

# Parental Education, Social Class Background and Belonging at Durham

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Summer 1 Research Report

## Introduction

This research project seeks to explore Durham University students' reflections on their experiences of inclusion and belonging at the end of their first year studying at the University. These experiences will be compared against students' demographic backgrounds, with a particular focus on their social class backgrounds and levels of parental education. These experiences will be stratified by this study's exploration of how students have felt they fitted into both departments and colleges, as well as the wider university. Universities are widely acknowledged to be important sites for social mobility, and achieving a degree is traditionally seen as the defining way into a professional career, particularly for students from lower social class backgrounds. Attending an elite university, such as a Russell Group institution, can make this even more likely: graduates from prestigious universities are 'more likely to secure professional and managerial jobs and to earn higher salaries' (Chevalier and Conlon, 2003). Perhaps in recognition of their important role in society, Universities in the past few decades have made significant efforts to recruit more students from demographic backgrounds traditionally underrepresented at university, including those from low-income areas or who are the first in their family to attend university. For example, Durham University has a Contextual Offer Scheme as part of its widening participation and fair access strategy, wherein applicants can receive a lower offer (i.e. reduced academic entry requirements) if they meet categories such as live in a postcode area with traditionally low university attendance, or are in receipt of free school meals.

Initiatives such as the Contextual Offer Scheme therefore aim to increase accessibility to University for students from underrepresented. However, even after they have achieved a place, university can still pose unique challenges for students from non-traditional backgrounds, such as those who are the first in their family to attend university as well as those from working-class households. Large-scale longitudinal studies conducted across the UK have illustrated that first generation students have higher drop-out rates and often struggle to achieve the highest grades at university (Henderson *et al.*, 2020).

The differential experiences of 'non-traditional' students at university has been explained in terms of Bourdieu's concepts of social capital and cultural capital. According to Bourdieu's (1984) typology, the capital an individual can inherit from their parents includes not only economic assets like property, but also social capital such as networks and a shared sense of identity, as well as cultural capital (i.e. hobbies, interests and tastes). These forms of capital, in addition to economic capital, distinguish an individual as belonging to a certain class. To apply this to the setting of the university, if middle-class parents pass on cultural and social capital (e.g. networks of their parents' friends' children or interests in high-brow topics like art and literature) to their middle-class children which align with the values of the middle-class universities, we could assume middle-class university students will feel comfortable in their identity and feel a stronger sense of belonging to the university. On the flip side, students from 'non-traditional' i.e. working class and non-graduate families may not have acquired this cultural and social capital from their parents and thus may feel a distance from their middle-class peers and institution, which can provide explanation for 'non-traditional' students' educational experiences. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *habitus* argues that cultural and social capital passed from parent to child can lead to an embodied *habitus*, comfort, in certain physical spaces such as a university for those who acquire the 'right' cultural or social capital; and discomfort for those who do not.

Reay *et al.* (2009) utilised Bourdieu's concept of social and economic capital and the related concept of *habitus*, in order to understand working-class students' sense of belonging to university and their identity as a student. A key area of Reay *et al.*'s (2009) study involved an exploration of the potentially difficult and damaging 'identity work' involved in attending university, a middle-class institution, as a working-class individual. An individual having the apparently-contradictory identities of 'university student' and 'working-class' can lead to conflict, and not feeling like they belong fully to one identity or the other.

Sociological studies of student identity and belonging in non-traditional students therefore utilise Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital in order to understand differential educational experiences. This study aims to understand belonging, identity and students' interpretations of inclusion at Durham University. Should this study discover a link between belonging and fitting into Durham University and students' levels of parental education or social class background, this raises an important issue which could have a significant impact on the performance of a key demographic Durham University seeks to recruit. This has implications for nationwide issues such as the role university plays in limiting or enabling social mobility in the UK, but also practical issues such as what support should be provided, and how it can be organised effectively at Durham University.

### Why inclusion at Durham?

The research was conducted at Durham University in July 2021. Durham was identified as a particular site of interest due to its aims to incorporate students from non-traditional backgrounds through initiatives such as Contextual Offers. However, despite these initiatives, Durham still has the sixth lowest state-school intake in England (Hindle *et al.* 2021). As students from working-class and non-graduate backgrounds are less likely to attend Russell Group or 'elite' universities (Reay *et al.*, 2009), these students' experiences at Durham, a Russell Group University which can be described as England's 'third' university behind Oxford and Cambridge, are of particular interest. Here, we can see the struggles non-traditional students may face at a traditional and elite institution, in contrast to their middle-class peers who may have more of an understanding of how the institution works and avenues for support due to the cultural and social capital they possess. A second reason Durham was located as an area of interest for this study is its distinctive position as a collegiate university. While collegiate universities purport to create a close-knit atmosphere, colleges may represent a place one can witness Bourdieu's (1984) *habitus*: how cultural capital is embodied through successful navigation of environments, for example, an individual's comfort walking around an elite institution such as a Russell Group University may stem from previous experiences of navigating similar environments such as elite private schools. Collegiate traditions such as gowned formal dining and other rituals, may be a more comfortable environment for those students whose graduate parents have been through these traditions themselves, or to students who attended elite private schools with similar traditions before coming to Durham.

