

How much is too much?

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 **Aimhigher...**
greater manchester

 **Aimhigher...**
greater merseyside

 **Aimhigher...**
How high can you go?
west yorkshire

- The Higher Education Act 2004 identified that tuition fees would be reviewed in 2010.
- Recent indications suggest a move towards a free market approach.
- Wider research shows that choice is closely related to cost.

The Context...

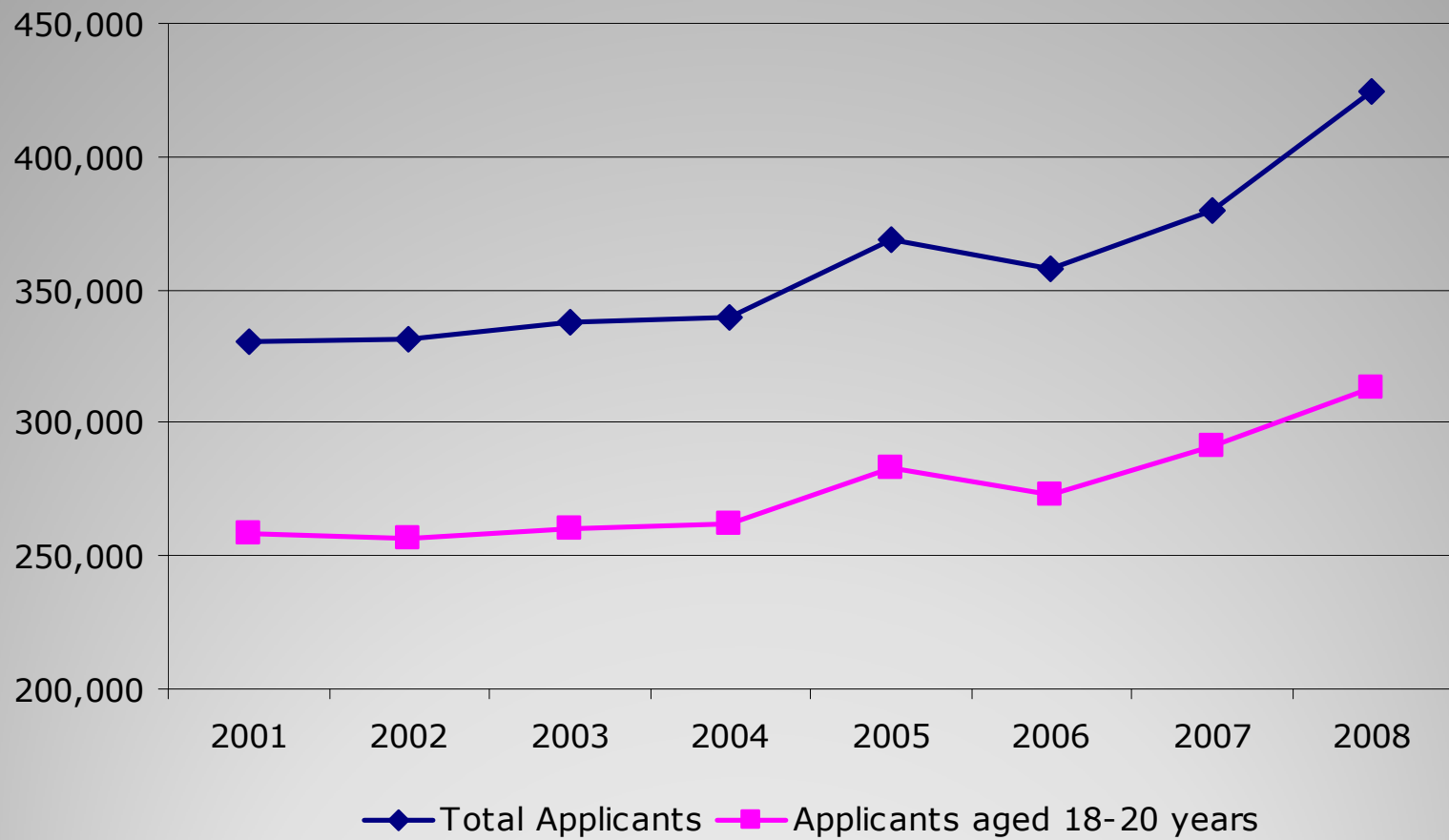
- Dearing 1996
- Grants to loans 1999
- Up-front tuition fees abolished 2004
- Fees rise to £3000 (by a small majority)
- HEI's receive a fixed grant from HEFCE

The Policy Context...

- *'...as yet we have no evidence that the precise amount of bursary available at the age of 18 is having a significant impact on the decision making process of applicants. This suggests that whilst the current package of support is not deterring students from higher education, institutional support does not at present appear to be a primary factor in most students' choice of institution'*

(OFFA, 2009).

- Two thirds of Vice-Chancellors have said they 'need' to raise fees in an anonymous survey for UUK.
- Suggestions between £4,000 and £20,000
- Over half of those surveyed felt students should pay at least £5,000 per year or for there to be no upper limit.
- Two out of three respondents said fees were not a deterrent to applicants from poorer families.
- UUK reports suggest fee increases will have MINIMAL implications on student numbers
- NUS have calculated that if fees are lifted to **£7,000** students will graduate with **£32,000** debt!



