

The



Smart

Kid

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WHICH UNIVERSITY?

Hang on a minute don't skip this article simply because your child is only five years old! Now is the time to start planning for the future as you will see below...

In the Guardian early last year, Trevor Phillips drew attention to a worrying problem – that people from ethnic minorities congregate in post-1992 universities and don't get their fair share of places in top universities. At the time he wrote the article, nine of the Russell Group universities had fewer than thirty Afro-Caribbean students. By contrast there were more black students at one of the post-1992 universities than the entire Russell group. He concluded that there is a kind of self-selecting system of apartheid going on in British universities. Overall, ethnic minorities are well represented in the system; but in some places their numbers are well down, in some places they are much better represented than in the population as a whole.

In summary the above research does not imply that people from Afro-Caribbean do not study, rather the issue posed is that the proportion that gets into the top universities is quite low. This is most definitely a matter to be addressed as it does not require much ingenuity to appreciate that graduating from an internationally recognised university provides one with a competitive advantage in an increasingly global marketplace.

A recent visit to the main weblog of maverick Tory MP Boris Johnson was quite revealing. In one of the forums several reasons were attributed to this

'apartheid system'. The comments made by members of the public on the website were quite emotive and there were some very interesting views about the causes of the matter; the main threads of the argument were underachievement at school, geographical factors, cultural issues and expectations. So let's see what the public thinks – the quotes below are taken from the blog.

"...the biggest one is expecta-

It takes brave people to break out of this pattern and wise people to support them

tion. The expectation by the child's family and teachers of what its likely future holds in store. This varies according to the social origins and experiences of the parents and ... the personalities of the teachers.

It doesn't matter how bright you are, if you never get the opportunity to learn the basics at junior school you won't get into a good secondary school and then you won't get the qualifications or background of experiences you need to acquire to get into Oxbridge or somewhere. Nor will you get the encouragement or the self belief that such a future is possible. Self belief is huge and hard to achieve in an un-

supportive environment. Telling a child or anyone for that matter, its useless loudly enough and long enough will squash the strongest and the best."

"Black people are still among the poorest with the least access to quality education and any group tends to follow the established path for its type... It is human nature to follow the safe and known path established by others like you for fear of being knocked back if you get 'above yourself'."

"It takes brave people to break out of this pattern and wise people to support them."

"...Find black and ethnic minority people who did go to top Universities...and ask them...What made the difference for them? I suspect it may be... that someone who had gone that route themselves supported and mentored them. Asian kids are tremendous overachievers because their families put a lot of emphasis on the importance of education and push and encourage them to study hard..."

"...Possibly the black people who went to the Polytechnic type places did so because they were advised it was the best they could do and never tried to apply anywhere else. Not because the advisers wished to hold them back but because that is the current pattern and the advisers are working with what they know. Also the students may fear being out of place and given a hard time."

"...my careers adviser of 25 years ago... told me I could be a nurse, a bank teller or a hairdresser, it was not suggested that I try for any sort of degree and he was discouraging when I brought it up. Not because he was inherently sexist but because, as he saw it, those were the

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safe options for a girl. I didn't listen but lots of people do simply because that's the only advice anyone has ever given them."

To see the full discussion enter the following URL on your web page:

www.boris-johnson.com/education/2006/01/the_trevor_phillips_conundrum.php

There is not much more to add to the comments above because although they are uncomfortable, there is a lot of truth in the reasoning. My question however is: "What are we prepared to do to break this cycle of poverty/failure (whatever you choose to call it)?" I can't seem to get away from some of the comments above hence I'm restating them here:

Self belief is huge and hard to achieve in an un-supportive environment

It takes brave people to break out of this pattern and wise people to support them

Will you choose to be a wise parent today and raise the expectations for your child/children and the next generation of the black community at large? Hopefully there is a resounding YES to that!

- Bunmi Adekeye

COMING SOON:

PLANNING FOR THE COST OF UNIVERSITY

To receive future copies of this free newsletter send an email to info@thesmartkid.org

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES: JUST CHILD'S PLAY?

