

It Takes More than Money to Motivate Students into Masters Degrees: Evidence from the University of Greenwich Fast Forward Programme (0210)

Gabriella Cagliesi¹, Denise Hawkes², Jonathan Sibson¹

¹University of Greenwich, UK, ²UCL Institute of Education, UK

The Fast Forward Programme is an innovative package of mentoring, work placements and financial support, which started in September 2014 at the University of Greenwich. The aim of the programme is to increase the number of Masters Students from groups that have been under-represented in higher education. It also seeks to help these students to develop workplace skills. The programme provides a 60% fee waiver and £500 towards the cost of books and other study essentials. Also included is the benefit of a close partnership between the university and employers in the region, ensuring every Fast Forward student benefits from guaranteed work experience and ongoing mentoring. Before the start of the programme, all third year undergraduate students and Greenwich undergraduate alumni (between 2005 and 2013) were asked about their intentions with regard to future study and their socio-economic background, enlarging the version of the HEFCE survey to include some behavioural tenets. This paper uses the information from this survey to consider the additional non-financial constraints and enablers for Masters Level study.

We find that both the alumni and third year students at Greenwich are from more disadvantaged backgrounds than those in the HEFCE survey in terms of the incidence of coming from a disadvantaged background and thus appear more likely to be financially constrained. The Fast Forward Programme therefore, is being offered in an institution with a strong track record of attracting students from more modest backgrounds. Beyond the important financial constraints, we find two additional barriers that have been indicated by both Greenwich Alumni and Undergraduate Leavers are: personal and family constraints (it would be difficult to manage the request of a Master programme with family life) and the opportunity cost of losing a current job (part time or full time). Both factors can be linked to the fact that on average our students come from more disadvantaged backgrounds and they may lack the social capital to enable them to participate in postgraduate study as well as fear more strongly loss of any job. Any scheme designed at encouraging more students into Master's programmes, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, needs to consider more than just finances through loans to encourage a socially diverse student body. Such a scheme would need to consider additional nudges to encourage students with family constraints and opportunity cost concerns to undertake further study. Universities could also be encouraged to look at programme design to make available Masters more flexible to alleviate these issues.

Secondly, we also find a strong enabler to Masters Study that is when a possible applicant is persuaded by career industry factual evidence that pursuing a Master's degree could lead to an improved career and to a better paid job (that can compensate the fear of losing any current job and the uncertainty of being able to repay the debt). Respondents reported a strong preference for scholarships and employers' scheme to fund Master programmes. Overall our evidence would suggest that links with the industry would be vital for the success of any postgraduate policy. In fact, 35% of our leavers and 32% of Alumni indicated that mentorship was an important factor in considering applying for the Fast Forward scheme, the third biggest factor after the financial aspect of the Fast Forward programme, and after their previous academic experience at Greenwich. Therefore as with the apprenticeship scheme, the Government should be aware of the importance of signalling

clearly the link between Master's study and industry opportunities, particularly when the objective is to encourage the taking up of individuals with protected characteristics. In essence in addition to the proposed loan scheme, further work needs to consider the ways we can highlight how a masters is a fast track into careers. This can only be achieved by support from industry partners.