Students’ pathways through Higher Education in the United Kingdom and Spain: a comparative analysis

Albert Sanchez-Gelabert
Grup de Recerca en Educació i Treball
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Workshop Warwick Institute for Employment Research
University of Warwick – 2nd of December 2014

This report was undertaken with the support of the IER and the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU)
Main objectives

• Explore undergraduate participation in Higher Education with special attention to students who leave their studies

• Analyze the relationship between pre-university variables and students’ participation in higher education

• Compare patterns of attendance in Spain and the United Kingdom
General model of analysis

Pre-university characteristics
- Gender
- Age
- Ethnic group
- Parental degree
- SES
- Motivation
- Priority
- Information

Patterns of HE attendance
- HEI
- Course length
- Field of study
- Persistence
- Dropout

Occupational status
- SOC(HE)
- Current activity
 Dropout rates

• Non-continuation rates in England shows (HEFCE, 2013):
  – Entrants who left HE during the first year has remained steady since 2005-06 around (8.2%)
  – Entrants transferring to another HEI remained steady until 2009-10 around 2%.

• Drop out rates in Higher Education in Spain:
  – 30-50% (Latiesa, CIDE, Cabrera)
  – Around 30% (Triadó, Gairín)
  – 5-7% (CRUE – Dean’s association)

• Lack of homogeneity in the definition of the phenomena leads to a difficulty of quantification in the Spanish case
  – Variety of meanings given to the term dropout
Dropout: a matter of definition

• Conceptualization (Tinto, 1975)
  – Leaving university or leaving course (or both)
  – Temporary/definitive dropout
  – Post-dropout situation (studying/working/unemployed)
  – Voluntary dropout

• Longitudinal approach (GRET-UAB)

• Methodological individualism (Boudon, Gambetta)
  – Theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen)
    • Behavioural, normative and control believes.
University pathway: general main scheme
Longitudinal Databases

- Survey on the Transition from Education / Training to Labour Market Insertion (STETLMI-2005)
  - Graduates in Bachillerato and CFGS (VET) in 2000 (records for the next 5 years)
  - Pattern of five digits represents their pathway
    (11111 = persistence | 12222 = transfer | 11333 = HE dropout | 13311 = stopout...)

Longitudinal Databases (II)

• Futuretrack
  – Students who applied to university through UCAS in 2005-06 for a full-time in a UK HEI.
  
  – University pathways in Futuretrack: all waves
    » Wave 4. Which of the following applies to you now?
      • completed an UG or currently UG; completed UG and PG; not completed UG
    » Wave 3 and 2: 2 questions were analysed
      • 1. Which of the following applies to you now?
        • Registered same course; different course; not registered.
        • 2. Which of the following most closely describes your participation in higher education since 2006?
          • Leave before completing my course; completed the course.
University pathways: Joining samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University pathway W4</th>
<th>UNI pathway W4+W3</th>
<th>UNI pathway W4+W3+W2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence PG</td>
<td>4802   28.8%</td>
<td>Persistence PG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>11216  67.3%</td>
<td>Persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>639     3.8%</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W4</strong></td>
<td><strong>16657</strong> 100%</td>
<td>Dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>missing</td>
<td>123235</td>
<td>W4 + W3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total FT</td>
<td>139892</td>
<td>missing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**wave 3***

| Persistence           | 15081             |
| Dropout               | 356               |
| Transfer              | 1617             |
| **W3**                | **17054**         |

**January-July 2009/2010**

**wave 2**

| Persistence           | 18229             |
| Dropout               | 700               |
| Deferred              | 3868             |
| Transfer              | 1668             |
| **W2**                | **24465**         |

**June-December 2007**

W4 + W3 + W2: 54308 100%

Missing:
- W4 + W3: 33711 100%
- W4 + W3 + W2: 85584 100%
University pathways: a comparative analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Pathways</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>SP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence PG</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Futuretrack and STETLMI-2005 analysis (weighted)

