

How to attract first-generation students for a doctorate

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Harriet Coombs

Background



Identify as first-generation (ish)



Authored the HEPI report 'First-in-Family Students'



Now a Trustee and Board Member of the Private Education Policy Forum

First-in-Family Students

How useful is the category of 'first-in-family' for widening participation in higher education?

First-in-Family Students

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Higher Education Policy Institute

HEPI Report 146

Key takeaways

- Most university students in the UK can be classified as 'first-in-family'
- Too much weight has been on FiF status as a measure of disadvantage
- Despite this, on many issues, there are notable differences between FiF students and other students
- The FiF problem is about fair access rather than widening participation





How can universities actively recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds?

Demystifying contextual admissions



- Complexities in admissions make the system hard to navigate and alienating for some students
- Some students aren't aware of the policies they may benefit from

Engaging parents



- Most universities do not provide specific outreach activities for parents
- Families are key drivers for young people's ambitions
- Continuing generation students tend to approach university with more 'certainty' than FiF students

Mentoring



- FiF students report finding transitions challenging
- Student mentors can provide a familiar and regular point of contact and an opportunity to ask 'stupid' questions

Re-entry



- FiF students are more likely to interrupt their studies
- The system needs to be more flexible and facilitate easier routes to re-entry

Conclusions

- Many FiF students succeed in making it to high-status universities
- On average, they are more likely than their peers to drop out and often face challenging transitions to higher education
- Universities could adopt policies to provide more support for FiF students