

MIND THE GAP!

Decision-making in first-generation undergraduates in relation to progressing directly into postgraduate study.

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MA Dissertation study

University of

HUDDERSFIELD

Inspiring global professionals

Starting Points

- Lancaster University has highest rate of first-degree leavers progressing into PGS across UK HEIs- **26.8%**.
- Institutional data for showed First Generation Students (FGS) to have consistently lower rates of progression into PGS in comparison to their undergraduate cohort.



Patterns of progression

Consensus of opinion in the literature that there is a correlation between lower levels of parental education and lower levels of progression on to PGS

2 key ways parental education levels could potentially influence progression into PG study

- 1) socio-economic 
- 2) social-psychological

“socio-economic disadvantage has more persistent and far-reaching impact on access to and outcomes from higher education than any other student characteristic” (Universities UK 2016)

“parental income has become more important in determining participation in HE...even when prior educational attainment is controlled for” (2). Conclusion supported by many other researchers, (3).

Postgraduate Loan - successful in enabling more students from previously underrepresented backgrounds in PGS to participate (4).

Patterns of progression

- HESA (2018) data for the corresponding period, shows lower progression rates for FG Students in comparison to SG Students

Show: Number Percent

Academic year: 2016/17
 Country of HE provider: All

	UK work	Overseas work	Combination of work and further study	Further study	Total in work or further study	Unemployed	Other	Total of known destination
Parental education								
Yes	64%	2%	5%	19%	91%	5%	4%	100%
No	67%	1%	6%	17%	91%	5%	4%	100%

- Inequalities may not be simply driven by economic factors and that parental education levels may impact progression to PGS in other ways
- Intersectionality- disaggregating characteristics is impossible!

Aims of the study

1. What are the **key factors** first generation (FG), final-year undergraduates at Lancaster University consider when deciding on whether to progress directly into PGS or not?
 2. How does the **undergraduate experience** at Lancaster University affect final year students informed decision-making in relation to progressing into PGS or not?
 3. What **action can careers professionals** at Lancaster University take to support FGS in their decision-making
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Why final year undergraduates

Majority of research related to progression into PGS has been conducted with students already engaged in PGS – less is understood about the reasons for progressing into PG study or not ⁽¹⁾

Exploring concept of mutability and independence. ⁽²⁾

Focus on the decision at end of undergraduate degree and not the experiences of returners to PGS study.

Intersectionality- disaggregating characteristics

Understanding influences on career and educational decisions

Hodkinson (2008) Careership Theory. (Horizon's For Action)

- made within the context of an individual's circumstances, their values and beliefs, their internal frame of reference that has emerged through their upbringing and external influences and opinion from significant others, thus highlighting that an 'informed-decision' does not rely on 'information' alone.

Abrahams's (2017)

- individual's habitus influences shape individuals' values relating to graduate employment

Suggests parents likely to be highly influential in shaping an individuals 'disposition' and consequently their 'Horizon's for Action'

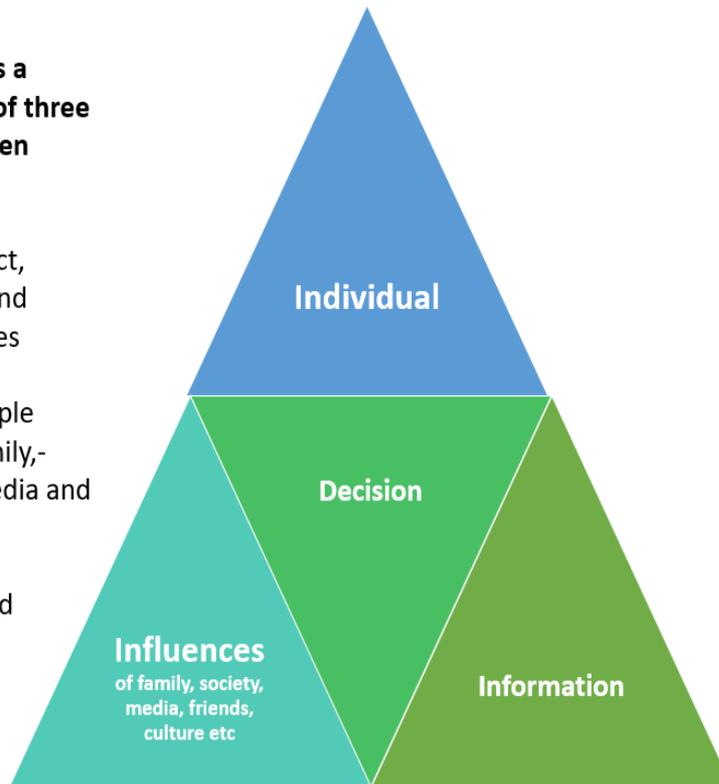
The Decision Triangle

The decision triangle is a visual representation of three key considerations when making a decision.