- Persistence = 80% in the Spanish sample and more than 90% (91.2%) in the UK
- Dropout in Spain is more than the double than in UK (4.1% vs 9.9%)
- Transfer pathway is less than 5% in the UK while it represents more than 10% in the Spanish population
General model of analysis

Pre-university characteristics
- Gender
- Age
- Ethnic group
- Parental degree
- SES
- Motivation
- Priority
- Information

University pathway
- HEI
- Course length
- Field of study
- Persistence PG
- Persistence
- Transfer
- Dropout

Occupational status
- SOC(HE)
- Current activity
Main characteristics: empirical findings

**Sociodemographics**
- Gender (Fita et al.; Salvador; Infestas)
- Age (Hovdhaugen; Corominas; Lassibille y Navarro)
- Parental level of education (Lehmann, Latiesa)
- Socioeconomic status (Pascarella, Cabrera)

**Individual factors**
- Motivation (Masjuan, Bernstein)
- Priority/Clear (Pascarella and Terenzini, Lonka et al)
- Information

**Educational previous experiences**
- Access route (Corominas; Villar)
- Previous grades (Latiesa, Bethencourt)

**External factors**
- Working while studying (Vickers et al; Hovdhaugen; Cabrera et al.; Stratton et al.)

**Organizational**
- Field of study (Latiesa, Cabrera)
- Length of the course (short/long) (Cabrera)
- Higher Education Institution
Bivariate analysis: characteristics of UK pathways

• Persistence to Postgraduate
  – Male and young
  – Highest tariff university
  – Longest degrees (4 and more than 4 year UG degree) and in the fields of Biology, Vet Sci, Agr & related, STEM, Social and Educational Science, Economic and Juridical Science, Humanities, Other (interdis.)
  – Highest economic and educational familiar background (Managerial and professional occupations and at least one parent with a degree) and Family as a source of information
  – “working during term time” or doing both “paid and unpaid work”
  – Mainly with expressive motivation and with a clear idea of the future occupational itinerary
Bivariate analysis: characteristics of UK pathways

• Persistence
  – Female and 19 and over
  – Non Highest tariff university and mainly related to 3-year UG degree. Related to Health Sciences, Social and Educational Science and Economic and Juridical Science
  – Lowest economic and educational familiar background (Intermediate occupations & Routine and manual occupations and with none of their parents with a degree) and report that family and guidance were important in applying to university.
  – Related to “unpaid and paid Work”
  – Related to not clear idea of the future occupational itinerary but related to professional motivations
Bivariate analysis: characteristics of UK pathways

• Transfer
  – Male and younger students (18 and under)
  – Lowest tariff university and related to 4-year UG degree and Other (FD, HND, DipHE) and Economic and Juridical Science and STEM
  – Lowest SES but highest parental level of education
  – “Difficulties & more help needed” and “Website” as a source of information when they applied
  – Not working: neither paid or unpaid work
  – Not clear idea of the occupational itinerary and expressive and instrumental motivations
Bivariate analysis: characteristics of UK pathways

• Dropout
  – Lowest tariff university and related to short degrees in STEM, mainly
  – Male and older than 18 and related to lowest SES and parental level of education
  – Source of information/advice when applying to university: not related to family support/advice
  – Not working: neither paid or unpaid work
  – Not clear idea and professional motivations
General model of analysis

Pre-university characteristics
- Gender
- Age
- Ethnic group
- Parental degree
- SES
- Motivation
- Priority
- Information

