

**SUTTON TRUST
NEWS RELEASE**

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**POOR STUDENTS HAVE LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF BURSARIES
ON OFFER**

Many students from poor backgrounds are being put off university because they are afraid of getting into debt and very few of them know about bursaries or maintenance grants on offer, according to a report by Staffordshire University published today.

The report was commissioned by the Sutton Trust, which seeks to improve social mobility by providing educational opportunities for young people from non-privileged backgrounds.

Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Trust, said: "This report shows there is a general ignorance, especially among poorer students, of the financial support packages on offer. Government, schools and colleges should take note. Young people need better information on the complex system of bursaries and grants, and this needs to be provided before they have made their higher education choices. Simple steps like these could have a big impact.

The report also finds that concerns about debt are deterring certain groups of young people from going on to higher education and influencing their decision to choose a local university rather than one further afield."

The researchers from the university's Institute of Educational Policy Research and Institute for Access Studies, received replies from 1,628 students aged 17-18 from 20 schools.

They found that a majority of students (59%) who had decided not to pursue study in higher education reported that avoiding debt had affected their decision ‘much’ or ‘very much’.

More than half (56%) of all the students surveyed who were thinking of going into higher education were considering a local university because of the financial implications. This is a much higher proportion than in previous surveys (14% in 1995/6 and 18% in 1998/9), but this may be because the survey concentrated on two large urban areas. The researchers found that students from homes with an annual income below £35,000 were more likely to consider a local university.

But the report found that although most students understood exactly what was meant by bursaries, only a small minority (30%) had actively searched for information on financial support. Almost half (45%) did not know whether they were eligible or not. Had they known that they were eligible for a bursary of £2,000 nearly 85% of those from low income homes said it would have encouraged them to apply.

Students who were expecting high examination grades were more likely to be informed about the existence of bursaries, but even these students had a ‘patchy knowledge’ of their eligibility for them at the universities to which they had applied.

The researchers found that information provided by schools tended to focus more on money management while at university and information on financial support came too late to affect their decision or whether or not to apply to university.

Knowing Where to Study? Fees, Bursaries and Fair Access by Peter Davies, Kim Slack, Amanda Hughes, Jean Mangan and Katy Vigurs, Institute for Educational Policy Research and Institute for Access Studies, is available on www.suttontrust.com.

The Sutton Trust is a charity founded in 1997 by Sir Peter Lampl with the aim of providing educational opportunities for young people from non-privileged backgrounds and improving social mobility. The activities of the Trust are aimed at helping children to reach their potential, by raising both their aspirations and academic achievement. It funds a wide range of research and projects covering parenting and early years, schools, universities and access to the professions.

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