

## **Cultural capital, graduate premium expectations and higher education choices**

### **(Outline)**

Cultural capital might influence higher education choices through achievement in school (Sullivan 2000, Tramonte and Wilms 2010), through the development of a 'scholarly culture' in the home (Evans et al. 2010) or through the interpretation of information about higher education (Cremonini et al. 2008, Noble and Davies 2009). School students endowed with 'higher' cultural capital may be more able to judge the likely benefits to them of participating in higher education, applying to an elite university or choosing one subject of study rather than another.

This study extends previous research by (i) examining the consistency between alternative measures of cultural capital (such as the PISA questions used by Tramonte and Wilms, and the questions used by Sullivan and by Noble and Davies); (ii) using a fairly large sample of randomly selected schools and (iii) by examining the associations between measures of cultural capital, students' beliefs about graduate premia, students' confidence in their beliefs about graduate premia and their expectations about participation in higher education.

We recruited a random sample of 50 schools from a selection of postcode areas in England which covered a full range of metropolitan, urban and rural localities. We stratified the sample to include 20 private schools and 30 state schools. Schools were asked to include all Year 11 students in a questionnaire survey and roughly 5,000 completed questionnaires are included in our data set. Student characteristics data were collected for parental education and occupation, ethnicity, expected examination grades at age 16. Students were also asked to give permission for matching their data with information (such as achievement grades and eligibility for free school meals) contained on the National Pupil Database.

Three sets of questions on cultural capital were included: (i) 'Books at home' (following Evans et al. 2010); (ii) Engagement with parents regarding school work (following PISA/ Tramonte and Wilms 2010); and (iii) participation in different cultural activities (following Sullivan 2000 and Noble and Davies 2009). Students were asked to indicate (i) whether they intended to continue in full-time education after the end of compulsory schooling at age 16 and (ii) whether they intended to participate in higher education. They were also asked to indicate how much difference they thought that going to university would make to their future earnings and how much confidence they had in their predictions. By including a question on students' confidence in their predictions we aim to address the problem of relying on students' expectations about average graduate premia as pointed out by Dominitz and Manski (1996).

We used factor analysis to examine the relationships between the elements in our measures of cultural capital and the groups of cultural capital indicators drawn from different sources. Previous research (e.g. Noble and Davies 2009) has suggested that some elements of cultural capital may be more closely related to higher education decisions than other. Our analysis of students' expectations of a graduate premium examines the relationship between these expectations and cultural capital after taking account of students' expected achievement and other background characteristics. We also compare these expectations with recent research (Hussain et al. 2009, O'Leary and Sloane 2011,

Walker and Zhu 2011) on the graduate premium before and after the recent increase in undergraduate fees in England. We also compare our results with previous evidence about expectations of the graduate premium (Anchor et al. 2011, Delaney et al. 2011, Schweri et al. 2011). Finally, we examine the relationship between cultural capital and students' confidence in their predictions of graduate premia after controlling for other factors.

The results of this study have implications for (i) our understanding of the relationship between cultural capital and higher education choices; (ii) policy towards affecting higher education choices through information, incentives and aspiration raising incentives; and (iii) the identification of school students whose expectations of the financial benefits of higher education are substantially at variance with current evidence.

## References

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