

LEARNERS' VOICE ON AIMHIGHER AND ITS IMPACT

What is Aimhigher?

- Established in 2002 as two separate programmes brought together in 2004, with the aim of widening participation in HE.
- The long-term origins can be traced back to the Robbins Report of 1963 and the Dearing Report 1997 which highlighted the prevailing gap in HE participation.
- Current funding for Aimhigher partnerships has been extended to July 2011.
- Local partnership areas organise various activities aiming to increase attainment and aspiration, including
 - Summer Schools
 - Taster days
 - Mentoring-type programmes (one-off or more sustained over a longer period of time)

Learner voice

Should children and young people have say about things that concern them?

- Advocates of the learner voice (e.g. Flutter and Rudduck 2004): positive impact on teaching and learning – schools into more inclusive and democratic communities; empowerment.
- How? Participation in decision-making through consultation and inclusion.
- Renewed interest in learners' voice, e.g. Labour Government (DCSF 2008: 12): 'There is no group whose view is more important...than the young people themselves, that is why it is critical that the student voice is heard, at both national and local level'.

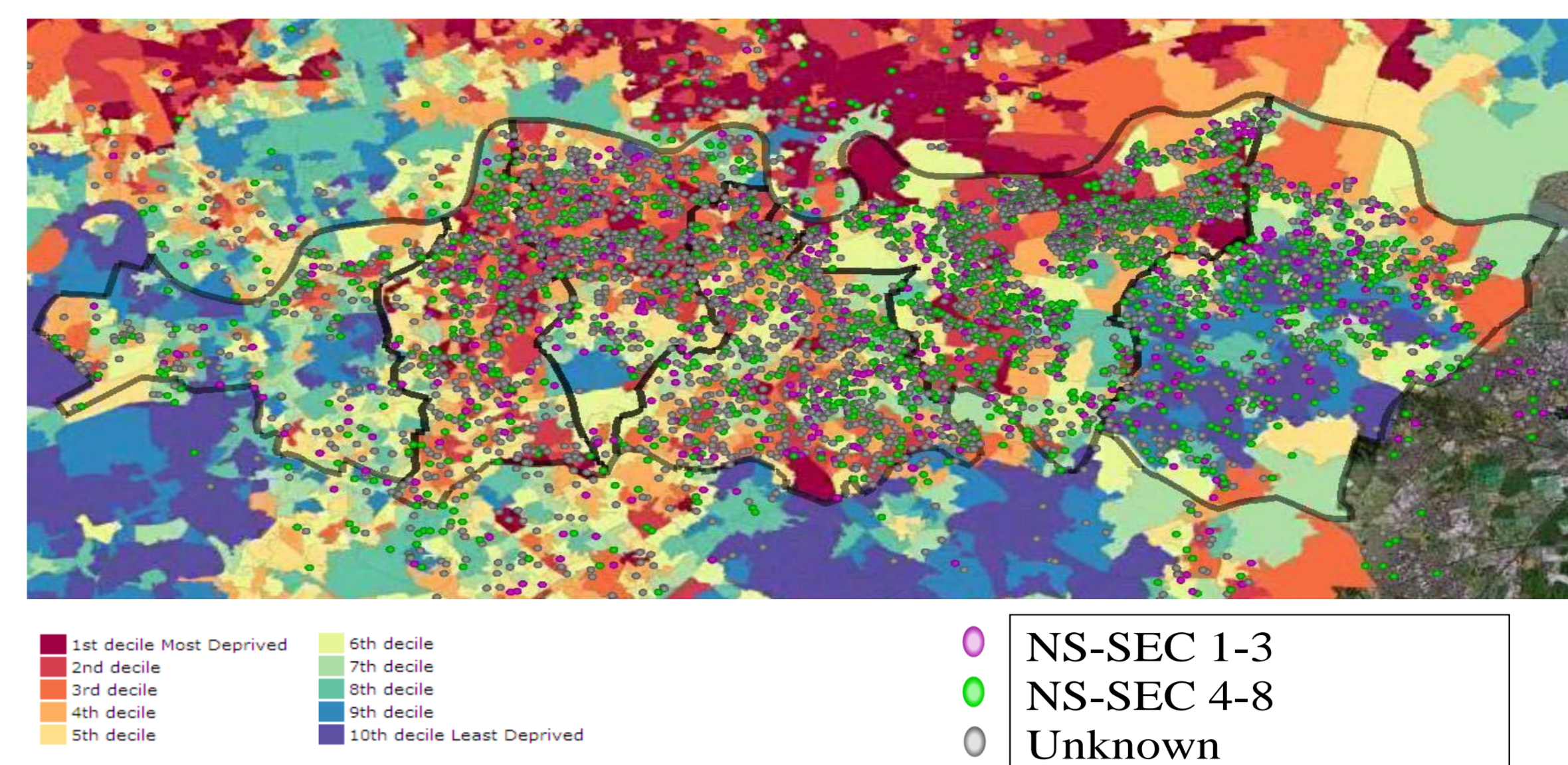
Research aims and methods

Linked to a requirement from the funders, HEFCE, to measure effectiveness and impact of the various activities and programmes at the local level. Focus on one partnership area in South East London (Aspire Aimhigher) via an emphasis on student voice. The partnership area consists of six London Boroughs (Wandsworth, Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Greenwich and Bexley) and has some very deprived and/or low-participating neighbourhoods. The map above shows the level of deprivation in the area in 2007, and the socio-economic background of some of the participants in 2008-09.

