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APPLICATIONS TO VOCATIONAL UNIVERSITY COURSES RISE BY OVER A QUARTER AFTER PARENTAL PRESSURE TO MAXIMISE EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

- 26% increase in applications to vocational courses from 2007-12, compared to 6% for non-vocational subjects
- Increased tuition fees lead half of parents (48%) to encourage their children to study a vocational course or consider other options

Applications to vocational university courses such as engineering have risen 26% in the past five years compared to 6% for non-vocational courses, according to analysis by HSBC¹. Research also found that parents ranked vocational courses and sciences most highly for graduate employment prospects. A fifth (21%) of parents who plan to advise their children on university courses will encourage them to study vocational courses following the rise in tuition fees.

Vocational courses most popular with parents and students

When it comes to graduate employment prospects, vocational degree courses are the most popular amongst parents with 68% preferring Medicine. Engineering is also perceived by half of parents (49%) as highly likely to lead to employment. UCAS applications follow a similar trend, with subjects such as nursing (+93%), engineering (+17%) and medicine (+12%) seeing a boost from 2007-12.

Which degree course offers the best graduate employment prospects?	Parents choice%	UCAS applications 2007-2012
Medicine	61%	+12%
Engineering	49%	+17%
Management or business studies	29%	+9%
Nursing	25%	+93%
Chemistry	16%	+13%
Modern languages	14%	-13%
English	13%	-11%
History	4%	-5%
Film Studies	2%	+1%
Art	1%	+9%

Traditional non-vocational subjects haven't fared so well, with only 4% of parents expecting a history degree to be amongst the best graduate employment prospects, and UCAS applications in this subject down 5%. Although 14% of parents believe a modern languages degree will lead to employment after university, applications to this course have suffered a 13% drop over five years, with English suffering a similar fate (-11%).

The popularity of vocational courses amongst parents comes despite the fact that more parents studied non-vocational courses at university themselves (53%) rather than a vocational subject (47%).

Parental influence

Over two thirds of parents (68%) describe their advice as influential on their children's educational choices, with over one in ten (13%) stating their advice is 'very influential'. Just 4% believe their advice has no sway with their children whatsoever.

Specific to the introduction of higher tuition fees, almost half of parents (48%) agree that the increased fees have influenced the advice they give to their children on university choices. Of those who agreed it did have an impact, half (49%) recommended that their children live at home and go to a local university instead. Almost a third (30%) suggested considering alternative education such as professional qualifications, while an additional 21% advised their children to study a vocational subject in order to better their chances of finding a job after university.

Anne-Marie Koukourava, Head of Wealth for HSBC in the UK commented:

"The combination of challenging employment prospects for young people with the introduction of higher education fees appears to have been the catalyst for a swing towards vocational university courses, which are seen as a safer investment in terms of graduate job opportunities. HSBC's recent Saving for Students² study found nine in ten parents intend to contribute to some extent to their children's higher education costs. So it is unsurprising that parents' recommendations are leaning towards courses which they believe have the best long term return on investment in the form of graduate roles.

"It is important to consider both the outcome of university study and the practicality of funding it. Sitting down with children to explain the financial implications of further study is an important step. Planning early and regularly saving by parents will make the financial burden of supporting children through university much easier to manage."

HSBC's 2013 Global Education³ research found that eight major countries are cheaper than the UK for English students to study in. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different tuition fee charging structures for their own students. The average cost of living and tuition fees in the UK (for English students) add up to £15,740, over £11,500 more than Germany, the cheapest university destination. Perhaps as a result, a quarter of parents would consider overseas study for their child.

	Cost of Living	Fees	Total
Australia	£8,701	£16,804	£25,505
USA	£6,939	£16,705	£23,644
UAE	£3,976	£14,153	£18,129
Canada	£4,991	£12,234	£17,225
Singapore	£6,200	£9,857	£16,057
UK	£6,851	£8,889	£15,740
Hong Kong	£6,133	£8,730	£14,863
Japan	£8,372	£4,319	£12,691
Russia	£4,178	£2,073	£6,251

China	£3,167	£2,637	£5,804
Taiwan	£3,302	£2,165	£5,467
Spain	£3,976	£663	£4,639
Germany	£3,741	£420	£4,161

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References

¹UCAS application data 2007-2012 <http://www.ucas.com/data-analysis/>

²HSBC Saving for Students Research (July 2012)

³HSBC Global Education Research (July 2013)

Notes to editors

Methodology for cost of living and university fees:

Fees represent the average tuition cost for international students based on the top 10 largest institutions in each relevant country (sourced from individual institution data).

Cost of living sourced from HESA Global Education Rankings 2010 where possible and adjusted to account for domestic inflation and from Expatistan.co.uk and HSBC Studying Abroad Research (Oct 2012) otherwise.

US Dollar conversion exchange rate as at 17th July 2013 – 1.51 USD to GBP.

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