



7. International workshop
27 to 29 of March 2014
„Expansion of Higher Education: New students –
more problems?“

**TRACKING STUDENT MOTHERS’
HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION
AND EARLY CAREER OUTCOMES
OVER TIME: INITIAL CHOICES AND
ASPIRATIONS, HE EXPERIENCES AND
FINAL CAREER DESTINATIONS**

WARWICK INSTITUTE *for*
EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH



Background to the research

Mature students have been examined in previous studies, but relatively few studies of student mothers, who may face particular barriers to achieving successful outcomes within and beyond Higher Education.

The study will track more than 2500 student mothers aged 21 or over who began their HE studies in 2005/6, using Futuretrack data, collected by researchers at IER.

Research aims and objectives

- To provide a critical review and synthesis of the evidence on the HE experiences and outcomes of student mothers;
- To provide new and comprehensive evidence on the HE experiences and early careers of student mothers who began their studies in 2005/6 and how this compares with the experiences of other students from the same cohort;
- To provide a robust evidence base to inform debates on widening HE participation and increasing social mobility among this particular group of students in light of recent policy changes, and to identify any challenges experienced and the adequacy of resources available to them during study and upon graduation.

Methodology

- The project includes three phases:
- 1) a comprehensive literature review;
- 2) a quantitative, longitudinal exploration of relevant Futuretrack data from the 2005/6 cohort of the UCAS applicants at all 4 stages;
- 3) follow-up qualitative interviews with 30 selected participants from the Futuretrack project.

Previous research findings I

Demands of juggling childcare and domestic work with studying (and paid work) particularly difficult for student mothers.

Most student mothers are limited in choice of HEI, choosing to study locally in order to manage childcare, children's education and partners' work.

Universities vary in level of support: many students rely upon individual staff members; others miss classes or turn up late (child sickness, course timetabling). Universities with the greater resources appear to have better facilities and structural supports (e.g., on-site creches) but student mothers are less likely to attend such HEIs.

Previous research findings II

How HEIs respond to the needs of student parents can maintain and highlight the 'otherness' of students with childcare responsibilities. However, until student parents are recognised as having unique needs, they may remain invisible and isolated, with a greater risk of dropping out.