Individual– Your instinct, personal perspective and individual circumstances

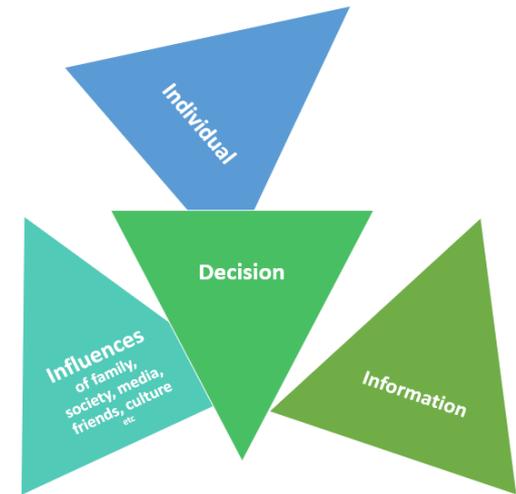
Influences- Other people including friends & family,- social media, wider media and opinion.

Information – Facts and figures.

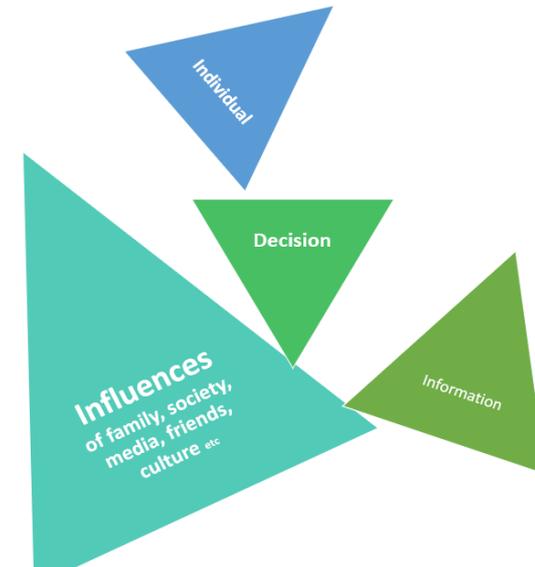


Edwards, S. (2018). THE DECISION TRIANGLE – A RESOURCE FOR CAREERS PRACTITIONERS. *Career Matters*, [online] (6.2), pp.pg 30-31. Available at: <https://www.cderegister.net/Framework/ResourceManagement/GetResourceObject.aspx?ResourceID=220373ad-6786-47f6-b7ec-ee963ee97642> [Accessed 25 Apr. 2018].

Sometimes different parts of the triangle can be pointing towards different conclusions



Sometimes some elements of the triangle are 'bigger' than others. This can be because some elements of the triangle are 'louder' or that they are seen as being more important



Methodology

Mixed methods applied to a case study approach

- Final year FG and SG students surveyed to gather preliminary data to help decide focus of the in-depth interviews. (122 responses – removed responses from international students and those on integrated Masters courses - 54)
- Semi structured interviews (sample group of 7 FG, Final year undergraduates)
- Visual representation