### Research Questions

This project sets out to answer the following research questions:

Do first generation students at Durham University see their university as an inclusive place?  
Do first generation students feel a sense of belonging to their university?  
Do first generation students feel a sense of belonging to their academic department?  
Do first generation students feel a sense of belonging to their colleges?  
Are first generation students at Durham University less likely than students from more advantaged backgrounds to experience feelings of inclusion and belonging?  
If Durham University students from first generation backgrounds are less likely to experience feelings of inclusion and belonging, can this be explained by the social and cultural capital they possess?

## Literature Review

The sociological interest in studying the experiences of first in the family and working-class students as a specific demographic has increased in line with these students' increase in numbers in UK universities, due in part to changes in the university structure which has occurred over the past few decades. Boliver (2011) highlights two key pieces of UK legislation in the 1980s and 90s which changed the higher education structure in the country. The Education Reform Act (1988) gave polytechnics independence from local authorities (Boliver, 2011). Secondly, the Further and Higher Education Act (1998) upgraded polytechnic universities to 'new' universities (Boliver, 2011). These acts, along with a 'political commitment to higher education expansion' increased university attendance exponentially (Boliver, 2011). These structural changes to the face of the UK higher education system resulted in not only a massive increase in enrolment in general, but also an increase in university attendance from students from non-traditional backgrounds. UCAS (2016) reported that the participation rate for students from lower-income backgrounds increased proportionally by almost 80%, and Henderson *et al.* (2020) discovered that by age 25, those who were the first in their family to attend university make up 18% of graduates. These increases in representation, and initiatives which have helped this, such as Durham's Widening Participation Scheme, may encourage the belief that this demographic is strongly represented in UK universities and is growing. However, it is key to note that although this demographic is growing, studies have shown that these demographics tend to attend different institutions, for example they often attend universities closer to home (Holdsworth 2006), and are more likely to be at former polytechnics rather than pre-1992 or Russell Group institutions (Reay *et al.*, 2009). Studies have also shown that first generation/working class students are more likely to experience 'setbacks in their learning' such as academic difficulties with the independent nature of learning at university and feeling as though they were behind their peers from more advantaged backgrounds (Hindle *et al.*, 2021).

Sociological studies have explored these 'setbacks' first generation students experienced at university through longitudinal studies, which use large-scale national datasets such as Next Steps to compare these students' academic performance against peers with graduate parents. Students from first generation backgrounds, it was discovered, were more likely to drop out before completing their course, with a drop out rate four percentage points higher than that for comparable peers from graduate backgrounds (Henderson *et al.*, 2020). Other studies sought to explain this performance gap through looking at not just academic success, but also students' engagement with their course and student experiences, drawing

on their feelings of wellbeing, belonging and identity (see for example Thomas and Quinn, 2007). Studies such as Byrom and Lightfoot (2012) and Reay *et al.* (2009) hypothesise that higher drop-out rates may be the result of a crisis of identity and lack of resources to handle what are predominantly middle-class institutions, utilising Bourdieuan concepts of *habitus* and exploring social and cultural capital. This area of sociological study therefore has the potential to not just establish the ways in which these students appear to perform worse than their middle-class or graduate peers, but *why* this may be.

A final challenge which emerged through the literature is the difficulty of defining a first generation student. Traditionally it is understood as a university student whose parents did not attend university. There are grey areas within the category of 'first generation' student, for example, a student whose uncle or sister attended university may or may not be considered a first generation university student. Although this student did not acquire the necessary cultural or social capital to excel at university from their parents, they could have acquired it from these close family members. Another common issue with defining a first generation student is oversimplifying the 'complex interrelationship' Thomas and Quinn (2007) identified between a students' parental education level and their social class. For example, first generation students may be conflated with students from working-class or less advantageous social class backgrounds. While it may be tempting to consider parental education and parental occupation backgrounds as inherently linked, the connection between a university degree and more advantageous social class backgrounds is not set in stone. Therefore, a first generation student does not necessarily equate to working class student. There are similar definitional struggles in determining an individual's class background.

Similarly, there is often a wide chasm between an individual's self-described social class and their social class as measured by occupational categories. The conflict between self-described class and where individuals fit on an occupational measure can be even more complex when the data asks for students' descriptions of their parents' social class background. Rubin *et al.*, (2014) distinguishes between *socioeconomic status*, which they described as one's current social and economic situation, and *social class*, which they describe as an individual's sociocultural background. In this typology, this research is most interested in students' parental socioeconomic status, therefore self-defined measures of social class will not be utilised as measures of social class background.

In order to combat some of these definitional issues, this research asked students to describe their parents' level of education using standard UK educational qualifications, and their parental socioeconomic status in a separate question using the NS-SEC categories of professions.

## Methodology

A social survey was designed using Google Forms, consisting of a range of demographic questions to ascertain key details about students' self-reported social class, educational and parental backgrounds, followed by questions about their direct experiences of and perception of inclusion/exclusion and belonging/non-belonging at Durham University using an opinion scale (see Appendix A).

