

# Decision-making about higher education: choosing an institution

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agus Gnóthaí Óige  
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# Introduction

- Large body of research on whether to go to higher (tertiary) education or not
- Less research on institutional choice other than geographic factors
- This paper looks at the reasons for choosing a HE institution and the extent to which these reasons reflect social background



# Research Literature

- Effect of geographical location on institutional choice (Frenette, 2006; Sa et al., 2006)
- Young people from middle-class and highly educated families are more likely to move outside their local region (Donnelly and Gamsu, 2018)
- Previous Irish research – distance from a HEI reduces attendance for lower income groups (Cullinan et al., 2013)
- Financial barriers – lower income students choose universities with lower living costs and better part-time job opportunities (Callender and Jackson, 2008)
- Also a period where young people are making the transition to adulthood and university is a time to mature (Coté, 2002).



# Hypotheses

- **Using waves 1, 2 and 3 of the child cohort component of the Growing Up in Ireland survey. Analyses exclude 17% who had already left school (1/3 in HE) due to lack of information on HE intentions**
- Controlling for area, more disadvantaged groups will place greater emphasis on being able to live at home (for financial reasons) and encouragement from school while more advantaged groups will be more likely to stress family having attended there and institutional reputation.
- The reasons among less advantaged groups will serve to reduce their choice sets and contribute to a lower chance of choosing a university. For the more advantaged groups, family ties and reputation will contribute to a consolidation of their class position.
- Working-class young people are more likely to consider themselves as adults so this greater sense of independence may partially increase their choice set among those who plan to go on to higher education.



# Importance of reasons for choice

- The institution offers the course they want to do;
- It would allow them to live at home;
- There are good transport links with home;
- They want to live in a new city/county;
- Their friends are going there;
- Their family members are going or went there;
- It having a good reputation;
- Their parents encouraging them to go there;
- Their teacher or guidance counsellor encouraging them to go there;
- Feeling the size (in terms of numbers) would suit them.



# Social background variables

- Gender
- Social class (dominance; including inactive)
- Mother's educational level
- Household income (equivalised; quintiles)
- Immigrant family
- Live in a city, town or countryside
- Control for 8 category region

