

### Introduction

This report details workshops CUPP and Community21 ran with stakeholders and young people in five different locations across the South Coast of England between March and May 2017 as part of the Sussex Learning Network National Collaborative Outreach Programme (SLN:COP). The aim of these workshops was to use innovative visual methods to work with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to explore their aspirations for the future, their views of post 18 study programmes and the challenges and barriers associated with engaging with these. The workshops explored the fears, expectations and priorities of young people, and their carers/community leaders with regard to their participation in further and higher education in the future. The findings have informed the design and focus of the SLN:COP Innovations Fund, which offers seed funding to community-university partnerships to generate new evidence and approaches to improve the participation rates of under-represented groups.

While much is already known about socio economic status and participation rates this work sought to review this knowledge in a local context by consulting young people from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds in Quintile 1 areas across the South Coast (areas of highest deprivation) on the challenges and barriers they themselves face and the kinds of interventions that might best support them in overcoming these.

### What is already known about entry to higher education for disadvantaged groups?<sup>1</sup>

Initiatives to raise aspiration and attainment and to increase participation in higher education among under-represented groups have been evident across the UK for the past 20 years. These have included National Programmes such as 'Aim Higher', Excellence Clusters and 'Gifted and Talented', and Charity interventions, such as 'Into University' and increasing diversity among those with degrees and access to higher paid jobs has been seen as a social justice issue. However reports in 2016 claim that numbers from lower income groups entering top universities have fallen in the past decade, despite 'millions being spent' on encouraging them, (Independent 2016). The Office for Fair Access (Offa) reports that '18 year-olds from the most advantaged areas are nearly two-and-a-half times more likely to enter higher education than disadvantaged 18 year olds, and nearly six times more likely to enter one of the universities with the highest entry requirements'. A report by the Royal Statistical Society in 2012 claimed that large differences in HE participation rates particularly at high status universities are divided by socio-economic background remain, but 'these differences are substantially reduced once prior achievement is included' and that this is 'more important in explaining lower HE participation rates among pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds than barriers arising at the point of entry to HE'. Chowdry et al (2013) also stress the importance of earlier and diverse policy interventions in reversing this trend.

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<sup>1</sup> Chowdry, H., Crawford, C., Dearden, L., Goodman, A., & Vignoles, A. (2013). Widening participation in higher education: analysis using linked administrative data. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society)*, 176(2), 431-457.

Independent (2016). <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/number-of-poor-students-attending-uks-leading-universities-falls-despite-millions-spent-to-encourage-a6879771.html>

Last accessed July 2017, and <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/record-gap-social-mobility-rich-and-poor-students-going-university-vince-cable-theresa-may-gender-a7475256.html>, Last accessed July 2017.

Office for Fair Access <https://www.offa.org.uk/press/quick-facts/> Last accessed July 2017.

## Design Process

The research tools were designed by two (former and current) design students from the university with the support of Nick Gant, Principal Lecturer in the School of Architecture and Design. The principle behind the design was that 'everyone likes to make something that looks good' and designing equipment to facilitate this (stamps and stickers to assemble into a 'road of life', a graffiti wall constructed from new white cardboard boxes and spray paints, the use of an animated iPad app to age and move a photograph of your face) would create an interesting and stimulating environment that young people would want to engage in. Research questions were retrospectively fitted into these tools, looking at the decisions that had framed young people's lives so far, their hopes for the future, their views on university and any anticipated regrets. Using the iPads they were able to age themselves and then record a 'letter from the future' back to their teenage selves.

## Organising the Workshops

The workshops were organised with community partners and run in Moulsecoomb, (on the outskirts of Brighton), Hastings, Selsey, Crawley and Newhaven. Partners were from voluntary organisations and attended a briefing workshop at the Placemaker space in Brighton to try out the tools. Later a fourth workshop was added in Crawley and finally we managed to set up a workshop in Newhaven at the last minute.

## Outcomes of the different activities

### 1. Graffiti Wall

Below are 'wordclouds' from the words appearing on the graffiti wall in the different workshops.

#### Moulsecoomb



*'New' predominates, and while notions of hard work are definitely there, and money and failure, there are a range of positive expectations voiced.*

## Hastings



What was noticeable about Hastings graffiti, and not necessarily apparent here, were the number of phrases expressed negatively; not good enough, not posh enough, not clever enough etc.

## Selsey



Failure is still a key word in Selsey, but accompanied by some positives; new, life, people, better.



## 2. Road of Life

Responses from the different workshops have been recorded below. These are grouped under the traffic signs most used, that of priority, hazards or red traffic lights that got in the way of the direction chosen, the sat nav or the voice guiding their direction and their overall destination. The numbers in brackets indicate the numbers of responses, these also indicate the level of engagement and how far participants applied different traffic signs.

