

AMBIENT INFORMATION

The effect of visiting a fun campus event on attitudes to HE

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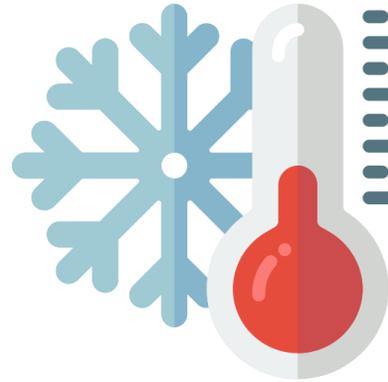
Lancaster University Community Day 2017

How do people gather information about HE?



HOT information

- Personal contacts
- Friends, relatives
- 'Grapevine'



COLD information

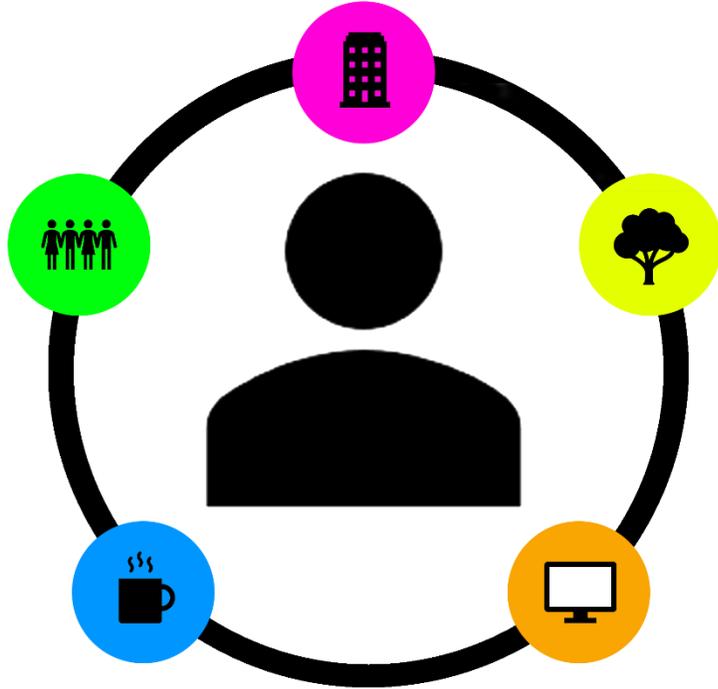
- Official sources
- Printed documents
- Prospectuses



WARM information

- Strangers with 'perceived synergy'
- Students encountered at open days

Our addition: Ambient information



AMBIENT information

- Collected on informal visits to university settings
- Fun activities
- No recruitment intention

We investigated the effects of ambient information at the 2017 Lancashire Science Festival.



Lancashire Science Festival 2017

How do non-recruitment visits to campus affect parents' views of HE?

- We conducted 188 face-to-face structured interviews with parents during the 2017 Lancashire Science Festival
- An online post-visit survey was completed by 273 parents

Our findings

- The experience of visiting the festival positively impacted on parents/carers' attitudes to HE, particularly among families from lower-SES backgrounds:

*“[I’ve] never visited the uni before and it’s not what I expected.
[I] felt welcomed.”*

Our findings

- Feelings of ‘reality’ and ‘accessibility’ were generated by experiencing the campus environment and meeting university staff in a friendly, informal way:

“It’s [my daughter’s] dream, [and] the people manning the stalls made her feel it was achievable.”

Our findings

- Visitors were able to gather knowledge of courses and facilities that may not have previously been available to those with little background of HE participation:

*“My four children already aspire to going to university.
The festival opens up the possibilities of what they could study.”*

Ambient information

- The experience of physically visiting the campus was a theme that frequently arose among respondents:

“[You] get to see the building and atmosphere, [which is] good for kids to experience.”

“[You] get to see how [the] campus is set out and the facilities.”

‘My nine-year-old son was amazed with the campus and lecture theatres and wants to go to uni now.’

Current project

How does 'ambient information' gained from visiting a university campus impact on children's views of university?