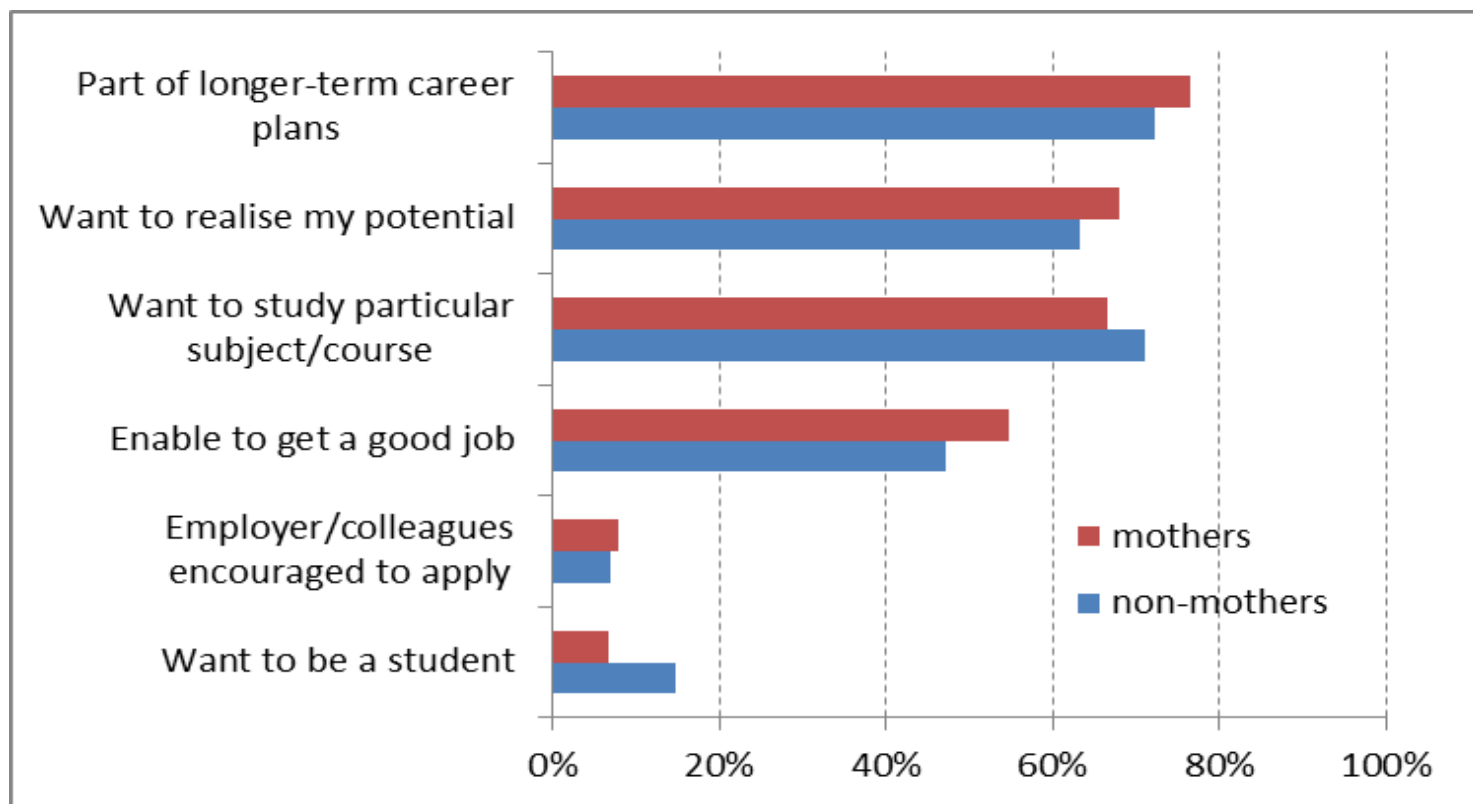
Single parents are most at risk of negative outcomes (demands and financial hardship). Many rely upon grandparents and friends for childcare. The experiences of student mothers tend to vary by many different interlinking factors, including social class, as well as marital status.

Most student mothers are studying to improve their career prospects, but many increase self-confidence and esteem as a consequence of HE. Many report on the importance of acting as good role models for their children.

The Futuretrack survey and methods

- National longitudinal survey of UK undergraduate students, online survey of all full-time 2005-6 UCAS applicants including EU and overseas applicants
- Four waves:
 - 1st wave: during application process in summer- early autumn 2006
 - 2nd wave: after completion of one year in summer- early autumn 2007
 - 3rd wave: last year in HE – Spring 2009(for three year courses) and 2010 (for four year courses)
 - 4th wave: 3 or 2 years after graduation (depending on the time of graduation) - Winter 2012
- Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) procedure, i.e. student mothers were matched with women of broadly the same age without children to identify the specific impact of parenthood