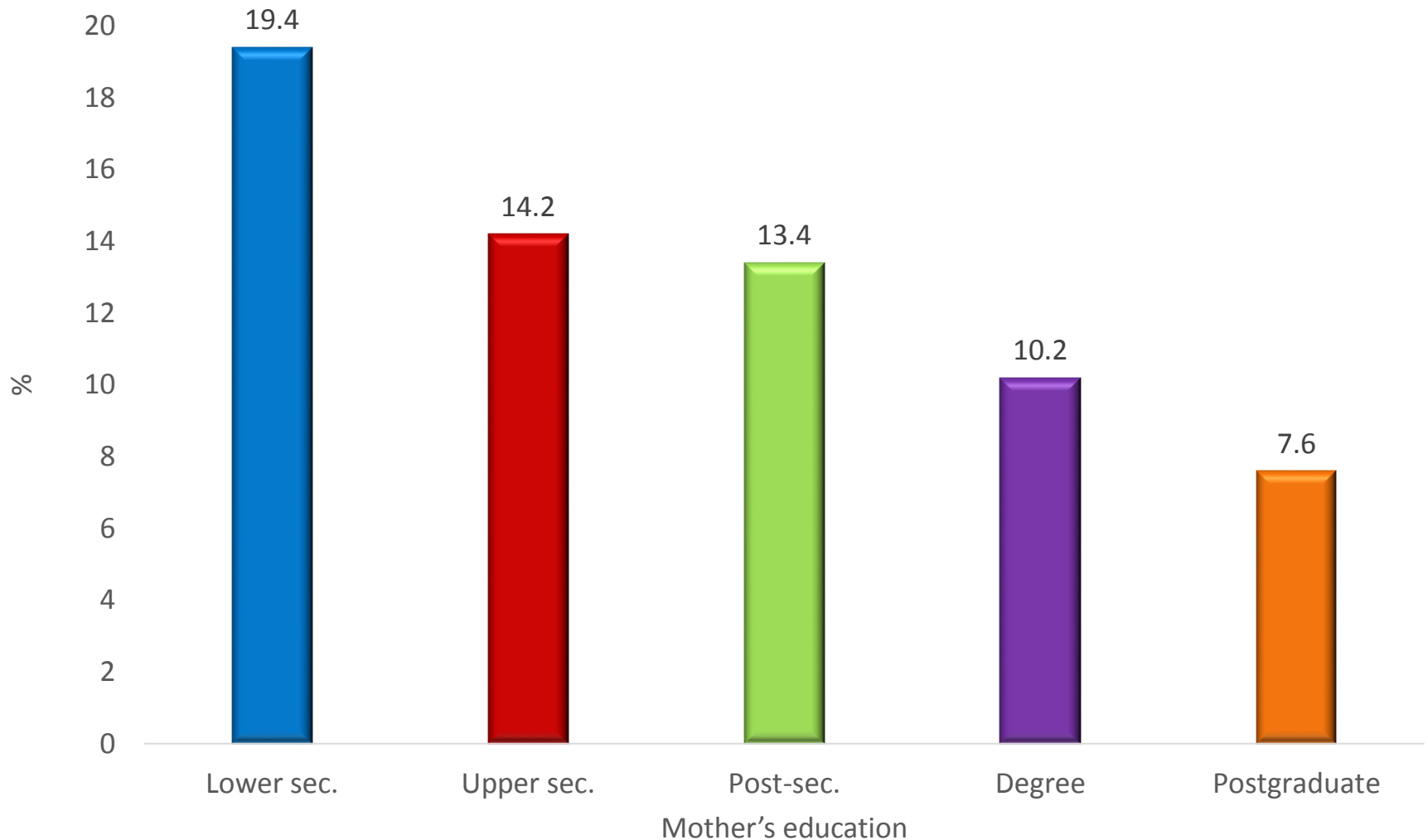


# School experience

- Social mix of secondary school (disadvantage) – binary
- Positive interaction with teachers
- Negative interaction with teachers
- Lower secondary (Junior Certificate) exam grades
- Academic self-image ('above average' in exams)
- Parental discussion of education with YP
- Adult Identity Resolution Scale