Parental education was measured by two separate survey questions, which asked the highest level of educational qualification achieved by the students' mother/female guardian, and then the father/male guardian. Parental education was measured in this way to assess differences between parental education between male and female guardians, and to improve the level of accuracy of the students' responses, which may prevent mislabelling a students' level of parental education as non-graduate even though one of their parents has a degree. However, one issue with this question wording is that it may exclude students who do not come from a heteronormative mother and father household. The impacts of this were mitigated by using the term 'mother/female guardian' and 'father/male guardian', to account for differences in family makeup. In addition, there was a 'not applicable' option to encompass those students who did not identify themselves as having a parental figure of that gender: three students (3.8%) used this option for the father/male guardian question.

Students' social class background was also measured through two different questions, which ask how students would describe their mother/female guardian's and father/male guardian's professions. Despite the risks of separating out parental gender in this manner, particularly regarding excluding some students whose family makeup do not align with this heteronormative schema, the social class background questions in particular reveal the importance of this separation as the questions regarding male and female guardians. The NS-SEC occupational class schema was used as responses, with examples given to each category in case students were not sure what a certain occupation or band meant, see Fig. 1 for these categories. This analytical schema was used instead of self-description because the study does not seek to examine how the students self-identify with labels such as 'working-class' or 'middle-class', but to assess their social background via their parents' level of employment. This is in order to assess how their sense of belonging may be impacted by their social class background, answering to Bourdieu's theory that those belonging to the higher social classes pass on cultural and social capital to their children, which may result in them benefitting from education more or feeling more at home in often middle-class academic establishments. On the flip side, those from lower social classes may lack this cultural and social capital and so feel more alienated in often middle-class establishments such as Russell Group universities.

- How would you describe your mother/female guardian's profession?
- Higher Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. lawyer/medical doctor
  - Lower Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. teacher/nurse
  - Intermediate e.g. clerical worker/administrative assistant
  - Small Employers and Own Account Workers e.g. shopkeeper/taxi driver
  - Lower Supervisory and Technical e.g. mechanic/plumber
  - Semi-Routine Occupations e.g. receptionist/telephone salesworker
  - Routine Occupations e.g. cleaner/bus driver
  - Homemaker
  - Never worked/Long-term Unemployed
  - Not Applicable

Fig. 1 NS-SEC occupational class schema utilised by the occupation survey questions

Once the survey was drafted, a small pilot was conducted using a similar population to check there were no problems understanding the survey questions (using students at a different university). The survey was then advertised via several social media outlets including Facebook and LinkedIn, targeted specifically at the 2020-2023 intake. Popular general groups such as 'Overheard at Durham Uni' were also utilised as they were perceived as having the ability to reach many first-year students. While advertising via social media has the risk of introducing bias into the sample of students participating in the study, as it may exclude students from the population who do not use social media and over-represent those with the time and inclination to respond to the survey, this risk was mitigated by also contacting the Sociology department to advertise the survey via e-mail to the first-year cohort. The choice to primarily seek respondents via social media and e-mail was due to the survey taking place over summer break, when few students would be remaining in Durham to see posters or other forms of advertising. Secondly, as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the majority of first-years at Durham have engaged with their studies at Durham online, and as a result the role of social media and online platforms for students to share news/engage in conversations has been significantly expanded. An attempt was made to advertise the survey through college JCRs, however due to the necessary permissions required for advertising surveys to students within colleges, it was not possible to do this due to the scope and nature of the project (six weeks conducted during the summer break).

Ethical approval was sought and approved by the Sociology department at Durham University, wherein the ethical risks involved with such a survey were considered and mitigated. Some examples of the ethical issues considered were the need to explicitly outline at the outset that some of the questions related to the topic of student wellbeing and mental health, should these topics prove to be upsetting or difficult students were advised to not participate. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were also addressed, and students were assured full anonymity due to the nature of the survey.

## Results

### Participant demographics

78 first year Durham undergraduates provided responses to the survey. Of these responses, 61 (78.2%) described themselves as 'female', 14 (17.9%) 'male', and 3 (3.8%) 'non-binary or other'. The over-representation of female participants may be a result of the sampling strategy, which targeted social media pages and groups that were not aimed specifically at women students, but which may have had a larger female audience or more women students may check them more regularly. In addition, it has been argued that women in general have a higher likelihood of taking the time to participate in surveys than men. Porter and Whitcomb (2005) found that survey respondents from the cohort of a liberal arts college in the US were more likely to be women. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 29, with over half (64.1%) aged 19 and 71.8% aged 18-19. Most of the participants described their ethnicity as White (72 participants), with two respondents describing themselves as Indian, one Ghanaian-Indian, one Bangladeshi, and two of mixed ethnicity (White and Black Caribbean and White and Asian). The participants are spread amongst Durham's academic departments and colleges; however the largest proportion are from the Sociology department and Josephine Butler College. Despite an effort to reach out to university-wide groups and methods of advertising my survey, the majority of the groups accessible to me as a member were specific to my own college and course. Due to the issues of timing, as it

took a while in some cases for group membership to be approved during the summer vacation, and issues with acquiring permissions to advertise my survey within multiple colleges via the JCR, these were represented more strongly than other subjects or colleges. Another reason for this may be that the subject matter of the survey appealed more to students from a social science background. A large component of Durham’s Sociology cohort and academic staff have an interest in the Sociology of Education and Inequality: it is one of the core research themes of the course.