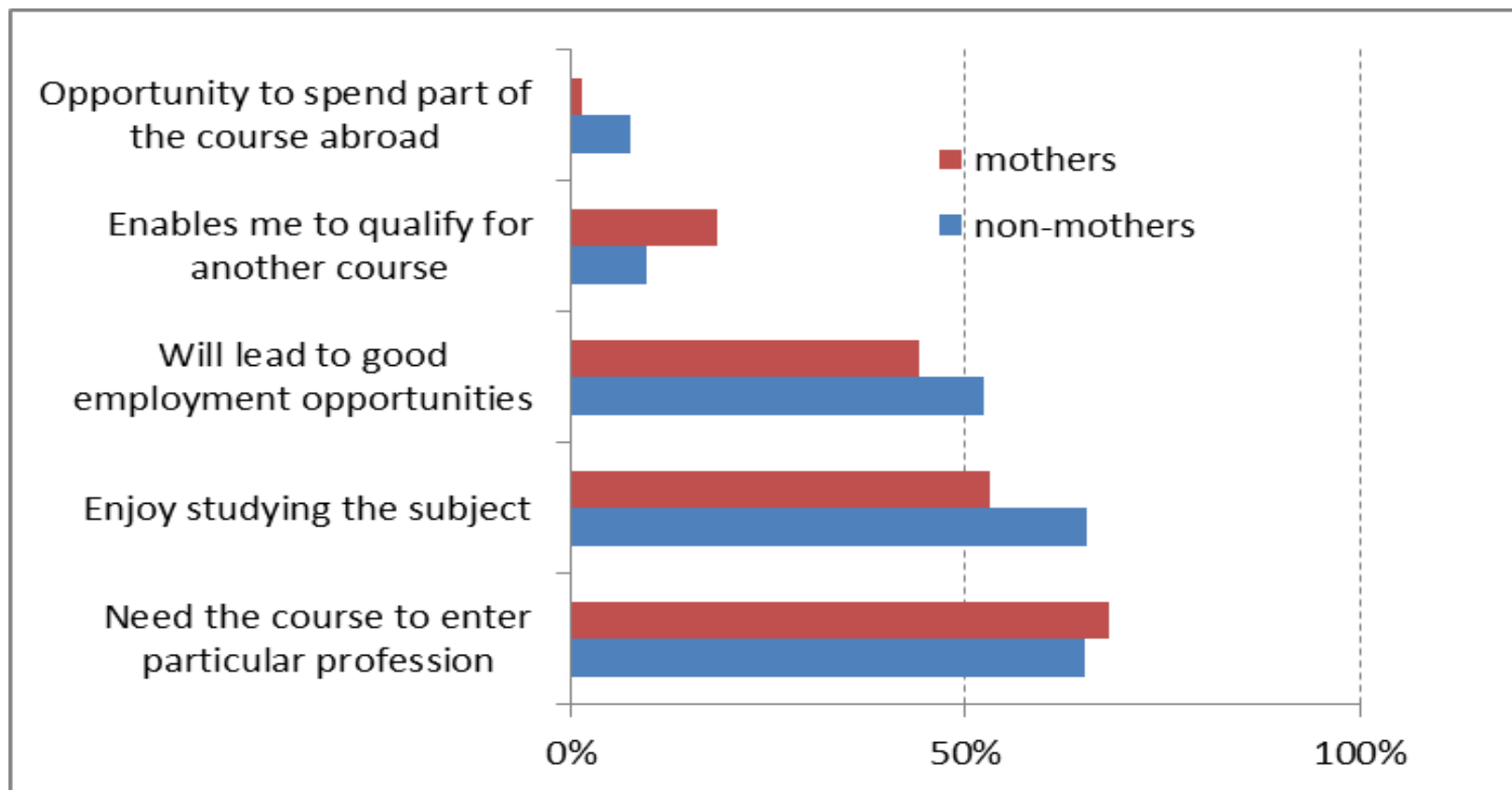
Application - why applied to HE



Application - why applied to HE

- *Enabled me to put off going back to work after birth of son so can be with him in his early years but also further my career at the same time. (Creative Arts & Design, Lower Tariff HEI, 31 years or older)*
- *Becoming a single mum gave me the push I needed to educate myself and provide a better future for my son (Subjects allied to Medicine, Lower Tariff HEI, 31 years or older)*