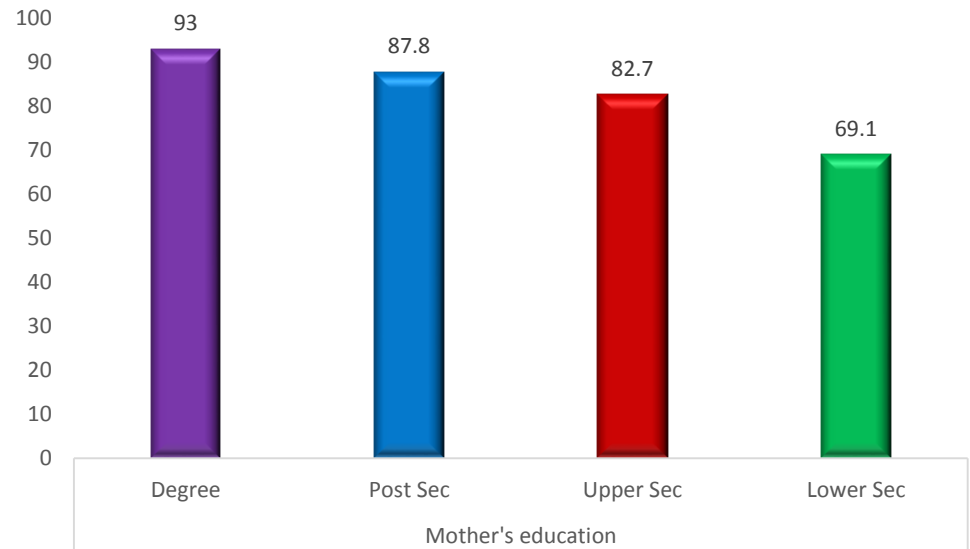
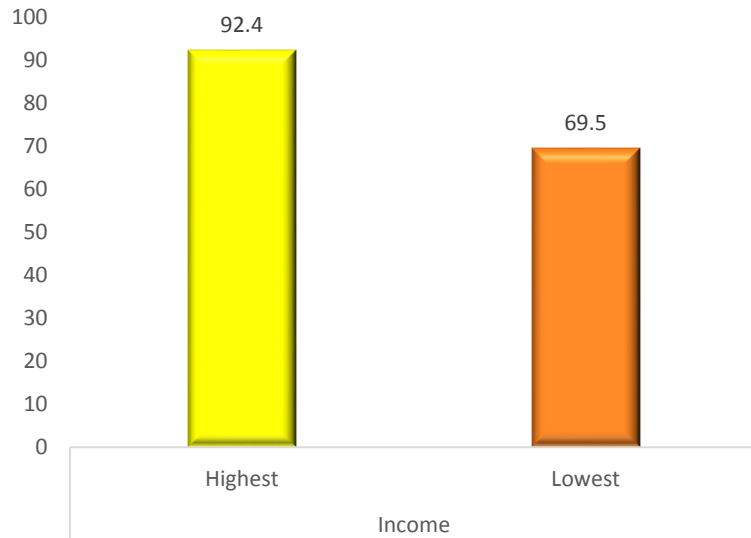
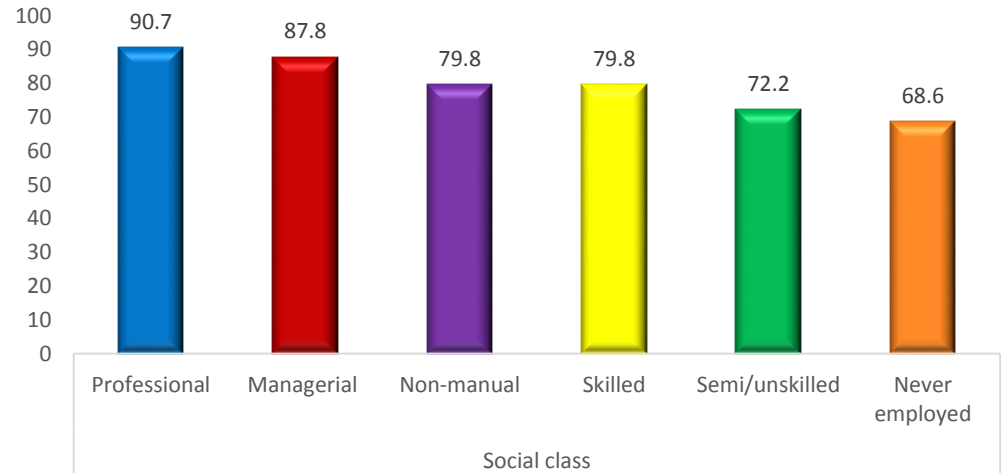
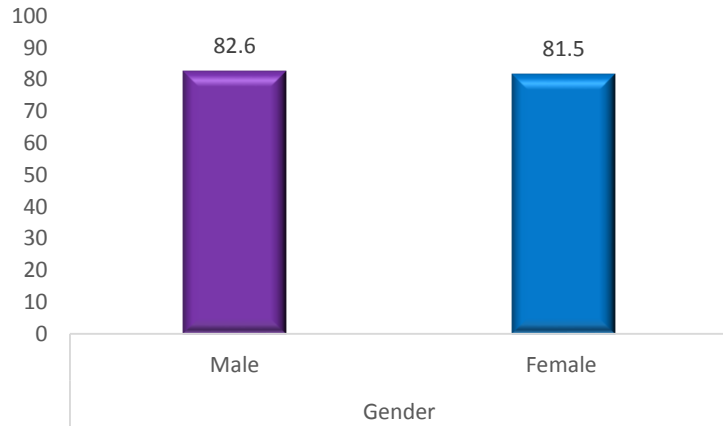
# You feel respected by others as an adult- % 'entirely true'