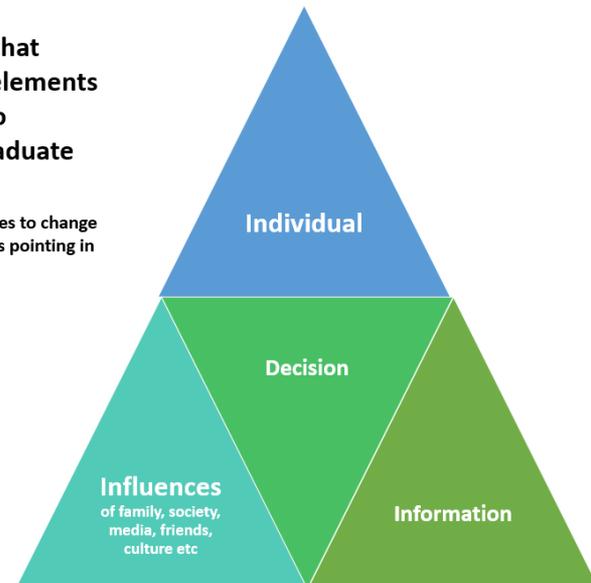
of the influences on the

participants

Decision-making/

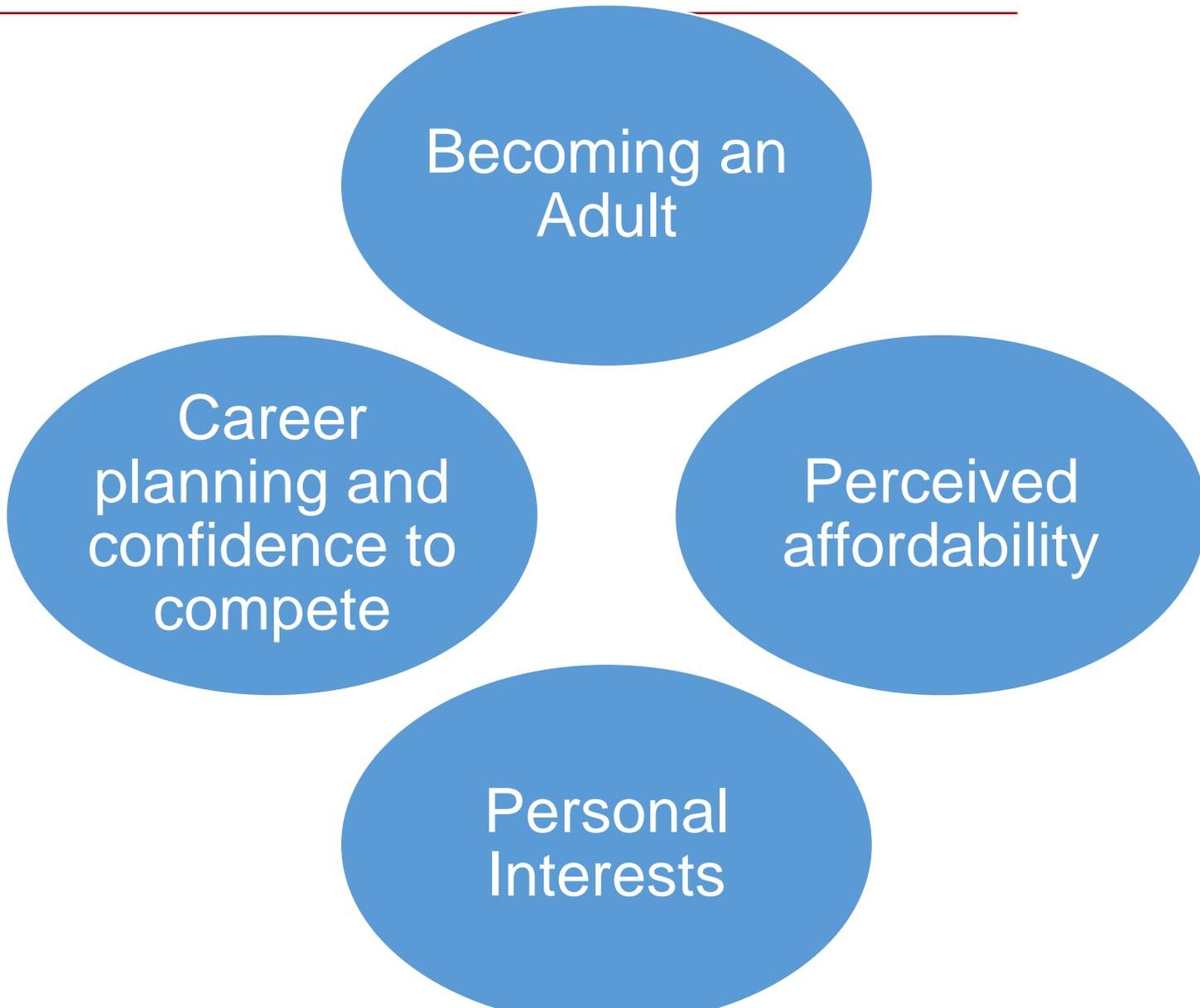
Create a triangle that represents the 3 elements in your decision to undertake postgraduate study or not.