The role of extra-curricular activities to your child's success should not be underestimated. Those pursuits that seem like time wasting or the reserve of the rich and famous can indeed make your child's application stand out with institutions such as universities and future employers.

A good development of activities builds teamwork, commitment, responsibility, leadership, communication and interpersonal skills - qualities that institutions value.

There is no right or wrong form of activity to participate in, what is important is the individuality of the child and their consistent commitment. There are many opportunities for children to develop a good array of activities, the difficulty is choosing which to pursue.

SCHEMES

There are many available but the Duke of Edinburgh scheme deserves a mention. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (D of E) is an award for personal achievement that can be obtained by anyone aged from 14 to 25, regardless of personal ability.

The Award itself has three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. To obtain an award, participants must demonstrate achievement at the appropriate level in various activities in four sections:

Service: helping the community (for example, working with a charity).

Skills: a hobby, skill or interest (for example, showing progress with a musical instrument);



Physical recreation: sports, dance, or fitness; and

Expeditions: can be by bicycle, horseback, or water, but most commonly on foot.

The D of E takes at least six months for a direct entrant to achieve a Bronze Award; 12 months for Silver and 18 months for Gold. However, the Award is highly regarded by employers and people involved in education.

Check out www.theaward.org for more information.

WORK EXPERIENCE PLACEMENTS

This is very important for children aged 15 years and above. Work experience -- paid or voluntary, year-round or summer -- can help identify career interests and goals. Gaining experience in an industry that the child hopes to enter shows institutions a level of proactivity and dedication. Some schools arrange work experience via Trident, an educational charity that has existed for 30 years to help young people aged 14-25 prepare for life beyond the classroom.

For parents whose schools do not arrange work experience, talk to your friends or neighbours about arranging for your child to shadow them at work or help in the office.

SPORTS

I know what you're going to say, "There are enough black people in sport and I don't want my child going down that road", but remember any activity is to complement and enhance academic achievements, not to replace it. It's not just track and field and football that are available; many schools provide tennis, rugby, swimming, gymnastics, netball and hockey amongst others.

CLUBS

It's well worth introducing your child to clubs such as The Scout Movement, Boys/Girls Brigade or Military Cadets. The main aim of all these groups is to develop young people physically, mentally and spiritually, so that they may play constructive roles in society. The exact age ranges vary by association but members are

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typically aged 5-18 years old.

The discipline and sense of advantage at the core of these organisations remains with the children long after they graduate. If your child's school does not support a particular club, visit your local church, they may be able to assist further.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Your child can also gain skills and experience through volunteer work, such as by tutoring primary school kids or spending time at a local hospital. Contact your favourite charity and ask how your child can be involved in fundraising or charity work.

- Yemisi Gibbons

When good preparation meets with opportunity the results can be phenomenal

MAKING THE MOST OF PARENTS' EVENINGS

We requested a while ago that you share your parents' evening experiences with us. The following are extracts from some of the responses we received. Thanks for your all contributions, do continue to send them in.

Are there certain children that influence your child; if so is it possible to move your child to different group

How often does the child get homework and is it on a regular basis. This allows the parents to know that on a particular day homework is always set

Is your child working to his / her full potential, in most cases the teachers know if your child is capable?

If your child is not getting on with a particular teacher, is there anyway the child could be moved to a different class

Hopefully we can all work together with kids' teach-

ers to bring out the best in them.

Kike A

The only issue I have is the length of time allocated for parents to get as much information from the school and for parents to feedback, recommend/propose and contribute to their children's educational welfare.

While there is an understanding of the fact that there are a number of children in a class, the teacher having their own personal life outside of school etc, consideration to take to rectify this frustration can be achieved a number of ways:

Unemployed parents to attend during working hours leaving working parents to attend in the evening

Group the class up alphabetically, by age, ability etc and then allocating days for these groups (twice a school year - 1st term, last term)

The children needing particular

attention from both parents and school can have a different meeting time (may be 3 - 4 times depending on requirements)

Not easy I know however, this is where concerted efforts on both parties will achieve a universal positive outcome for the child.