Current project – stage one

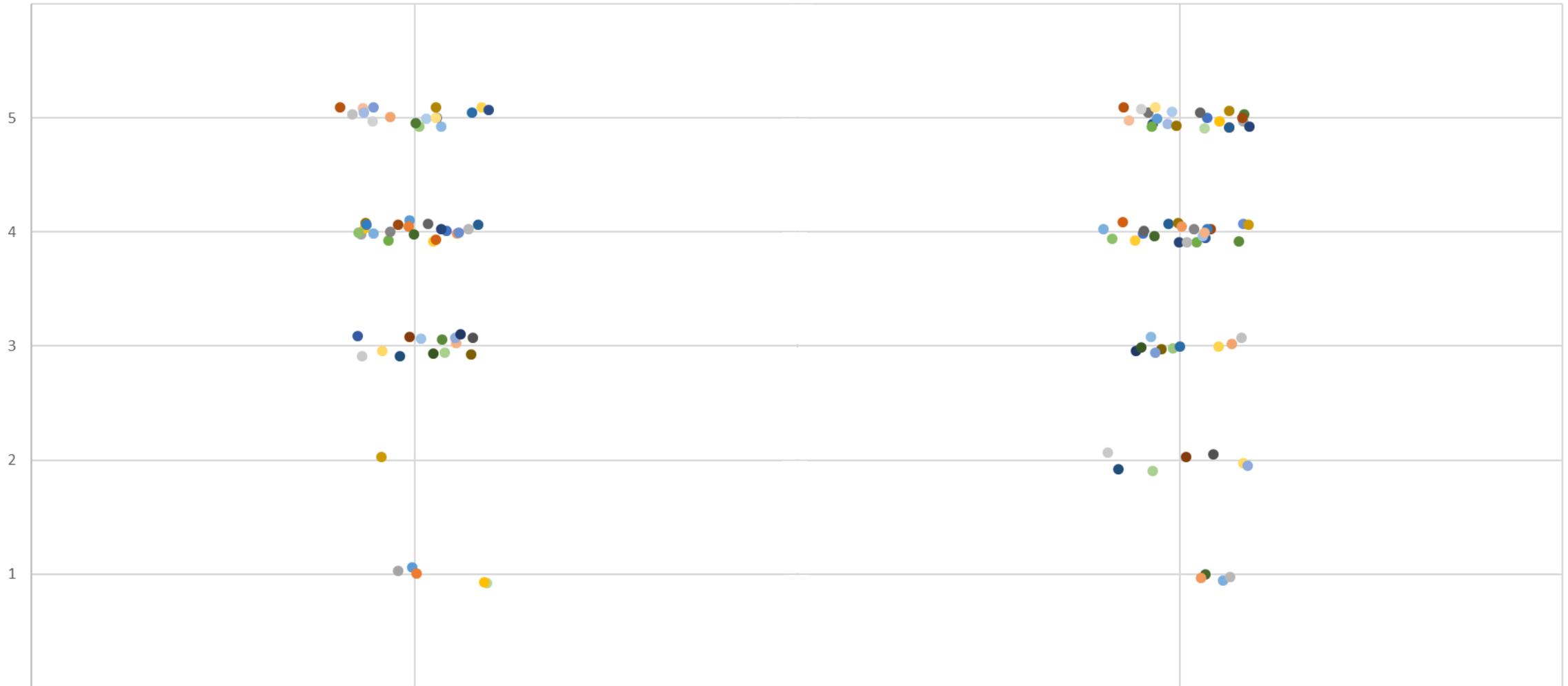
- 124 pupils from seven schools completed pre-festival on-line surveys;
- 64 pupils from six schools completed post-event surveys;
- Focus groups were held before and after the event with pupils at three schools.

Preliminary findings

- Before their visit, we asked pupils whether they had visited a university previously, and whether they thought university was for “people like me”.
- We found no correlation between the two measures:

$$r=0.02$$

Going to university is for people like me (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)