Click on each of the triangles to change its size or to rotate it so it is pointing in a different direction



Please add any notes on next slide.

Individual Factors



Individual Factors

Becoming an Adult & being independent: prominent in those who were planning to enter graduate employment or undecided.

“I want a house in a couple of years so I want to start saving for that and with a Masters I know that it would be quite hard ... that was a big personal thing for me” (Beth)

“.... One day I think ‘you might get into a job, get settled, find somewhere new to live, get income and start a family and stuff like that’. But then part of me says I.... I could do another year in education, maybe...” (Grace)

“I could borrow the money from my parents, but I don't want to be in that much debt to my parents ... rather just do it on my own... than ask them, like, I could... that option is there.” (Olivia)

Individual Factors

Perceptions of affordability: not simply underlying financial resources, but attitudes relating to perceived value for money were a barrier to exploring PG Study as an option.

67% of SGSs agreed with the statement that PGS would increase chances of gaining employment in comparison only 40% of FGS

“If it were more affordable it definitely would have made me think a lot harder about it” (Alex)

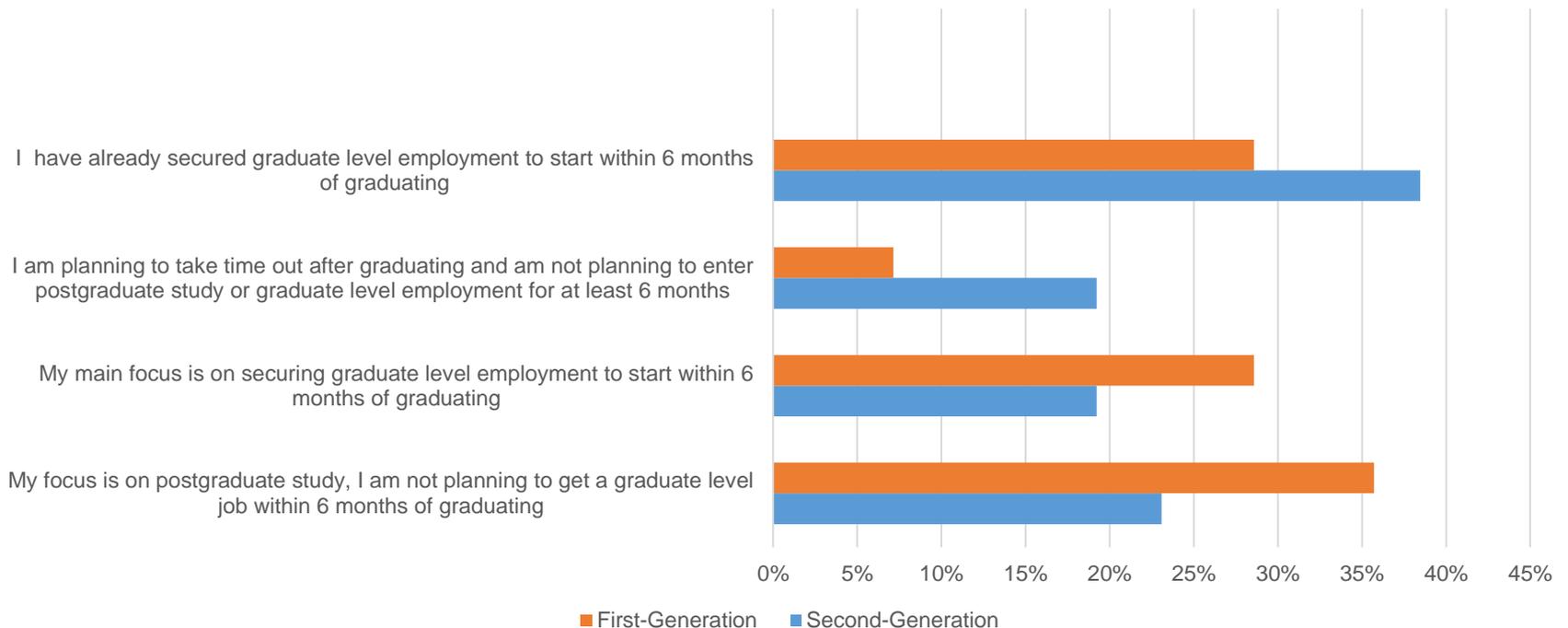
“there was this course in London at 23 grand, well that was ruled out straight away”. (Liam)

“I would love to do Masters but I feel like it's a lot of money to spend on something that can get you in the same place as people have just done an undergrad.” (Beth)

Individual Factors

Personal Values and Interests: For those who had made a firm decision to progress into PG study for them passion and values were frequently mentioned. More so than those looking to enter graduate employment.