Application – why choose particular course



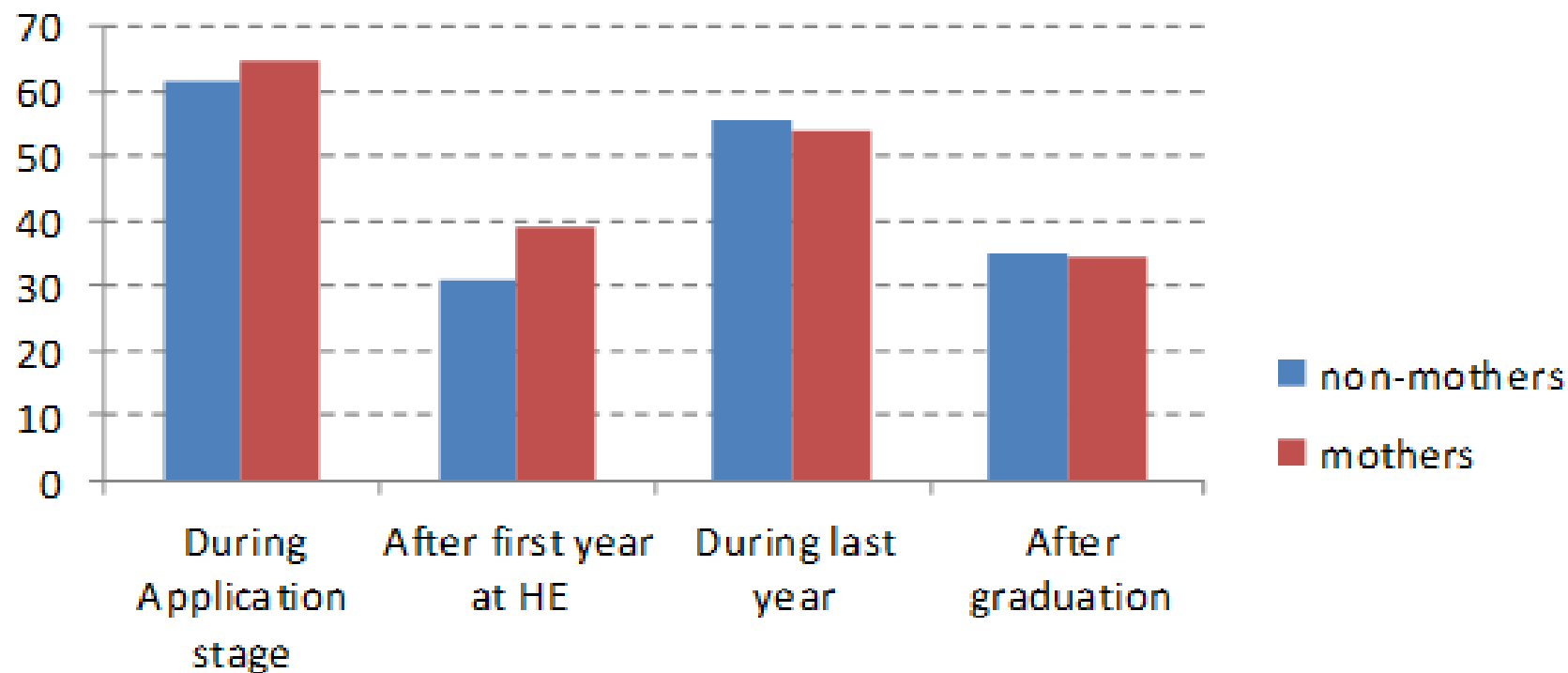
Application – why choose particular course

- *I am changing career - from maths teaching to medicine, after a career break to bring up my family. This break gave me the time and space to consider the reasons for my original degree course and subsequent career path and to consider which skills, talents and interests had not been fully developed. (Medicine & Dentistry, highest tariff HEI, 31 or older)*
- *I'm applying to do Persian and Islamic studies as my daughter's father is Afghan and I'd like to be fluent in the language and understand the culture more, both for me and my daughter (did not get accepted into this course but went on to do a distance-learning course at the Open University).*

Reasons for Choosing HEI

- 'I could continue to live at home' most important reasons for mothers (78 %) compared to non-mothers (22 %).
- *I have 6 children and would not be fair to move them all from their friends and schools. (Subjects allied to Medicine, Highest Tariff HEI, 26 and over)*
- *My children are settled in school, and the course would be a change for them with regard to needing child care, so I wanted to limit all other changes. (Subjects allied to Medicine, Medium Tariff HEI, 21-24 years old)*

Careers Clarity



Agreement with 'I have a clear idea about the occupation I eventually want to enter and the qualifications required to do so'

Current Activity

	Non Mothers	Mothers
Drop - out	7 %	5 %
Engaged in Further Study	12 %	15 %
Full-time Employed	47 %	38 %
Part-time Employed (one job)	9 %	26 %
Part-time Employed (more than one job)	7 %	6 %
Unemployed	12 %	11 %

Current Employment

	Non Mothers	Mothers
Expert	48 %	51 %
Orchestrator	5 %	3 %
Communicator	11 %	10 %
Non-graduate	31 %	32 %
Graduate job	64 %	64 %

Conclusion

- Student mothers are very restricted in their choice of course and HEI
- Student mothers are very instrumental in their use of HE to pursue their career plans
- After their studies, student mothers were more likely to work part-time.
- Student mothers were less likely to work in orchestrator jobs but were as likely as non-mothers to be employed in graduate jobs.

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