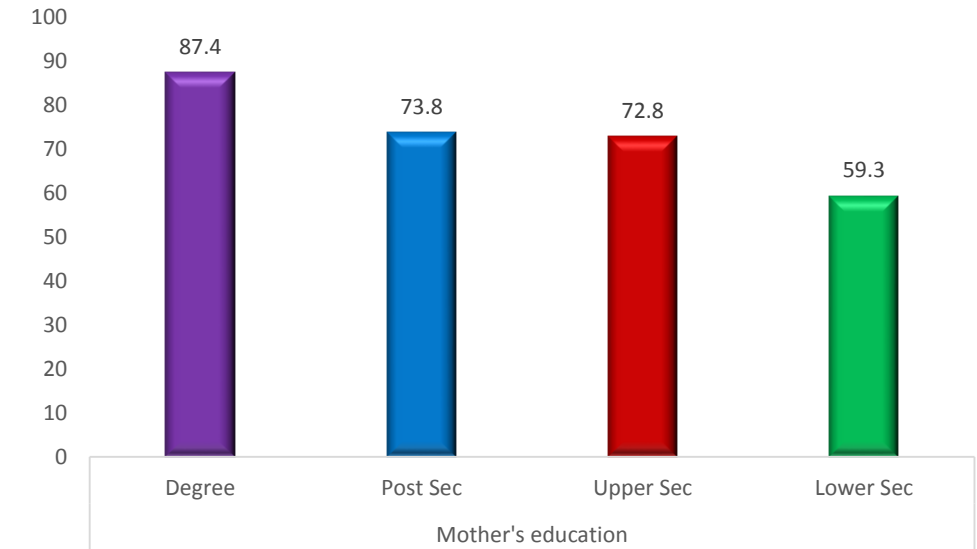
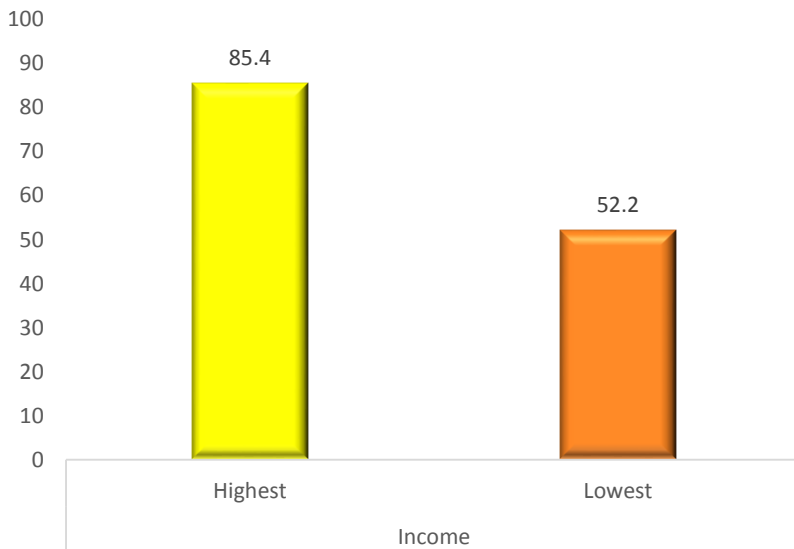
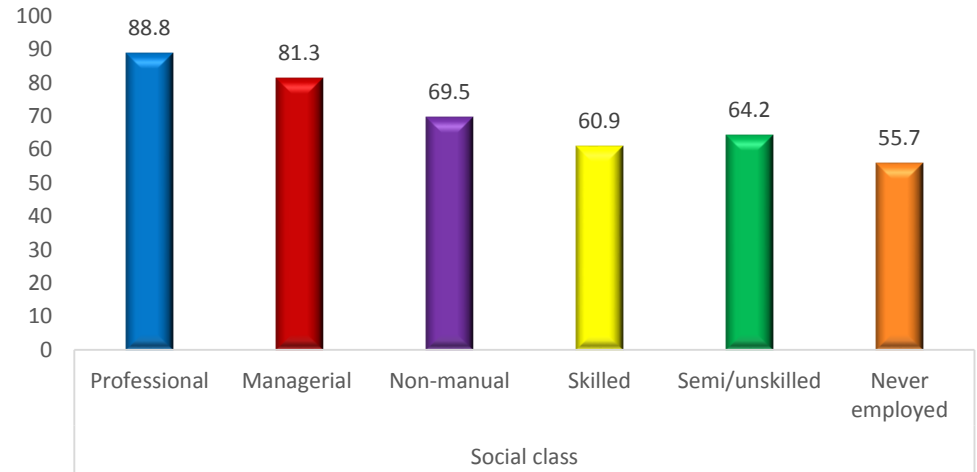
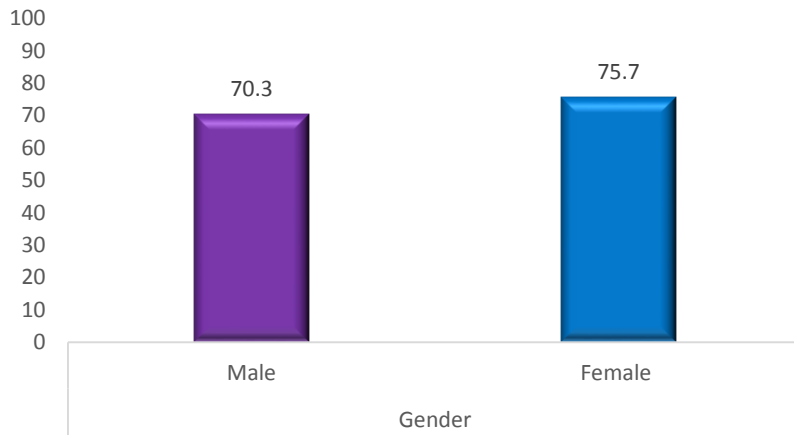