First generation-students & second-generation students intentions after graduation



Individual Factors

Career Planning and Confidence to Compete.

Those intending to progress to PG Study had very clear career plans –but also expressed that their undergraduate degree alone wasn't enough

Those intending to progress directly into graduate employment had less of a clear plan and either 'drifted' into a role or were conflicted and undecided about their next steps

Influences

Family as a support network

Undergraduate experience

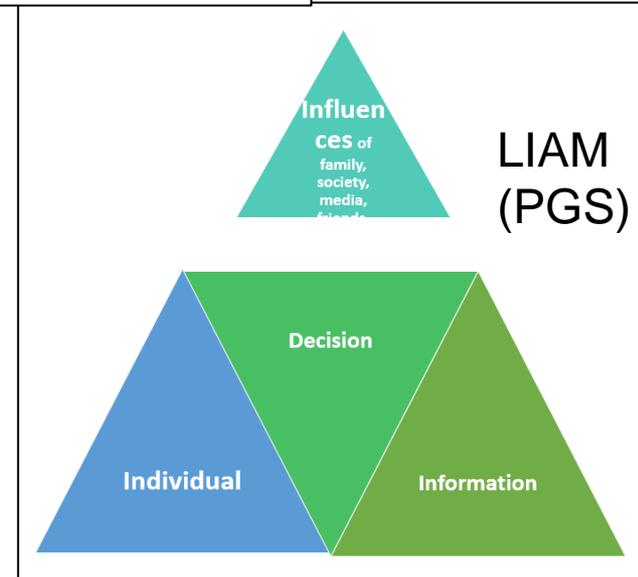
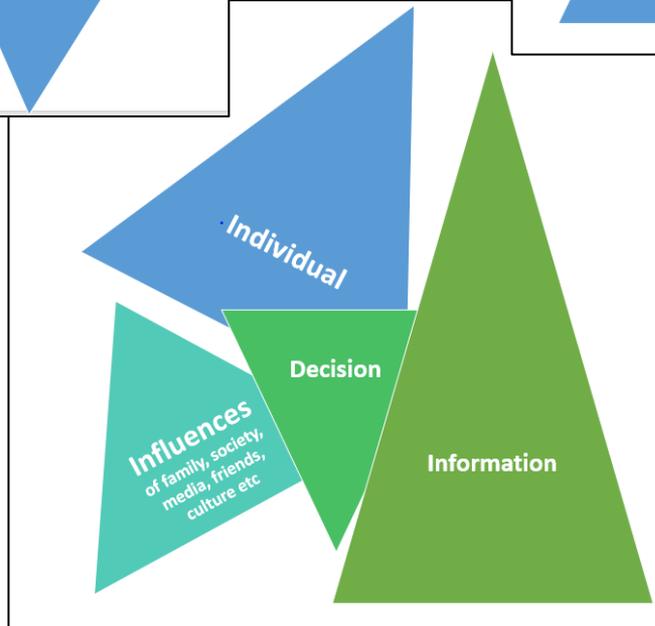
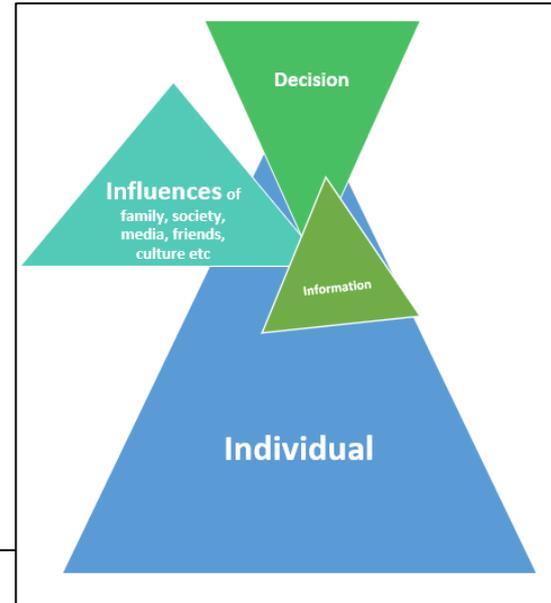
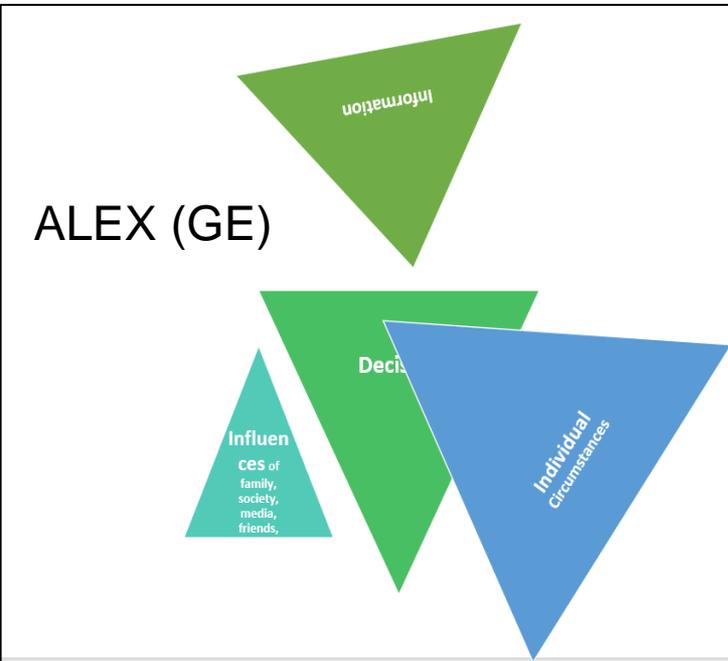
“all of the influences (friends, family, media) were quite neutral and did not affect my decision” (Cara)

