightly different approach when looking at the impact of financial support, rather than necessarily considering the impact of increased fees, with Dynarski (2000) finding that an increase of \$1,000 in aid increased the level of participation by 4%, thus showing a greater sensitivity to assistance than it does from increasing fees. Research does, however, suggest that both the availability of assistance and changes in tuition fees are having a direct impact on the willingness of individuals to

participate in higher education, yet the precise impact of the new UK reforms in 2010 still remain relatively unexplored.

Research Philosophy, Strategy and Methodology

The purpose of this research is to look at the substance of quantitative changes and the impact that these have had on an individual, to make decisions in relation to participation in higher education.

Type of Research

As the key issues at the heart of the research are to look at the thought patterns and behaviours of individuals, the appropriate research philosophy is interpretivist and phenomenological in nature, ensuring that the researcher takes into account the conscious decisions of the individual. The reasoning behind the decision to adopt this approach is based on the recognition that human decision-making is controlled by a variety of factors and not simply based on quantitative, rational and objective decision-making. The research will be a combination of quantitative and qualitative, as it is anticipated that an analysis of participation, such as that within the existing literature can be undertaken to determine the figures behind the change, yet it is also necessary to look for a descriptive element to the research, so that the thought patterns of students can be analysed.

This phenomenological approach is much more humanistic in nature and recognises that opinion will be central to the ultimate findings within this research; however, this should be undertaken with a quantitative support structure, where appropriate.

Research Approach and Strategy

The underlying research approach is inductive in nature and involves taking a particular situation, in this case the increase in tuition fees, and developing general ideas and theories as to how this is likely to impact on various different elements of higher education. This will include not only looking at overall levels of participation, but also at the impact which this has had on decision-making in relation to which degree should be studied. This research being inductive enables the researcher to start by looking at the factual basis of an increase in fees and then to spread out from this point, in order to gather ideas and theories.

Methodology

The chosen methodology therefore will be to look at the precise nature of the changes and to identify any trends in participation between the two previous increases in fees and the year after the increase in fees, something which can be achieved by looking at the figures and facts from various institutions, before then going on to take the humanistic approach by undertaking questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with students and potential students, to determine whether the increase in fees leads to changes in decision-making in relation to the choice of course that can be attributed to the figures that have been identified.

Ethical Implications

There are several key considerations when it comes to ethical concerns during research of any nature and, in particular, in this case many of which

are identified by Saunders et al., (2003). Some of the ethical considerations which have potential implications for this research have been identified, and the researcher is mindful that other ethical considerations may arise, on a case-by-case basis. The main concern at this stage is linked to the fact that information needs to be gained directly from the student in relation to their financial status and, as such, the privacy of those individuals is crucial, with individuals having to be confident that the information being provided will be maintained in confidence, although the research is going to be objective in nature when dealing with the information the participants provide.

Participation in the research must necessarily be entirely voluntary, with any participant being free to leave the study at any point. Participants need to be clear on the purpose of the research and the role which they play, as well as offering them the opportunity to make changes to the responses and to gain access to their responses, at any point, to check that they have been reported accurately and make changes, if they deem appropriate.

Data Collection

Data collection from primary sources, i. e. students and potential students, will be gathered through the method of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups and will target existing students and those students who are making their higher education decision, at the moment, or in the foreseeable future. On the whole, therefore, this will focus on the age category of 17 to 20 years old, although where possible, some more mature students will also be

interviewed, as they may have different perspectives in terms of their higher education decisions.

The most appropriate form of data collection for the questionnaires has been determined as being online, as this is likely to encourage the greatest response, due to its flexibility and the likelihood that the majority of students and potential students will have at least an acceptable level of IT experience to be able to complete a questionnaire online. As interviews will also be conducted, the fact that the questionnaires will be on closed-end questions that can provide quantitative analysis does not present a particular limitation. A copy of the enclosed questionnaire will be contained in the appendix to this proposal and the format of the interviews and focus groups will be the same as questionnaires, but encouraging longer and more open ended responses, in order to obtain a better feel for the thought patterns behind the responses. A test pilot of 10 questionnaires has been undertaken and the responses are contained in the appendix.

Analysis of Pilot Data

The data collected as part of the pilot is contained in the appendix and it is concluded that the questions are appropriate when it comes to meeting the aims and objectives of the research. By asking the respondents about their current position in terms of their education and whether they are currently considering a university course as well as looking at the factors that are likely to influence the decision, a broader understanding of the influence of the increased fees can be ascertained. This questionnaire will also form the

basis for the interviews and open-ended answers are expected in relation to these questions, offering explanations as to why certain answers have been given by the broader questionnaire sample.

For example, all the respondents stated cost as an influence on their university choices and 6 respondents stated that it was their main factor when it came to the decision-making process, suggesting that there is on the face of it a strong indication that this factor is going to have a direct bearing on university choices. This questionnaire will then lay the foundation for the broader analysis and in order to determine the precise impact that the increased fees are likely to have, and not simply determining that they do in fact have an impact, but rather, it is the nature of the impact that is going to be the formative part of this research.

Overall Evaluation

The research strategy, on the whole, is appropriate to the underlying aim of the research, as it combines quantitative information relating to the number of students and the choices in relation to courses. This is then to be combined with the thoughts and ideas of students entering into education, to ascertain the reasons behind these quantitative changes. This issue is, however, likely to be personal to individuals and, as such, there will be limitations in the fact that it is not possible to gain responses from every single potential student simply cannot be obtained on generalisations which are likely to be present during research of this nature.

References

BLANDEN, J., GREGG, P. & MACHIN, S. (2003) Changes in Educational Inequality. CMPO Working Paper Series No 03/079.

BLANDEN, J & MACHIN, S. (2008) ' Up and Down the Generational Income Ladder in Britain: Past Changes and Future Prospects' National Institute Economic Review 2008; 205; 101.

BROWNE REVIEW (2010) Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education in England. www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report

CHOWDRY, H., CRAWFORD, C., DEARDEN, L., GOODMAN, A. and VIGNOLES, A. (2010) ' Widening Participation in Higher Education: Analysis Using Linked Administrative Data', Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) Working Paper W10/04.