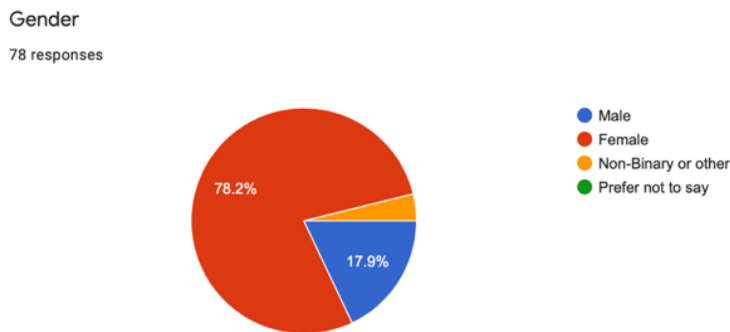


Fig. 2: Pie Chart demonstrating participant gender balance

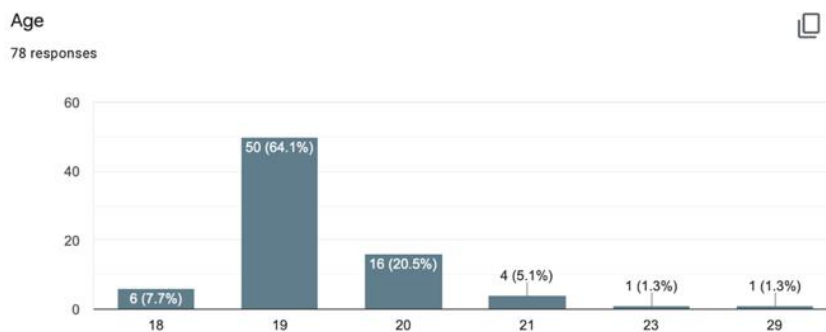


Fig. 3 Bar Chart demonstrating participant age makeup

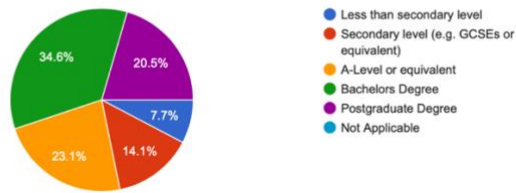
Due to these limitations of this sampling method in terms of getting a representative sample with regard to gender, ethnicity and subject groups, the sample is unrepresentative of the first year student population of Durham as a whole and this must be taken into consideration when analysing its results. The results therefore cannot be generalised to the wider population of Durham students as a whole.

### Parental education and occupational backgrounds: demographics

While the distribution of parents/guardians from each type of educational background appears similar, there are slight variations between the genders. For example, mothers/female guardians are more likely to have A Levels as their highest level of qualification than fathers/male guardians (23.1% to 19.2%), but also slightly more likely to have Postgraduate degrees as their highest level of qualification (20.5% to 19.2%). Fathers/male guardians are slightly more likely to have Bachelors degrees as their highest level of qualification (34.8% to 37.2%).

What is the highest level of educational qualification your mother/female guardian has achieved?

78 responses



What is the highest level of educational qualification your father/male guardian has achieved?

78 responses

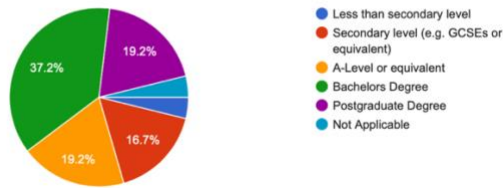
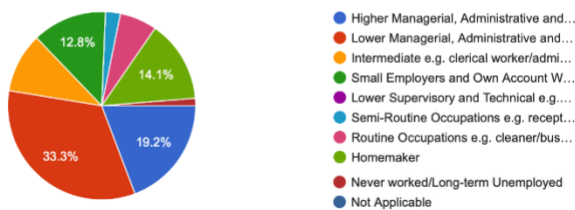


Fig. 4 Pie Charts demonstrating the parental education distribution

The gender differences between guardians' occupational backgrounds are evident from Fig. 5 below. The largest selected occupational bracket for the male guardian question was 'higher managerial' at 44.9%, while the largest female guardian occupation bracket was 'lower managerial' at 33.3%. For female guardians, the category 'higher managerial' made up 19.2% of respondents, almost half of the percentage of male guardians. Comparatively, the lower managerial category only made up 20.5% of male guardians. This reveals the importance of stratifying students' social class by gender, due to the differences in the social class background of male and female guardians' employment. Due to societal expectations regarding division of childcare duties and gendered jobs, women's labour is often less secure and less well-paid. This is an important consideration to take into account when analysing the social class background of students.

How would you describe your mother/female guardian's profession?

78 responses



How would you describe your father/male guardian's profession?

