

Objective

Institutional financial supports to students who may be from low income households or experiencing some financial hardship could be said to possess the propensity to enable them to participate in higher education on a somewhat equal basis like their affluent peers (McCaig et al., 2016). The question as to whether these bursaries are serving the intended purpose of widening opportunities for higher education access, retention, wellbeing and success needs a close examination.

Methodology

An instrumental case study was adopted for the project. This is because this type of approach has been shown to help understanding of a broader subject (Yin, 2013) such as the impact of institutional financial support on students accessing and succeeding in Higher Education.

The different bursary types investigated include Maintenance Bursary, Hardship Fund and Care Leavers Bursary.

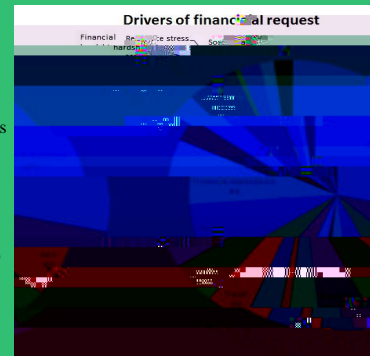
In order to deliver a comprehensive data for a reliable outcome, a mixed methods approach was used comprising of qualitative and quantitative methods. A reviewed commission by OFFA asserts that institutions that have used a mixed methods approach to ascertain the impact of their financial support had a rich source of information that can enable a better understanding (Nursaw Associates, 2015).

In the case of the project, instruments of the mixed methods approach consist of an online Bristol Survey (BOS) and in-depth semi-

Analysis and preliminary findings

The survey captured a broad range of data including open ended text responses which are rich in content. The in-depth qualitative data embedded in the survey is currently being analysed thematically (Boyatzis, 1998) and the following emerging findings which form part of this snapshot progress report can be advanced.

Out of the several responses on reasons for requesting financial support, the most recurrent theme was the need for financial assistance. However, many of the students went on to identify more specific motives for requesting financial assistance such as low family income and the need to afford food, rents or pay bills as illustrated:

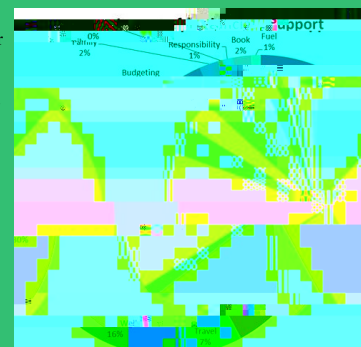


Some quotations from participants illustrating some of the reasons for seeking financial assistance

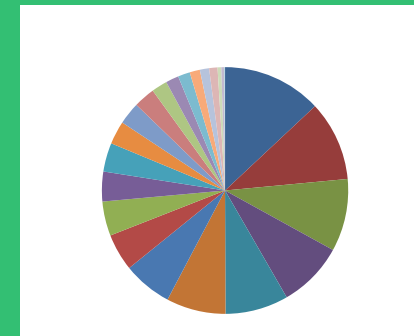
Whilst participants had different motives for requesting financial support, it was useful to investigate the actual impact financial support or bursary had on their studies or university life.

In this light and when asked to state how the financial support or bursary helped them, the most recurrent theme was **financial security** as evident.

According to several of the respondents, financial aid from the university enabled them to be financially secured. That is, they could focus on their studies without the worry and stress that comes with inability to pay rents or bills.



Participants perception of the effect of not receiving financial support was also evident



A majority of the participants suggested that if they had not received financial support, they ~~would have~~ incurred debts and this was followed closely by a significant number who asserted they would have dropped out as illustrated.

The most recurrent findings revealed here have commonalities. For instance, it can be maintained that the need for financial assistance as a motivating factor for students requesting support is directly related to having financial security if provided with the relevant

support. Furthermore, students' lack of financial security could lead to them incurring debts which could have adverse repercussions on their studies.