Has never visited a university

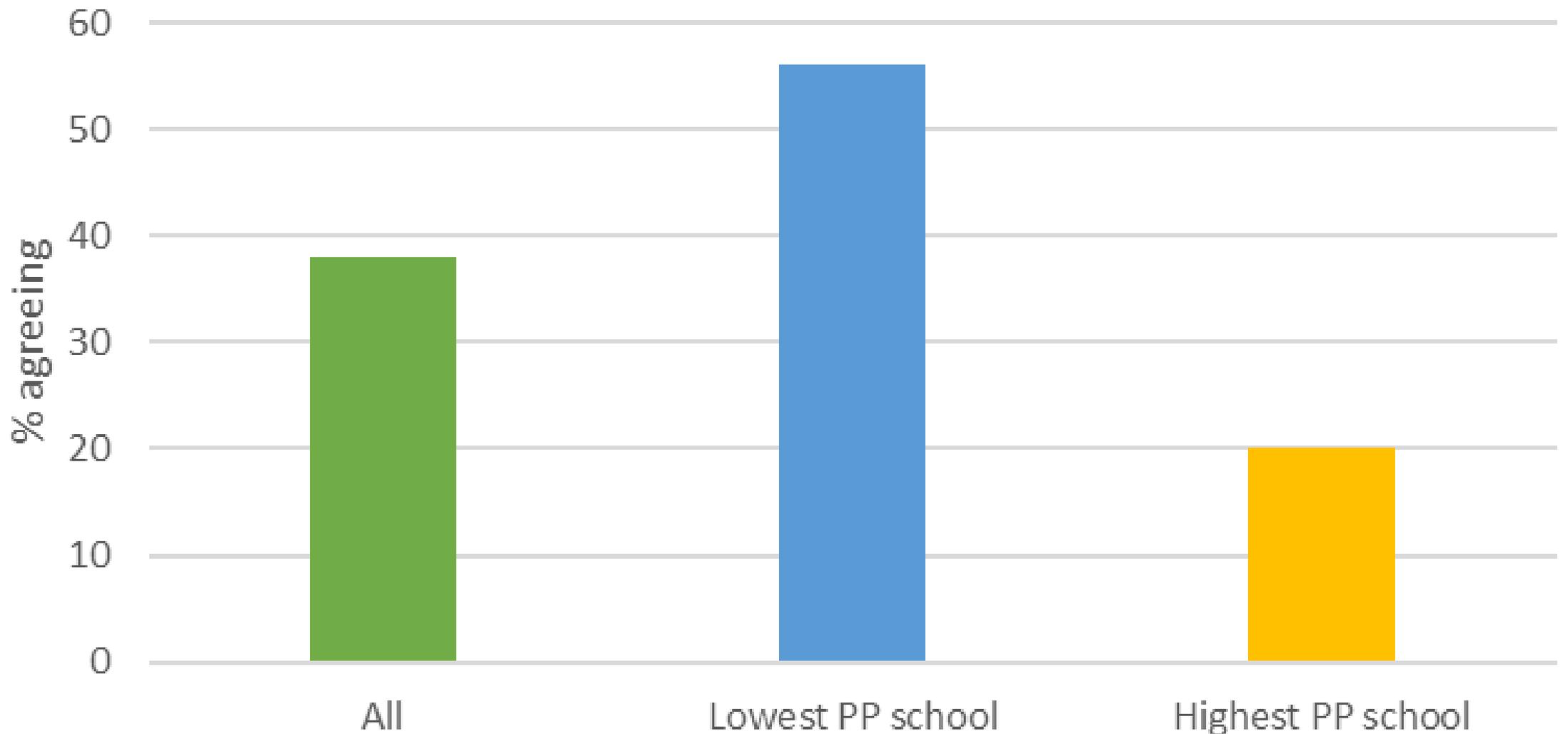
Has visited a university

Circumstances of visit may be a factor

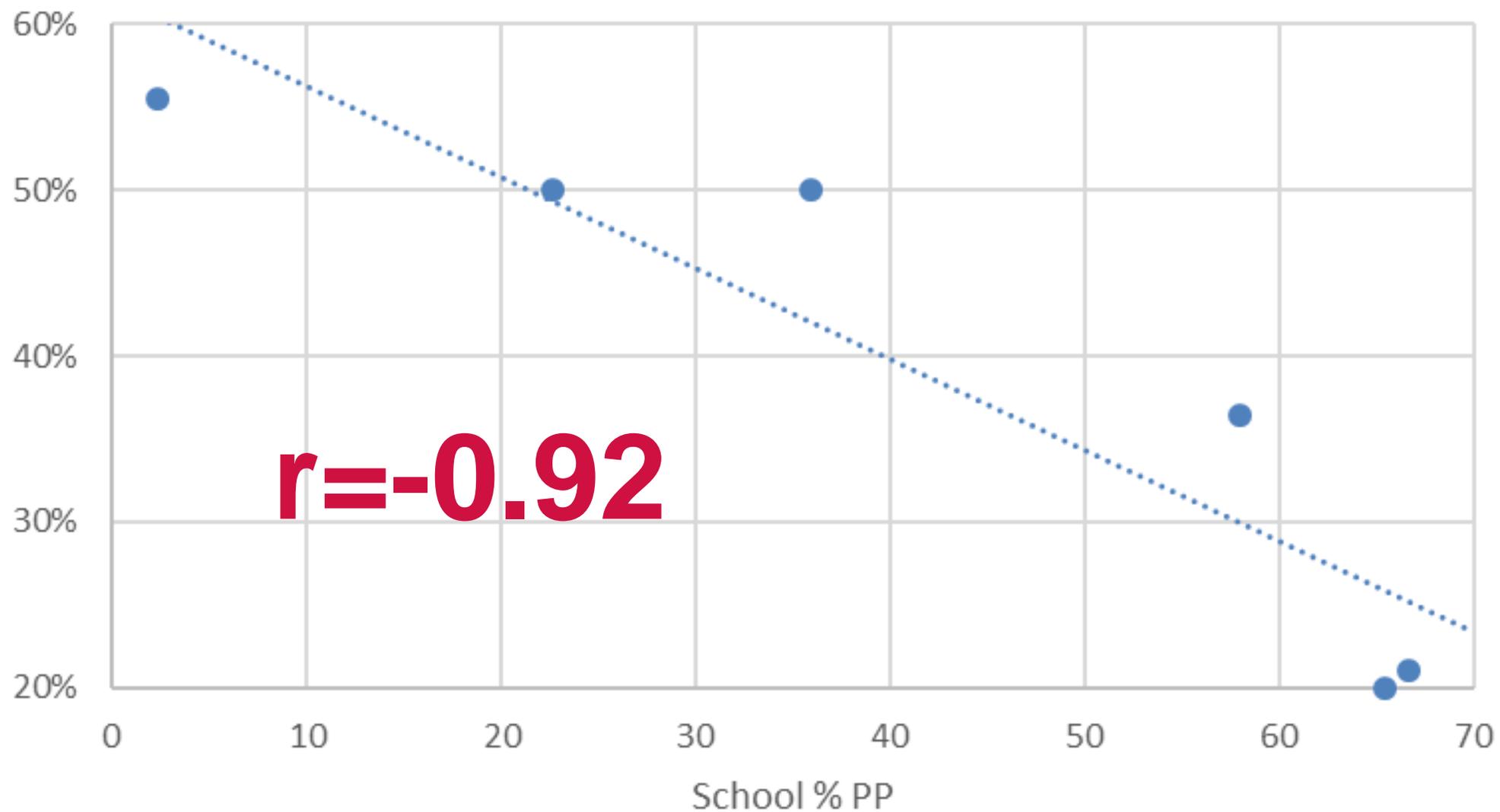
- Focus groups found a variety of types of visit:
 - Special events such as a primary school graduation ceremony;
 - Educational events, eg a science workshop;
 - Because a parent or sibling was a student;
 - Because a parent was an academic.
- In our high-SES group, pupils reported visiting multiple universities, including those in other regions of the country, with both parents and school.

More work needed!

Was the experience of visiting a university similar to what you were expecting?



% who agreed that university was similar to what they were expecting, by school



Ambient information collected (1)

Ambient information collected by participants was mainly about the scale of the university:

“I did not know what a university would like, it was really big!”

“I thought it was smaller because when we were outside it was smaller but when we came in it was bigger.”

“I thought it was going to be bigger.”

Ambient information (2)

Information was also collected about the learning environment and the people.

“All the chairs went up like a theatre or a cinema.”

“It was really big and all the people were very polite.”

“I thought there would be stool and classrooms.”

“I've always wanted to go university, I thought it was like school but since attending the festival I know its different.”

Conclusions - parents

- The experience of visiting a university for a non-recruitment event can positively impact parents' attitudes towards HE;
- This effect is stronger among parents from low-SES households;
- The visit made university seem more 'realistic' and 'accessible';
- Participants also gleaned new information about available subjects and courses.

Conclusions – young people

- Initial results suggest that having visited a university does not affect 10-11 year olds' likelihood of agreeing that uni is for 'people like me';
- However there is nuance around the type of visit experienced to be investigated;
- Pupils from high pupil premium schools were less likely to find a visit to a university matched their expectations;
- Young visitors gathered ambient information about the scale of a university, its facilities and people.

References

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