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Cash 'shaping students' choices'

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Students' choices of university courses are being shaped by money rather than personal interest, a survey from the National Union of Students suggests.

It means more students are going to local universities where they can live at home - and more choose courses based on future earning prospects.

Only 28% are going to university for the "experience", while 44% are going to improve their earning power.

A large majority of students, 85%, are glad to have gone to university.

This survey of students' attitudes, based on interviews with more than 3,000 students, shows a high level of satisfaction with university life and the quality of teaching.

Living at home

But it reveals an experience of university life that is sharply aware of the cost and likely rewards.

There are 46% of students working during term time - with 45% of these saying that it has a negative impact on their studies.

There are 3% of working students with jobs that last more than 33 hours per week.

The survey suggests that choosing a university is often not a case of pursuing a personal interest - especially for students from poorer backgrounds.

More than half of students from low-income families apply to a university based on its closeness to home, allowing them to save on accommodation costs.

Students going to prestigious Russell Group universities, seem to be more motivated by the reputation of the university rather than the individual subject.

But for students at new post-1992 universities, the motivation is more likely to be the prospect of improved earning power from studying a particular course, with less attention paid to the institution.

NUS president Wes Streeting welcomed the finding that students were glad to have attended university.

"However, we are concerned that opportunities for poorer students remain restricted.

"Fees and spiralling living costs are forcing those from poorer backgrounds to choose a university close to home - this has to be taken into account in the forthcoming review of higher education funding," said Mr Streeting.

Sally Hunt, general secretary of the University and College Union, also highlighted that students from poorer families had less choice if financial pressures obliged them to go to a university near to where



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