“whilst ‘Influences’ and ‘Information’ has “weighed in” on making the decision – ultimately, it’s the ‘individual’” (Jimmy - students’ own quotation marks)

“Influence of others still has some influence but this is perhaps smaller and less relevant” (Liam)

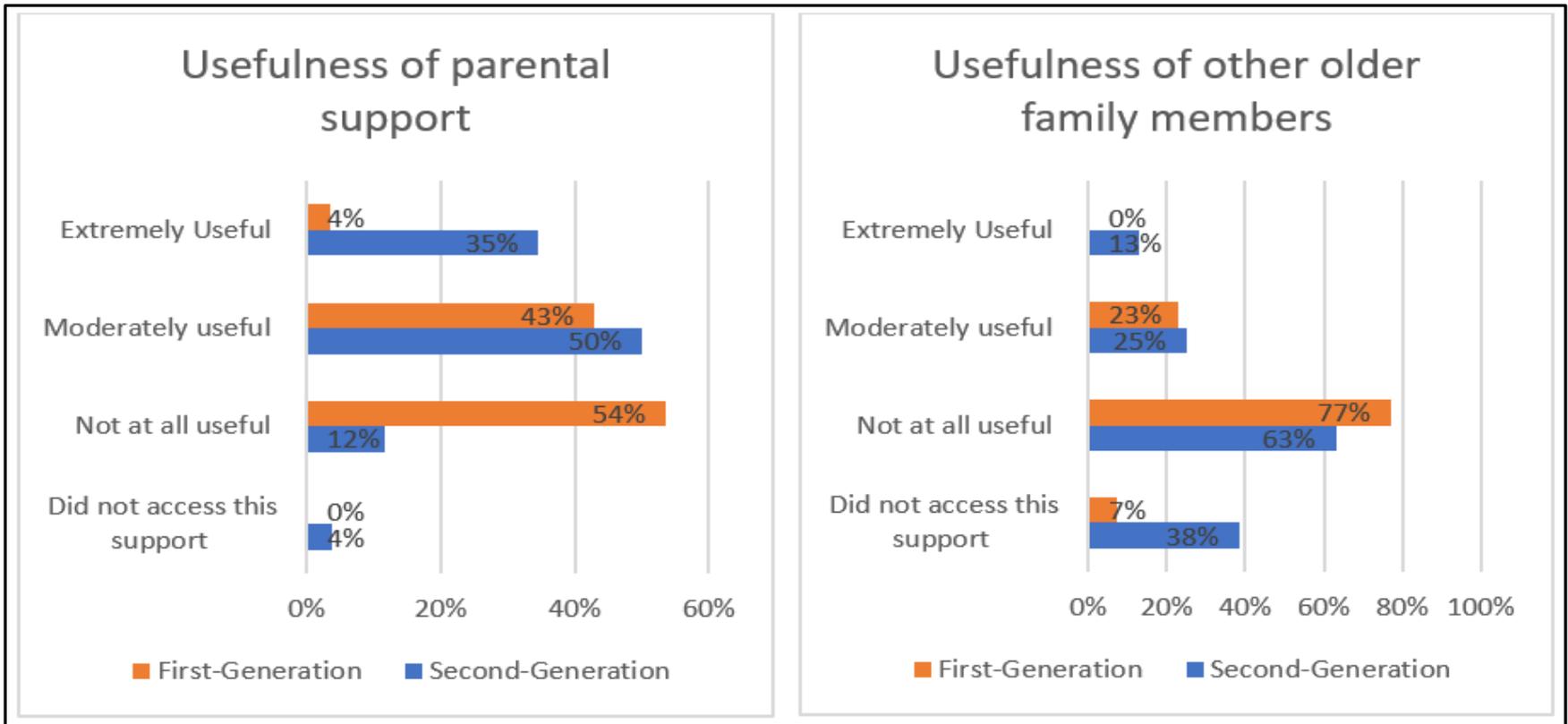
“I think my decisions have largely come from myself rather than other people” (Olivia)