# Intend to go to Higher Education





# Intend to go to university (among those planning on HE)

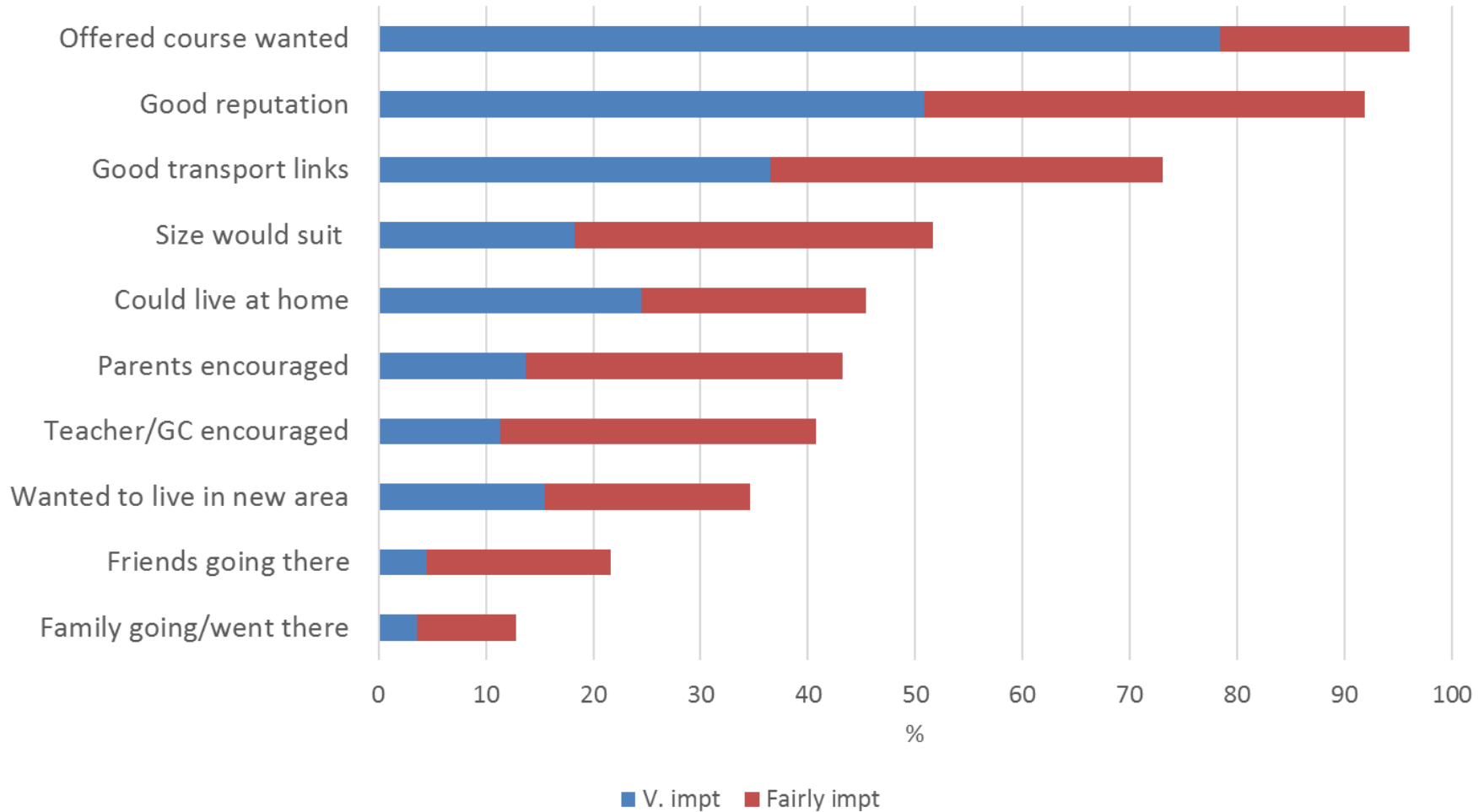




# Intends to go to HE (logistic regression)

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	0.278	0.072
Male	1.139	1.333**
Household income:		
Quintile 2	1.043	1.005
Quintile 3	1.473**	1.269
Quintile 4	1.342*	1.122
Quintile 5	2.239***	1.670**
(Ref.: Quintile 1)		
Social class:		
Professional/managerial	1.527**	1.050
Non-manual/skilled manual	1.406*	1.184
Semi/unskilled manual	1.070	0.929
(Ref.: Never employed)		
Mother's education:		
Upper secondary	1.497***	1.164
Post-secondary	2.173***	1.571**
Degree	3.244***	1.798**
(Ref.: Lower secondary or less)		
Immigrant background	0.924	0.919
Attended a working-class secondary school	0.694**	1.024
Positive interaction with teachers	1.210***	1.149***
Negative interaction with teachers	0.808***	0.872***
No. of higher level lower secondary grades		1.319***
Higher academic self-image		1.490***
Less secure as an adult		1.077***

# Reasons for choice





# What influences these reasons?

- Family background less influential than expected; effect of income differs from that of social class and education in some instances.
- Young people with more highly educated mothers are less likely to emphasise being able to live at home; semi/unskilled manual group place greater emphasis on being able to live at home.
- But those from the highest income groups place a much stronger emphasis on being able to live at home.
- Somewhat surprisingly, the group from 'never employed' families are very unlikely to value being able to live at home in choosing an institution. Also much more likely to rate wanting to live in a new city or county more highly. Disaffection with their local area and/or their families?



## Reasons(2)

- The rating of other reasons for institutional choice is not strongly structured by social background. However, professional and managerial groups and those with graduate mothers are more likely to emphasise family members having attended the institution.
- Young people who attended a working-class (DEIS) school are also less likely to mention this factor, most likely because they are the first generation to (plan to) attend college.
- Higher income groups (the top two quintiles) are more likely than lower income groups to emphasise the institution providing the course they want to do.



## Reasons(3)

- Males - friends attending the college and family members having gone there and less likely to rate school encouragement, course provision, the size of the institution, wanting to live in a new area or good transport links.
- Higher-achieving students are less likely to emphasise being able to live at home, good transport links or school encouragement but much more likely to mention the type of course offered. This is likely to reflect their ambition to attend more selective universities which are further afield.
- Lack of effect of academic self-image