78 responses

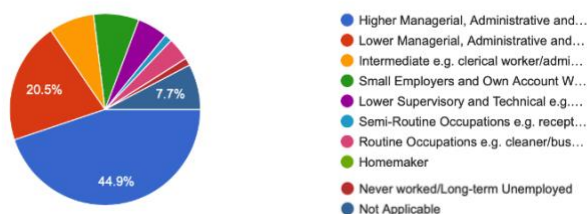


Fig. 5 Pie Charts demonstrating the parental occupation distribution

### How inclusivity and belonging was measured

Students were provided with a series of opinion scales which asked for their views of Durham University's levels of inclusion, whether they have felt excluded from the university due to personal characteristics such as social class background, and about their feelings of belonging to the university generally and their academic department and College specifically. Belonging was discussed in relation to whether they felt a 'strong' sense of belonging to the wider university as a whole, their department and their colleges. In addition to these questions which aimed to provide an insight into student's reported experiences of inclusion and belonging at Durham as per the research questions of this report, a number of other topics were raised to contextualise and develop this insight. Students were asked about their levels of involvement in common aspects of student life such as whether they were involved in societies or if they planned to help with 'freshers' events for new first-year students next academic year. These questions aimed to develop an understanding wider than how students felt they 'fit in', to see whether they did in practice participate in the wider social life of the university. They were also asked to assess whether they had made a friendship group and how similar they perceived their peers to be. A key aspect in students fitting into university, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, Stuart (2006) argues, is friendship and peer support at the university. Asking how similar students perceived their peers to be also could give an insight into cultural capital and *habitus*. If working-class or first generation students are more likely to perceive their peers at university as having different interests (perhaps as a result of their upbringing and cultural capital), this could be an insight as to *why* these students do not feel a strong sense of belonging at Durham. Finally, students were asked to assess how far Covid-19 impacted their feelings of belonging, with an aim to assess whether students from non-traditional backgrounds had a different experience of Covid-19 affecting their sense of belonging to university.

### Experiences of exclusion and belonging at Durham University

From Fig. 6 below, it is clear that relatively few respondents agreed (15.4%) or strongly agreed (3.8%) with the statement that they had been excluded from the university due to their social class background. However, students were more likely to disagree (53.8%) than to agree (34.6%) with the statement that they felt a strong sense of belonging to the wider university community. Similarly, students were more likely to disagree (49.4%) than to agree (36.4%) that they felt a strong sense of belonging to their academic department. In contrast, students were more likely to agree (51.3%) than to disagree (28.8%) that they felt a strong sense of belonging to their college. This could illustrate that a collegiate university does create a close-knit community within one's college, however it also raises the question whether this impacts on the students' belonging to the university as a whole.

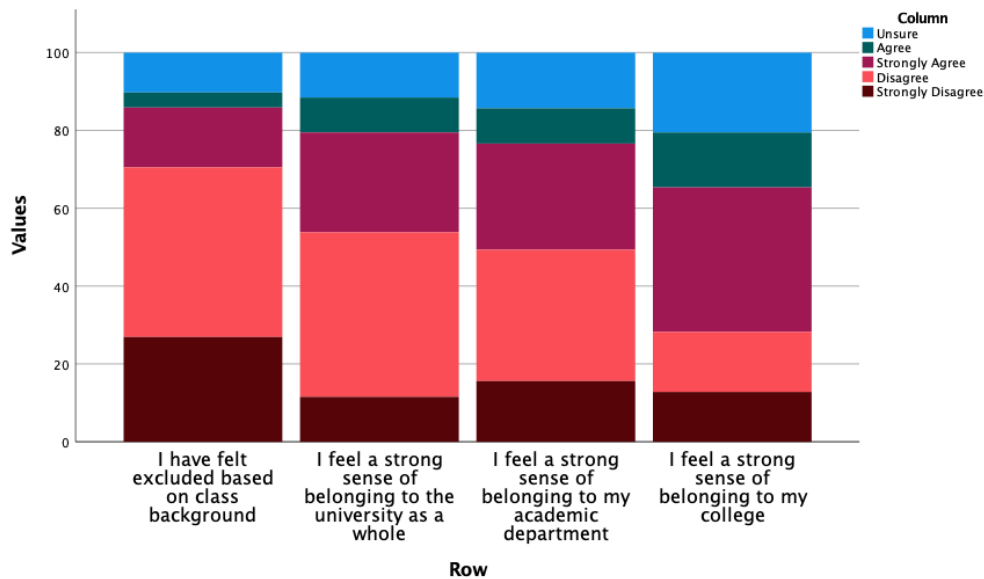


Fig. 6 Stacked Bar Chart demonstrating participant responses to experiences of exclusion and inclusivity at Durham

### Parental Education - Bivariate Analysis

Crosstabulation analysis was utilised to analyse the relationship between the students' sense of belonging and experiences of inclusion/exclusion at Durham and their levels of parental education.

When analysed in relation to maternal and paternal levels of education, students' own experiences of exclusion at Durham due to their social class background revealed that students with A Levels as their highest levels of maternal and paternal education were more likely to 'strongly agree' they have felt excluded from Durham because of their social class background (33.3% of those with this level of maternal and paternal education). Those with a parental education of less than secondary education were most likely to respond that they 'agree' they have been excluded (33.3% maternal and 16.7% paternal). Finally, those students with a parental education of secondary level only were more likely to 'strongly agree' they had experienced exclusion from Durham due to their social class (33.3% for both measures). Students who described their parental education as a Bachelors degree were more likely to respond they were 'unsure' or 'strongly disagree' if they had been excluded (50% unsure and 42.9% strongly disagree maternal; 50% unsure and 38.1% strongly disagree paternal). Therefore, crosstabulation of these two variables appears to suggest some link between non-graduate parental education and experiences of feeling excluded due to social class at university. However, those students who described their levels of parental education as Postgraduate were also likely to respond they 'strongly agree' they experienced exclusion from the university community due to social class background (33.3% maternal and paternal). This reiterates the need to separate out parental education from social class, as not every student who has graduate parents necessarily has parents who come from the higher tiers of social class system.