University pathway
- HEI
- Course length
- Field of study

Persistence PG
Persistence
Transfer
Dropout

Occupational status
- SOC(HE)
- Current activity
University dropout: occupational consequences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University pathways</th>
<th>Persist. PG</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Dropout</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>39,0%</td>
<td>71,9%</td>
<td>61,1%</td>
<td>62,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>2,7%</td>
<td>5,5%</td>
<td>9,7%</td>
<td>4,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>45,1%</td>
<td>9,6%</td>
<td>7,6%</td>
<td>19,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed and looking for work</td>
<td>11,4%</td>
<td>10,8%</td>
<td>15,1%</td>
<td>11,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0,6%</td>
<td>0,8%</td>
<td>2,0%</td>
<td>0,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not looking for work</td>
<td>0,3%</td>
<td>0,9%</td>
<td>3,7%</td>
<td>0,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid work</td>
<td>1,0%</td>
<td>0,6%</td>
<td>0,8%</td>
<td>0,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100,0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100,0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100,0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100,0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p ≤ 0,01 chi-square test

Although most of the students who dropout are employees (61,1%), dropout pathways are more related to precarious status ("unemployment", "unpaid work", "not looking for a job", "other")
University pathways and occupational status

Students with dropout experiences at university are overrepresented in “Non-graduate” occupations (SOC(HE)).
Conclusions

- Relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and university pathways: gender and age
- Individual factors: clear idea and motivations
- The importance of the family: as an economic and cultural background and as a source of information/advice

- Dropout or transfer: similar characteristics
  - Small differences: age, parental level of education and motivations.
- Persistence and Persistence to PG: big differences
  - Socio-demographic (age, gender), individual (motivational), organizational (HEI, course length), familiar background

- Impact of university pathways on occupational status. Dropout related to non-graduate occupations and precarious situations
Thank you for listening...

albert.sanchez@uab.cat
Results: University pathways

Spain

University pathways for the period 2000-2005 – Graduates in *Bachillerato* and *CFGS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop-out</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE dropouts</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop out</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: STETLMI-2005 analysis (weighted)*

United Kingdom

University pathways students who applied to university through UCAS in 2005-06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence PG</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop out</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Futuretrack analysis (weighted)*
University pathways: Similarities to the Spanish context

• Persistence
  – Women, young, with at least one parent with a degree, courses in Health Science and Social and Educational Science.

• Transfer
  – Male, young, higher educated parents, instrumental motivations, not working (paid or unpaid), in STEM degrees

• Dropout
  – Male 19 and over, professional motivations, short course, neither parent has a degree, in STEM degrees
Motivations

What was your MAIN reason for choosing your particular course of study?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item questionnaire Futuretrack</th>
<th>Motivations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get good grades in subjects related to the course</td>
<td>Expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy studying the subject</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in the content of the course</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to spend part of the course abroad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modular course, keeps options open</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enables me to qualify for another course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will lead to good employment opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need the course to enter particular profession</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had difficulty deciding, was a reasonable option</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was advised that the course would be appropriate for me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Previous information

*In deciding to apply for a higher education course, how far do you agree with the following statements?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item questionnaire Futuretrack</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I had access to all the information I required about higher education courses</em></td>
<td>Had all information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have had excellent careers guidance</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/lecturers were very helpful to me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers guidance provided at my school/college was very helpful to me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends influenced my choice(s)</td>
<td>Difficulties &amp; more help needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I needed more help and advice in choosing which course to study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found it difficult to choose course(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found the UCAS website easy to use</td>
<td>Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/college websites and prospectuses were helpful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family were very supportive in my choice of course</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen)

- **Dimension**
  - motivation
  - priority
  - moral norm
  - social norm
  - educational
  - integration
  - relational
  - familiar
  - economical

- **Beliefs**
  - Behavioral beliefs
  - Normatives beliefs
  - Control beliefs

- **Intention**
  - Attitude toward the behavior
  - Subjective Norm

- **Action**
  - Behavior
  - Actual Behavioral control
University pathways

Three [or four] main pathways:

• **Persistence**: remain or graduated on the same course they started.

• **Persistence to PG**: students registered on a postgraduate course.

• **Transfer**: registered on a different course to the one they started.

• **Dropout**: leave higher education before completing their course.