- Less secure as an adult - likely to emphasise wanting to live in a new area and less likely to rate being able to live at home, school encouragement, reputation or size as important. Opportunities to forge their independence?



# Effects of reasons on university choice

	Odds ratio
Importance of:	
Wanting to live in a new city/county	1.083
Family attending/attended	1.175*
Friends attending	1.129±
School encouragement	0.862*
Being able to live at home	0.795***
Parental encouragement	1.080
Course offered	0.897
Good reputation	1.292**
Suitable size	0.823***
Good transport links	0.944





# University Choice and social background

- Higher university intentions among those from professional/ managerial, high income and highly educated households.
- Having attended a school with a greater concentration of disadvantage is associated with reduced university plans.
- Much of the effect of family background on university intentions is mediated through educational achievement and self-image, though higher income and being from a professional background continue to have direct effects.
- Being from a professional background partly mediated by the reliance on family links as a basis for choice. But effect of other aspects of social background remain largely unchanged, and there is still a clear relationship between household income levels and university plans
- Additional analyses looked at families with low, medium and high levels of education separately. Being able to live at home reduced university plans for all groups. However, relying on family ties as a basis for choice enhanced university plans only for the offspring of graduates.



# Other factors

- Young men are less likely to plan to go to university than young women.
- Those from immigrant families are more likely to plan on attending a university.
- Students who have experienced positive interaction with their teachers are more likely to plan on university while the reverse is the case for those who have frequently been reprimanded.
- University intentions are stronger among those who had higher levels of achievement and who had more positive academic self-images.
- Those who feel less secure as an adult are more likely to plan on going to university



# Conclusions

- The course offered, the reputation of the institution and good transport links emerge as the most important factors in institutional choice.
- A significant minority (45%) emphasise being able to live at home; similar to actual % doing so.
- Young people from professional/managerial households did place greater emphasis on family links with the institution but otherwise little systematic variation by background.
- The factors considered important by young people did serve to shape their plans about whether to go to a university or institute of technology.
- Wanting to live at home limited the horizons of all groups, not just those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- However, institutional reputation did appear to play a more important role in enhancing university plans among those from graduate families.
- Next steps: AME v. logistic regression; sub-group analysis; mediation analysis; RMF data – location of HEI