**What is the highest level of educational qualification your father/male guardian has achieved? \* I feel a strong sense of belonging to my academic department Crosstabulation**

% within I feel a strong sense of belonging to my academic department

		I feel a strong sense of belonging to my academic department					Total
		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure	
What is the highest level of educational qualification your father/male guardian has achieved?	A-Level or equivalent	23.8%	26.9%	28.6%	8.3%		19.2%
	Bachelors Degree	100.0%	38.1%	23.1%	42.9%	58.3%	37.2%
	Less than secondary level		3.8%				3.8%
	Not Applicable		4.8%	3.8%	14.3%		3.8%
	Postgraduate Degree		9.5%	23.1%		25.0%	19.2%
	Secondary level (e.g. GCSEs or equivalent)		23.8%	19.2%	14.3%	8.3%	16.7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Fig. 9 Crosstabulation comparing maternal and paternal education with feeling a strong sense of belonging to students' academic department

Crosstabulation analysis reveals that students with an A Level parental education were the most likely to 'strongly disagree' that they felt a strong sense of belonging to their college (40% maternal and paternal). Bachelors level parental education students were more likely to 'disagree' (41.7% maternal and 50% paternal). Students with a paternal education of Secondary were most likely to 'strongly agree' (45.5%). Aside from these exceptions, the results seem to suggest little more of a relationship between parental education and a feeling of belonging to their colleges. As with departments, more analysis is needed to unpick which students go to which colleges and parental education levels, and satisfaction levels with colleges generally.

**What is the highest level of educational qualification your mother/female guardian has achieved? \* I feel a strong sense of belonging to my college Crosstabulation**

% within I feel a strong sense of belonging to my college

		I feel a strong sense of belonging to my college					Total
		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure	
What is the highest level of educational qualification your mother/female guardian has achieved?	A-Level or equivalent	24.1%	8.3%	18.2%	40.0%	25.0%	23.1%
	Bachelors Degree	41.4%	41.7%	27.3%	10.0%	37.5%	34.6%
	Less than secondary level	6.9%	8.3%		10.0%	12.5%	7.7%
	Postgraduate Degree	13.8%	25.0%	36.4%	20.0%	18.8%	20.5%
	Secondary level (e.g. GCSEs or equivalent)	13.8%	16.7%	18.2%	20.0%	6.3%	14.1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**What is the highest level of educational qualification your father/male guardian has achieved? \* I feel a strong sense of belonging to my college Crosstabulation**

% within I feel a strong sense of belonging to my college

		I feel a strong sense of belonging to my college					Total
		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure	
What is the highest level of educational qualification your father/male guardian has achieved?	A-Level or equivalent	17.2%			40.0%	37.5%	19.2%
	Bachelors Degree	37.9%	50.0%	36.4%	30.0%	31.3%	37.2%
	Less than secondary level	3.4%	8.3%			6.3%	3.8%
	Not Applicable	6.9%			10.0%		3.8%
	Postgraduate Degree	20.7%	33.3%	18.2%	10.0%	12.5%	19.2%
	Secondary level (e.g. GCSEs or equivalent)	13.8%	8.3%	45.5%	10.0%	12.5%	16.7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Fig. 10 Crosstabulation comparing maternal and paternal education with students feeling a strong sense of belonging to their college

## Parental Occupational Class – Bivariate Analysis

Respondents who reported their maternal profession as fitting within the NS-SEC category of 'higher managerial' were most likely to strongly disagree (19%) or disagree (26.5%) that they have been excluded from the university community due to social class background. Those who described their maternal profession as 'lower managerial' or 'small employers' were most likely to agree they had been excluded due to their social class background (66.7% and 33.3%). Although there is more variation across the different categories in the paternal profession responses, they show a similar pattern of most likely to disagree or strongly disagree as higher managerial and most likely to strongly agree they have been excluded. This analysis illustrates that professions which are in the lower-middle and working-class categories of this schema are more likely to have experienced exclusion from Durham university than the 15.4% of respondents overall who agree they had been excluded.

### How would you describe your mother/female guardian's profession? \* I believe I have been excluded from the university community due to my social class background Crosstabulation

% within I believe I have been excluded from the university community due to my social class background

		I believe I have been excluded from the university community due to my social class background					Total
		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure	
How would you describe your mother/female guardian's profession?	Higher Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. lawyer/medical doctor		26.5%		19.0%	25.0%	19.2%
	Homemaker	8.3%	17.6%		14.3%	12.5%	14.1%
	Intermediate e.g. clerical worker/administrative assistant	16.7%	11.8%		9.5%		10.3%
	Lower Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. teacher/nurse	16.7%	26.5%	66.7%	47.6%	37.5%	33.3%
	Never worked/Long-term Unemployed	8.3%					1.3%
	Routine Occupations e.g. cleaner/bus driver	25.0%	2.9%			12.5%	6.4%
	Semi-Routine Occupations e.g. receptionist/telephone salesworker	8.3%	2.9%				2.6%
	Small Employers and Own Account Workers e.g. shopkeeper/taxi driver	16.7%	11.8%	33.3%	9.5%	12.5%	12.8%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