Influences



Influences

Family as a Support Network



Influences

Family as a Support Network

Parental expectations were revealed.

“I think they think... undergraduate and then a job. They keep asking...’when will you bringing some money in’...they think a masters isn’t needed if you want a normal job.” (Grace)

“yeah, I think they expect me to get a job now” (Alex)

Influences

The Undergraduate Experience:

Academic Staff

- Highly influential, particularly personal encounters.

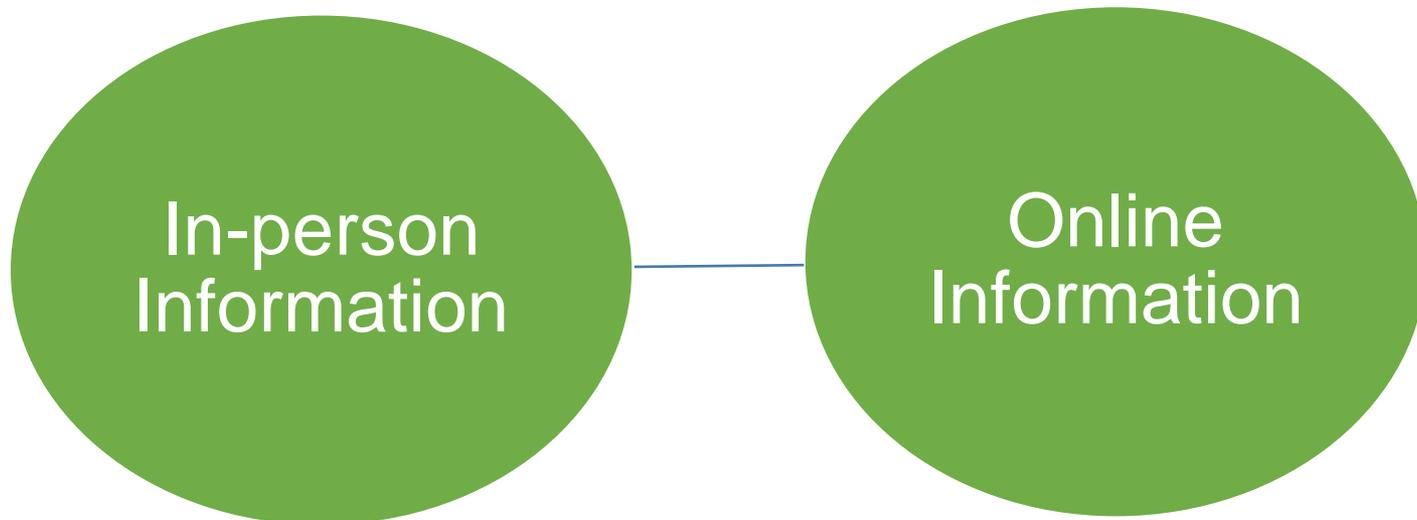
Careers Activity

- Most highly rated source of support 😊

Information

Value of Information varied across the sample group.