Sanu W

It is essential for me to know whether or not my child has put his best efforts into his respective subjects.

I therefore always ask the teacher if they think the boy is doing his best in terms of efforts and commitment.

Obviously, you cannot expect anyone to perform beyond his capability. A good parent also should not tolerate underperformance. Every child must be encouraged to attain the maximum potential.

David A



I have asked the following questions:

- Concentration in class & whether he focuses & follows instructions
- What he's good at

If something is pointed out that is not so good, I ask the teacher for her suggestions or advice on how this can be improved.

Folake A

Whatever the mind can conceive and believe it can achieve
-Napoleon Hill

READERS' CORNER

Many thanks to the readers who continue to send us feedback and/or articles. Below is one such article. It goes to show there is a wealth of knowledge and information out there.

For parents that are considering preparing their children for the eleven plus grammar school examination I will recommend that you visit the eleven plus exams website. This site not only provides useful resources like practice papers, it is also a minefield

of information when it comes to advice on how to tackle those tricky examination questions and the whole selection process. It contains invaluable tips on how and when to start preparing your child for the test, a list of recommended tutors that can be used, how to appeal if your child is borderline, twelve plus tests and much more.

One of the main highlights of this site for me is that it has a

number of forums; one for each County where parents can exchange ideas and ask other like minded parents for their opinions. There is also a section on Independent school that provides an up to date analysis on performance and the selection process.

So whether you require assistance with that difficult Verbal Reasoning question or information on the required

pass mark for the grammar school of your choice visit:

www.elevenplusexams.co.uk

Abi O

CODE CRACKER

RUSSELL GROUP UNIVERSITIES

The Russell Group is an association of leading UK research-intensive Universities committed to maintaining the highest standards of research, education and knowledge transfer.



Formed in 1994 at a meeting convened in the Hotel Russell, London, the Group is composed of the Vice-Chancellors/Principals of the 20 Universities listed below. The Russell Group is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales.

In 2004/5, Russell Group Universities accounted for :

65% of UK Universities' research grant and contract income

56% of all doctorates awarded in the United Kingdom

30% of all students studying in the United Kingdom from outside the EU

In the 2001 national Research Assessment Exercise, (RAE) 78% of the staff in Grade 5* departments and 57% of the staff in Grade 5 departments were located in Russell Group Universities,

In 2004/5 Russell Group Universities were allocated approximately 64% of the total quality-related research funding (QR) allocated by the Funding Councils.



Below is a listing of the universities:

University of Birmingham

University of Bristol

University of Cambridge

Cardiff University

University of Edinburgh

University of Glasgow

Imperial College London

King's College London

University of Leeds

University of Liverpool

London School of Economics & Political Science

University of Manchester

Newcastle University

University of Nottingham

Queen's University Belfast

University of Oxford

University of Sheffield

University of Southampton

University College London

University of Warwick



Source: The Russell group website - www.russellgroup.ac.uk

Conclusion:

In plain English the above are effectively the best of the crop, what we may call the "Ivy League Universities" of the United Kingdom

NEW UNIVERSITIES



In the UK the term New University has two meanings. It used to be the term for any of the several universities founded in the 1960s, these are also called **plate-glass universities**. More recently it has been used to describe:

- any of the former polytechnics;
- central institutions or colleges of higher education that were given the status of universities in 1992;

colleges that have been granted university status since then also called **post-1992 universities** or modern universities

Source: Wikipedia



The Smart Kid is an organisation formed to empower 21st century parents in the UK by sharing vital information and motivating them to take positive action for their children. We expect that the parents who contact us will go on to share the information with their peers, friends and family thus empowering one another. These gradual but consistent efforts will produce a shift in the culture and value system in the UK. Our vision is that previously untapped ability, lying dormant in a sizeable proportion of the population, will be discovered thus creating a more productive society where the best opportunities are no longer restricted to the realm of a select few. Thanks for taking the time to read this and we hope you share our dream for all children in the UK.

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