### How would you describe your father/male guardian's profession? \* I believe I have been excluded from the university community due to my social class background Crosstabulation

% within I believe I have been excluded from the university community due to my social class background

		I believe I have been excluded from the university community due to my social class background					Total
		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure	
How would you describe your father/male guardian's profession?	Higher Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. lawyer/medical doctor	16.7%	50.0%		61.9%	37.5%	44.9%
	Intermediate e.g. clerical worker/administrative assistant		11.8%	33.3%		12.5%	7.7%
	Lower Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. teacher/nurse	8.3%	26.5%	33.3%	19.0%	12.5%	20.5%
	Lower Supervisory and Technical e.g. mechanic/plumber		8.8%		4.8%		5.1%
	Never worked/Long-term Unemployed	8.3%					1.3%
	Not Applicable	33.3%			4.8%	12.5%	7.7%
	Routine Occupations e.g. cleaner/bus driver	16.7%				12.5%	3.8%
	Semi-Routine Occupations e.g. receptionist/telephone salesworker	8.3%					1.3%
	Small Employers and Own Account Workers e.g. shopkeeper/taxi driver	8.3%	2.9%	33.3%	9.5%	12.5%	7.7%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Fig. 10 Crosstabulation comparing maternal and paternal occupational backgrounds and feeling excluded from the university community

However, there appeared to be less of an association between social class background and feelings of belonging to the university. Those with a maternal profession described as 'lower managerial' were more likely to 'strongly disagree' that they feel a sense of belonging to the wider university community (44.4%), however this is only slightly less than the next highest percentage, which was 42.9% who 'strongly agree'. For a paternal profession of 'higher managerial', 85.7% of respondents 'strongly agree' they feel a sense of belonging and the next highest was 'agree' which was answered by 45% of those in the parental profession category of 'higher managerial'. It could therefore be argued there was a slight link between a higher managerial parental profession and a strong sense of belonging to the wider university community, however there was little link with the rest of the categories.

**How would you describe your mother/female guardian's profession? \* I feel a strong sense of belonging to the wider University community as a Durham student after finishing my first year Crosstabulation**

% within I feel a strong sense of belonging to the wider University community as a Durham student after finishing my first year

		I feel a strong sense of belonging to the wider University community as a Durham student after finishing my first year					
		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure	Total
How would you describe your mother/female guardian's profession?	Higher Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. lawyer/medical doctor	20.0%	27.3%	14.3%		11.1%	19.2%
	Homemaker	15.0%	12.1%	28.6%	22.2%		14.1%
	Intermediate e.g. clerical worker/administrative assistant	20.0%	6.1%		11.1%	11.1%	10.3%
	Lower Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. teacher/nurse	30.0%	30.3%	42.9%	44.4%	33.3%	33.3%
	Never worked/Long-term Unemployed		3.0%				1.3%
	Routine Occupations e.g. cleaner/bus driver	5.0%	6.1%	14.3%		11.1%	6.4%
	Semi-Routine Occupations e.g. receptionist/telephone salesworker		3.0%			11.1%	2.6%
	Small Employers and Own Account Workers e.g. shopkeeper/taxi driver	10.0%	12.1%		22.2%	22.2%	12.8%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**How would you describe your father/male guardian's profession? \* I feel a strong sense of belonging to the wider University community as a Durham student after finishing my first year Crosstabulation**

% within I feel a strong sense of belonging to the wider University community as a Durham student after finishing my first year

		I feel a strong sense of belonging to the wider University community as a Durham student after finishing my first year					
		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure	Total
How would you describe your father/male guardian's profession?	Higher Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. lawyer/medical doctor	45.0%	39.4%	85.7%	33.3%	44.4%	44.9%
	Intermediate e.g. clerical worker/administrative assistant	20.0%			22.2%		7.7%
	Lower Managerial, Administrative and Professional e.g. teacher/nurse	20.0%	21.2%		22.2%	33.3%	20.5%
	Lower Supervisory and Technical e.g. mechanic/plumber	10.0%	3.0%			11.1%	5.1%
	Never worked/Long-term Unemployed		3.0%				1.3%
	Not Applicable	5.0%	9.1%	14.3%	11.1%		7.7%
	Routine Occupations e.g. cleaner/bus driver		9.1%				3.8%
	Semi-Routine Occupations e.g. receptionist/telephone salesworker		3.0%				1.3%
	Small Employers and Own Account Workers e.g. shopkeeper/taxi driver		12.1%		11.1%	11.1%	7.7%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Fig 11 Crosstabulation comparing maternal and paternal occupational background with feeling a strong sense of belonging to the university community

**Confounding variable – the Covid-19 Pandemic**

In order to account for a potential confounding variable previously not considered throughout this research, this project sought to explore the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Durham students' sense of belonging in their first year. Due to most allocated

teaching time and social activities occurring entirely online for most of the year, it is easy to see how this may have had a significant impact on students' sense of belonging.