### ***Moulsecoomb***

**Priorities:** Money (x4) Good Job (x2) Family (x2) Sport (x2) Good Grades (x1) University (x1) Friends (x1) Stay the same (x1)

**Hazards/Traffic lights:** School/teachers (x9) Bullies (x2) Teenage pregnancy (x1) Depression (x1) Boyfriend went to prison (x1) Assault (x1) Anorexia (x1) Went into care (x1)

**Support/Sat Nav:** Parents (x3) Friends (x3) Family (x2) Supportive teacher (x2) Myself (x2)

**Destination:** Uni (x3) Own garage (x2) Engineer (x1) Music (x1) Own Restaurant (x1) Sport (x1)

### ***Hastings***

**Priorities:** College (x1) To enjoy learning (x1) A good job (x1) Family (x1) Work that fits around children (x1)

**Hazards/Traffic lights:** Anxiety/lack of socialising skills (x5) Arrested 4 times (x1) Mother's negative input (x1) Bullied (x2) Lack of childcare (x1)

**Support/Sat Nav:** Parents (x5)

**Destination:** House/wife/job/kids (x2), College (x1) Own business(x1) Personal Trainer (x1) Retirement (x1)

### ***Selsey***

**Priorities:** Getting good results (x2) Staying close to home (x1) Me first (x1) working with children (x2)

**Hazards/Traffic lights:** School x2 Boarding school (x1) Not enough guidance (x2) Lack of confidence (x2)

**Support/Sat Nav:** Teachers (x2) Friends (x1) Mum (x1)

**Destination:** Uni (x2) College (x1) A good job (x2) Sport's career (x1)

### ***Crawley***

**Priorities:** Friendships (x2) Doing what I enjoy (x1) Doing the best I can (x1)

**Hazards/Traffic lights:** Unhappy relationships (x3) Not passing (x2) Being bullied (x2) Gaming (x1) Health problems (x1)

**Support/Sat Nav:** Family (x4) Teachers (x2) Self (x2)

**Destination:** Good job (x4) Home/marriage/family (x3) Uni (x2) Hairdressing (x1)

### ***Newhaven***

**Priorities:** Boyfriend (x1) Be happy (x1) Stability (x1) College (x1)

**Hazards/Traffic lights:** Bullied (x5) Wrong crowd (x3) Excluded (x2) Accident (x1)

**Support/Sat Nav:** Parents (x3) Grandparents (x2) Self (x1)

**Destination:** Electrician (x1) Engineer (x2)

### 3. Day in the life of a university student



There was a real consistency among all respondents about what life at university would actually be like. This consisted of a mixture of studying (which some people were excited by and others felt would be a continuation of school) interspersed with staying out late, drinking and partying and meeting friends for coffee. Overall what stands out from a combination of responses into one word cloud are the positive responses, words like amazing, opportunities, fun and friends are more prevalent than library, assignment and work.

### 4. Life in 40 years' time

In this exercise participants were asked to record what they were doing, any regrets they had and any advice they would pass on to their younger selves. Here results varied between the different locations.

#### ***Moulsecoomb***

**Life at 55:** Events company/promoting bands/exams invigilator/operations manager/marine biologist/micro scientist/personal trainer/doctor/own restaurant/own garage/drug dealer

**Regrets/Advice:** not working harder/not taking opportunities/not listening to my mum/leaving home/moving in with my boyfriend/hanging out with friends/not going to uni/not taking academic subjects/no regrets/happy with choices.

#### ***Selsey***

**Life at 55:** working at uni/youth worker/mature student/hairdresser/in a dead end job/care home/hairdressers

**Regrets:** not using support offered/not taking opportunities/not having someone to champion my cause/not being more confident or assertive/not working in industry/choosing wrong courses/not studying something different.

### **Hastings**

**Life at 55:** Retired/head teacher/old guy/done everything I wanted to/successful businessman/working at Xtrax/successful in catering/maths teacher/teacher in Australia/self-employed/ an 'ologist/confident/a children's nurse

**Regrets/Advice:** Work harder/try harder/be a better person/put yourself first/don't listen to others/finish college/read and concentrate more/think of the consequences

### **Crawley**

We had fewer staff support members and a much smaller room at Crawley, we were also unable to access the iPads. Hence we were not able to reproduce this element of the research there.

### **Newhaven**

**Life at 55:** Vet/Primary school teacher/nurse/computing engineer/RAF mechanic/working with kids/interior design/architect/ working for apple/building RAF jets/RAF electrician/formula 1 Racer/something to do with working with kids or mental illness/counselling/in a nice paid job/hiding as I can't afford to retire

**Regrets/Advice:** 'don't let the little things turn into big things'/stress less/do regular revising/stand up for yourself/work harder at school/network/go to college/uni/work harder/revise for 2 hours a day/be a banker or marry one/none!

## **Reflections on Data Collected**

1. Contrary to expectations debt is an issue, but not the over-riding issue, young people are more worried about failing, about 'not being good enough' about leaving home, losing friends and lacking confidence – than being in debt.
2. Teachers (both good and bad) are hugely influential in young people's lives, their confidence and their aspirations, but schools are not the right places to do this work and are already over-saturated with messages about the future. Youth groups and voluntary organisations are better placed to work with young people on difficult issues and personal support.
3. Young people from under-represented groups are likely to need a large amount of support at university and as universities and class sizes expand they are unlikely to be able to provide this. Local college provision, supported apprenticeships and 1:1 mentoring may all be more effective in improving individual life chances.
4. There is a disconnect in the understanding that 'jobs for life no longer exist, and jobs for today's teenagers may not yet have been invented'; and the expectation that young people join a career trajectory. Conversations with young people about the future need to be kept open, follow individual leads and avoid suggesting they need to 'know what they want to be'. This places undue pressure on them and adds to fear of failure
5. Young people make decisions in context and are influenced by family, friends, peers and local community culture. Support in accessing further study may take a variety of very different forms (such as provision of a minibus, a forum to connect young people's services, or a locally based mentoring scheme).

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