Trend in UCAS Applicants (England)

- Aimhigher is a Government funded initiative to widen participation into Further and Higher Education
- Aimhigher Partnerships in Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside and West Yorkshire collaborated on research
- Research aim was to obtain information on the views of young people about HE tuition fees.

The Study...

- Mixed method approach
- Questionnaire
- Focus groups in each Aimhigher Partnership area
- Sample
 - Schools: Y9-11
 - Post-16 institutions: Y12-13

The Methodology...

- 448 respondents to questionnaire across all three partnerships
- Largest group of respondents identified as aged 19 or younger (87%)
- Just under half identified as aged 16-17 (46%)
- Females outnumbered males (56%:31%)
- Postcode information was used to band respondents into three groups

Responses...

- Those who were living in an area defined as a target for Aimhigher (with a rank on the Index of Deprivation within the 40% most deprived nationally);
- Those who's postcode showed they lived in an area of sufficient affluence to be outside the Aimhigher targeting criteria;
- Those who could not to be matched to the above two groups (postcode was not given, incomplete or not identified).

Respondents...

- 277 respondents were from the Aimhigher target group
- 126 were from outside of Aimhigher targeting criteria
- 45 were unknown

Respondents...

- 71% of respondents identified themselves as definitely interested in going to university (69% target:77%non-target)
- Aimhigher target learners are better informed about the overall costs of studying at university compared with other learners (40%target:20%non-target)
- The majority of respondents identified family and teachers as main source of IAG
- Under half of all respondents (46%) said they new about financial support available to HE students (Slightly more in AH cohort)

Findings...

- Around a third of AH target group respondents said they knew about the amount universities can charge for degrees compared to only 22% of non-AH
- However, when scrutinised, the accuracy of their knowledge was patchy. Only just over half identified the variable fees maximum threshold correctly.

Findings...

- Most respondents (69%) want the Government to pay for tuition fees.
- Three out of ten said students should contribute – with very little difference between the target and non-target groups.
- Amongst those respondents who are definitely interested in going to university, most are planning to take out a student loan.
- Two-fifths say they will get a job, with little difference between the groups.
- Just under a quarter overall (23%) said they would ask their parents/carers to pay.
- Those in the Aimhigher target group are proportionally less likely to say they would ask parents/carers to contribute (19% compared to 31%).

Findings...

- Most respondents said they are aware that university tuition fees may increase in future, with Aimhigher target group respondents being less likely than average to be aware of potential fees increases.
- Around two-fifths (38%) said an increase in fees would put them off applying – Aimhigher target group learners were proportionally less likely to be put off than non-Aimhigher target learners (36% compared to 42%).
- The question of whether a degree is worth getting into debt for prompted much discussion, with many people feeling a degree is worth the debt.
- Few in the discussions appeared to have thought in detail about managing debt.

Findings...

- Aim higher target respondents were proportionally more likely than average to believe people on low incomes should pay less to do a degree.
- Most young people did not feel the amount should be linked to exam grades.
- Two-thirds felt all courses should cost the same regardless of the university involved.
- The notion that the more you pay the better quality the degree was generally rejected by the young people we spoke to.
- Only a minority thought that paying higher tuition fees would give them a higher standard of education.

Findings...

- Relatively low levels of understanding about the overall costs of studying at university, although Aimhigher target learners generally feel better informed. Knowledge of financial support available to students is low with little difference between the groups.
- The overall level of knowledge about the costs charged by universities is relatively low. Aimhigher target group respondents were less likely than average to be aware of potential fees increases.
- There is was a definite commitment by many respondents, especially in the Aimhigher target group, to higher education regardless of cost.
- Whilst there is little difference between the groups in those who intend to seek paid work whilst at university, the Aimhigher target group is much less likely than other learners to see parents/carers as a source of funding.
- There appear to be varying degrees of understanding around the concept of 'better' degrees/careers.

Conclusions...

- **Raising Awareness:** It is important to give clear information about tuition fees and financial cost of university as early as possible in the Aimhigher journey.
- **Understanding of what's involved and support available.** Young people need more information and 'signposting' regarding scholarships and bursaries.
- **Differentiating what's on offer.** More work is needed around the concepts of 'better' degrees and opportunities and the relationship to career prospects.
- **Supporting success.** There would appear to be a need to support young people progressing to university in managing debt.

Recommendations...

- All three Aimhigher Partnerships involved in this project are now actively disseminating this research.
- The final draft paper was submitted to DBIS to be included in the tuition fees review.
- The final paper will be submitted for publication.
- Due to regional variation in the results, Aimhigher West Yorkshire are using their breakdown to identify specific action points for their area which will be presented to their districts to roll out to the local Aimhigher Organisers in their schools. AH Greater Manchester and Greater Merseyside will also adopt this approach.

What next?

Thank you for listening!

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