



# CAREERS SERVICE BRIEFING

## Commuter Students Research Project

Inspiring futures

### What question were we trying to answer?

This study aimed to understand the impact of commuting whilst studying at The University of Edinburgh (UoE). We wished to test the findings of the literature review which suggested that commuter students would likely be from a widening participation group and that commuting may have a negative impact on academic achievement, access to/engagement with extra-curricular activities, and increased social isolation, with consequent impact on employability.

#### UK-wide context

1. Wider access to university for 'non-traditional' students
2. Rising cost of Higher Education
3. UK Government suggested students stay at home if possible\*

#### Scotland-specific context

1. Participation in HE is higher in Scotland (likely due to free tuition)
2. Scottish and Scotland-based students with a local university may commute from home
3. Scotland has two of the top three UK universities for stay-at-home students (West of Scotland and Glasgow Caledonian)

#### References

\*Hillman, N. (2018), 'The rise of commuter students...?' *HEPI Blog* (<http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/02/20/rise-commuter-student/>) Accessed: 6.06.18)

### How did we approach this?

The project, conducted by a Careers Service Student Intern, included a literature review, analysis of qualitative data collected in 2018 (focus group; 1-1 interview; email; and survey (159 respondents)), and quantitative DLHE data (final year students 2011/12 – 2016/17).

After considering the geography of the City of Edinburgh, a region of 'central' postcodes was established to determine those that can be classed as 'non-commuters', roughly a three to four-mile radius around the George Square campus. All students with postcodes outside this area are considered 'commuters' in this study.

### What did we find out?

Analysis revealed commuter students are:

- Likely to belong to a WP category (50%)
- Older on average (however, the survey found that a third were aged 25+, but 56% were living at home)
- 10% less likely to achieve a first-class degree
- Concentrated in certain Schools

Many commuter students reported barriers to participation:

- **Academic:** 53% of survey respondents said they had missed a class due to issues with their commute
- **Financial:** The average cost per week of commuting was £39.48
- **Health and wellbeing:** 51% of commuters travel over 1 hour per journey, and fed back that they are often physically and mentally fatigued from the journey and carrying their course materials
- **Interaction with the university community:** Students are likely to have a part-time job (62%) with less time to socialise, build strong networks, or attend events on campus

However many respondents said these factors did not impact them negatively And 62% enjoy their own social and professional networks at home.

## What did we find out?

Commuting was found to have little effect on the graduate's ability to progress into a 'top career' in the DLHE data analysis.

- 93% of commuters either went on to employment or further study/training
- 69% were employed in professional occupations.

However when the high numbers from The Moray House School of Education and Sport were removed (50% of commuter students progressed to employment as teachers), commuter students were 4% less likely to attain a 'top' career. However, this was found to be linked with WP status rather than with being a commuter student.

Commuter students were less mobile after graduation: 89% who were employed after graduation remained in Scotland to work, compared to 53% of non-commuter students.

## Areas for Action

The literature review and benchmarking against UK HEIs broadly found **buddy schemes; mentoring programmes; improved active engagement/communication; and dedicated societies, resources, and facilities (including storage spaces)** can support commuter students.

Innovations were identified at University of St. Andrews which offers '**commuter status**'; giving students access to a society, areas on campus, and a resource handbook. University of Salford offers commuters **online and in-person communities** through social media and a **dedicated social space on campus**. A recurring theme is the need for **considerate timetabling**, 67% of survey respondents said their classes were not very flexible:

- Early starts and/or late finishes are impractical: Students avoid peak-time travel (too expensive) but there are also issues around safety, lack of transport, and other commitments/scheduling
- Virtual attendance/recorded sessions would enable remote access during a commute
- Spontaneity is not an option; arrangements which allow advanced planning are beneficial

### Considerations

- Flexibility of virtual attendance and/or recorded lectures supplemented by online readings, options to submit work online; and virtual office hours with tutors and lecturers
- Flexible timetabling which gives commuter students priority access to timetable alterations where applicable
- Provide dedicated social and storage spaces on campus
- Allow commuters to self-identify and receive 'commuter status' to access tailored support
- Improve engagement by building a dedicated community with societies, resources, and a forum to hear the student voice
- Support future students and manage their expectations by sharing the collective insight of those who have been commuters including offering a study guide
- Promote the use of Platform One to engage commuters early and tap into this network
- Improve the range and advertising of digital options and opportunities to engage virtually with the Careers Service and consider approaches to ensure flexibility of booking in-person appointments, e.g. ring-fencing

## Interested in finding out more?

Please contact [careers.ed.ac.uk](http://careers.ed.ac.uk) for access to the full Project Report or to discuss the findings.

*With special thanks to Taylor Brooks-Brown, Student Experience Research Intern.*