Covid-19 has significantly impacted on my feelings of belonging and community as a Durham student in my first year  
78 responses

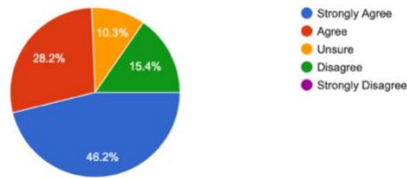


Fig 12 Pie chart demonstrating participant responses to the question about the impact of Covid-19 on their sense of belonging at Durham

Fig. 12 reveals that a significant population (61.6%) of respondents believe the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on their feelings of belonging, with the most popular response being to 'strongly agree' with the statement, with almost half (46.2%) of participants selecting this option. Crosstabulation analysis was then utilised in order to assess whether students from non-graduate backgrounds believe their sense of belonging to the University was more strongly impacted by Covid-19 than respondents from graduate backgrounds.

As expected from the above, crosstabulation results which can be seen in Fig. 13 demonstrated students across the board of levels of parental education are most likely to 'strongly agree' that Covid-19 impacted on their sense of belonging to Durham. The largest majority who agreed with this statement were those with a maternal or paternal education level of 'less than secondary level' with 100% of those students who report this level of paternal education responding 'strongly agree', and 68.7% of those students who report this level of maternal education responding 'strongly agree'. This suggests there may be some relationship between the lowest levels of parental education and experiencing a less-firm sense of belonging to Durham University, however this requires more exploration, perhaps via a study on the impact of Covid-19 on students who began university in the midst of this huge global event.

**What is the highest level of educational qualification your mother/female guardian has achieved? \* Covid-19 has significantly impacted on my feelings of belonging and community as a Durham student in my first year Crosstabulation**

% within What is the highest level of educational qualification your mother/female guardian has achieved?		Covid-19 has significantly impacted on my feelings of belonging and community as a Durham student in my first year				Total
		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Unsure	
What is the highest level of educational qualification your mother/female guardian has achieved?	A-Level or equivalent	16.7%	22.2%	50.0%	11.1%	100.0%
	Bachelors Degree	37.0%	18.5%	33.3%	11.1%	100.0%
	Less than secondary level			100.0%		100.0%
	Postgraduate Degree	25.0%	12.5%	50.0%	12.5%	100.0%
	Secondary level (e.g. GCSEs or equivalent)	45.5%	9.1%	36.4%	9.1%	100.0%
Total		28.2%	15.4%	46.2%	10.3%	100.0%

**What is the highest level of educational qualification your father/male guardian has achieved?  
Covid-19 has significantly impacted on my feelings of belonging and community as a Durham  
student in my first year Crosstabulation**

% within What is the highest level of educational qualification your father/male guardian has achieved?

		Covid-19 has significantly impacted on my feelings of belonging and community as a Durham student in my first year				
		Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Unsure	Total
What is the highest level of educational qualification your father/male guardian has achieved?	A-Level or equivalent	33.3%	26.7%	33.3%	6.7%	100.0%
	Bachelors Degree	27.6%	6.9%	51.7%	13.8%	100.0%
	Less than secondary level			66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
	Not Applicable	33.3%		33.3%	33.3%	100.0%
	Postgraduate Degree	33.3%	26.7%	33.3%	6.7%	100.0%
	Secondary level (e.g. GCSEs or equivalent)	23.1%	15.4%	61.5%		100.0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>28.2%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>46.2%</b>	<b>10.3%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Fig. 13 Crosstabulation comparing maternal and paternal education and responses to the question about the impact of Covid-19 on students' belonging

## Conclusion

This research project has sought to explore Durham University student experiences of inclusion and belonging in relation to their parents' educational and occupational backgrounds. Some evidence can be seen which suggests that students from lower social class backgrounds and lower levels of parental education experience more exclusion from Durham, and are less likely to agree that they feel a strong sense of belonging. However, the Covid-19 pandemic evidently had a large impact on the 2020-23 cohorts' ability to get involved in activities and teaching which may have fostered a sense of belonging and developed their identity as a Durham student. In addition, the small self-selected sample means that the student experiences reflected throughout this project cannot be generalised to the larger student population.

Despite these limitations, this study has revealed some important areas for further study, including what may foster feelings of belonging and inclusivity, including role peer and friendship groups play. Through identifying these inclusion-encouraging factors, it can be determined how to encourage these and help students develop friendship groups. One important finding from this survey is that students were much more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging to their college than the wider university community. This implies colleges play an important role in student experiences of inclusion at collegiate universities, and can be used as a site to develop student feelings of belonging further. In addition to further areas of interest which look at what may foster inclusion, this research points towards some important areas which may be needed to look at which foster feelings of exclusion in students, for example, experiences of discrimination based on social class background or how living 'out' from college may impact students' belonging.

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## Appendix A

## Parental Education, Class and Belonging at Durham

This survey intends to establish first years' sense of belonging to the University community, colleges and peer groups in relation to their parental education and social class background. It will present a number of statements about belonging and inclusivity at Durham, inviting participants to select the extent to which they agree or disagree with these statements on a Likert scale.

All answers given in this survey will be completely anonymous. Any questions about anonymity or concerns about anything else related to this survey should be forwarded to my university email: [cvcf53@durham.ac.uk](mailto:cvcf53@durham.ac.uk)

This survey should take around 10 minutes to complete

### Demographic Questions

#### Gender

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary or other
- Prefer not to say

Durham is an inclusive environment for people of all genders

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Durham is an inclusive environment for people of all ethnicities

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The layout and content of the survey which was sent out to students via emails and social media through Google Forms