- Evidence of proactivity in exploring online information
- Being overwhelmed with information



Information

Encounters with HEIs (postgraduate study) – very few

Almost all information referred to related to Graduate employment.

“I think if I knew more about funding options and universities that offer different courses, I’d be more confident to pursue a PG course” (Beth).

“Everything I knew [about Postgraduate study] I’ve either found out via my lecturer or just from my own research. I don’t think that the uni provided that much really” (Olivia)

Conclusion – standout factors influencing decision

Knowledge gap

- Exacerbated by strong focus on graduate employment at university and parental expectation. Lack of opportunities for vicarious experience among FGS highlights the importance of academic staff being aware of their potential influence.

Adulthood and independence

- Influence on decisions driving them towards graduate employment. Arguable narrative that has been shaped by parental expectations

Perceived affordability

- Clearly a barrier to progression to **exploring** and pursuing PGS. A narrative shaped by wider influences.

Long standing narrative of GE after UG

- The narrative at year 12/13 to encourage WP students into PG is focused on better job prospects and Graduate Employment. This influences both parental student expectations of what next steps after UG should be

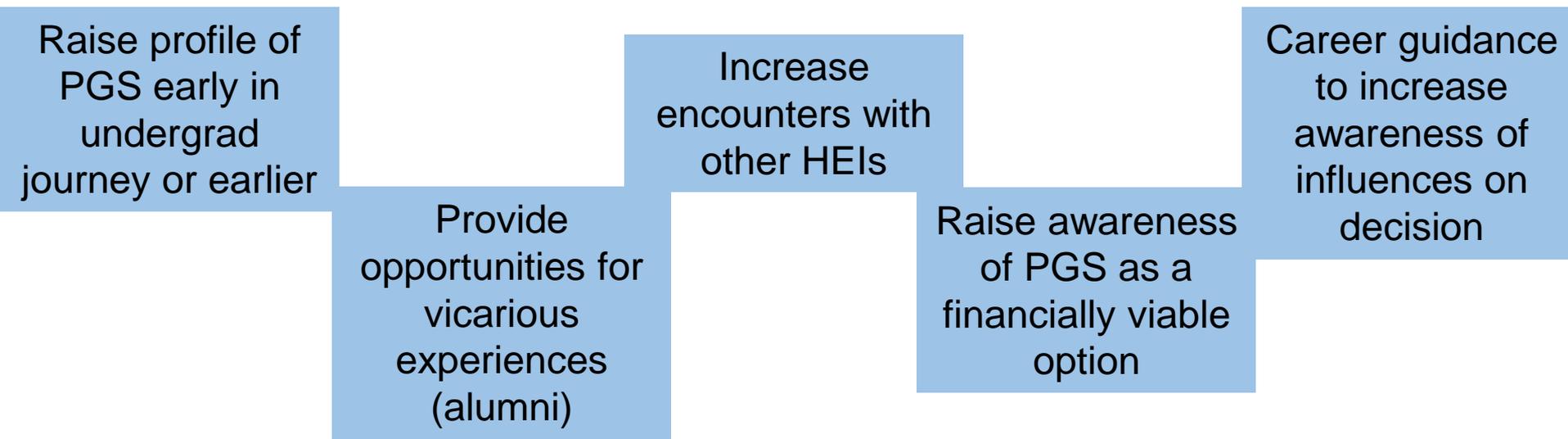
Careers practitioners cannot change the narrative gained through families but they can influence the balance of that narrative within the institution.

Conclusion & recommendations for practice

- Being a FGS seemed have an impact on participants decision-making related to Graduate employment or PG Study.

Particularly in terms of gaining vicarious experiences and receiving verbal persuasion to increase their self efficacy and bring the option of PGS into their “Horizon’s for Action”

- Not fully aware of the influence of others on their decision making.
- FGS is indeed a relevant and useful characteristic to target in the quest to widen participation and access to PGS.



Any Questions



Thank you for listening- If you would like to continue the discussion – get in touch
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