Main question: have activities had any impact on the participants in terms of informing them about university life and increasing their desire to enter HE?

Methods: interviews with 18 learners who had taken part in Aimhigher activities (mainly aged 17 to 20) in 2008.

Participant Domiciles and Index of Multiple Deprivation (2007) by LSOA



Findings

The main interview findings are summarised in Figures 1 to 4 below. It was found that:

- The learners were attracted to HE for various reasons including instrumental reasons (e.g. career) and intrinsic reasons (e.g. independence, challenge).
- The learners' HE choices were characterised by complexity. Choice of institution was commonly shaped by social class considerations, desire to stay close to home, the perceived quality (e.g. published statistics) and/or environment.
- The learners perceived there to be some barriers to HE entry, most commonly the cost, getting the grades and leaving home. Some also expressed a worry about fitting in to HE.
- The learners overwhelmingly enjoyed the Aimhigher activities. Most of the young people interviewed felt that their desire to go to HE had increased; a few stated that the impact had been decisive; some that they had already decided to enter HE.
- In addition, 13 out of 18 interviewees thought that involving the learners in the organisation of the activities would be helpful, so that their views could be taken into account.

Summary

- The findings of this small-scale research have suggested that Aimhigher activities are successful in demystifying the HE experience, for example in terms of finance, but concerns still prevail about issues like fitting in and getting the right grades.
- The learners tended to very enthusiastic about Aimhigher, but what we don't know is whether this is going to become a reality – are they actually going to apply to, and enter HE. More research is needed to unravel the complexities involved in these areas.

LEARNERS' VIEWS ON HE, BARRIERS TO ENTRY AND THE INFLUENCE OF AIMHIGHER

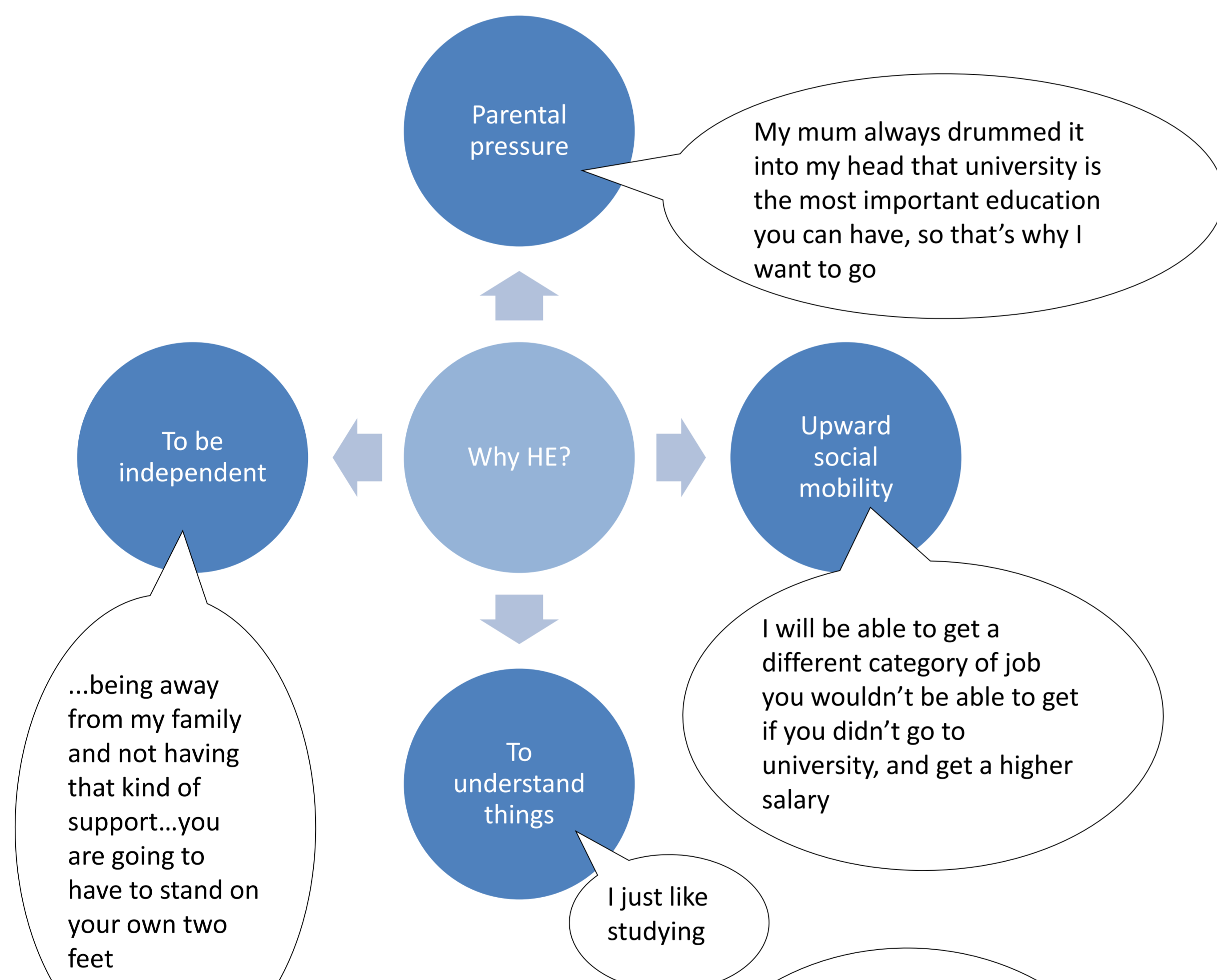


Figure 1: Why HE?

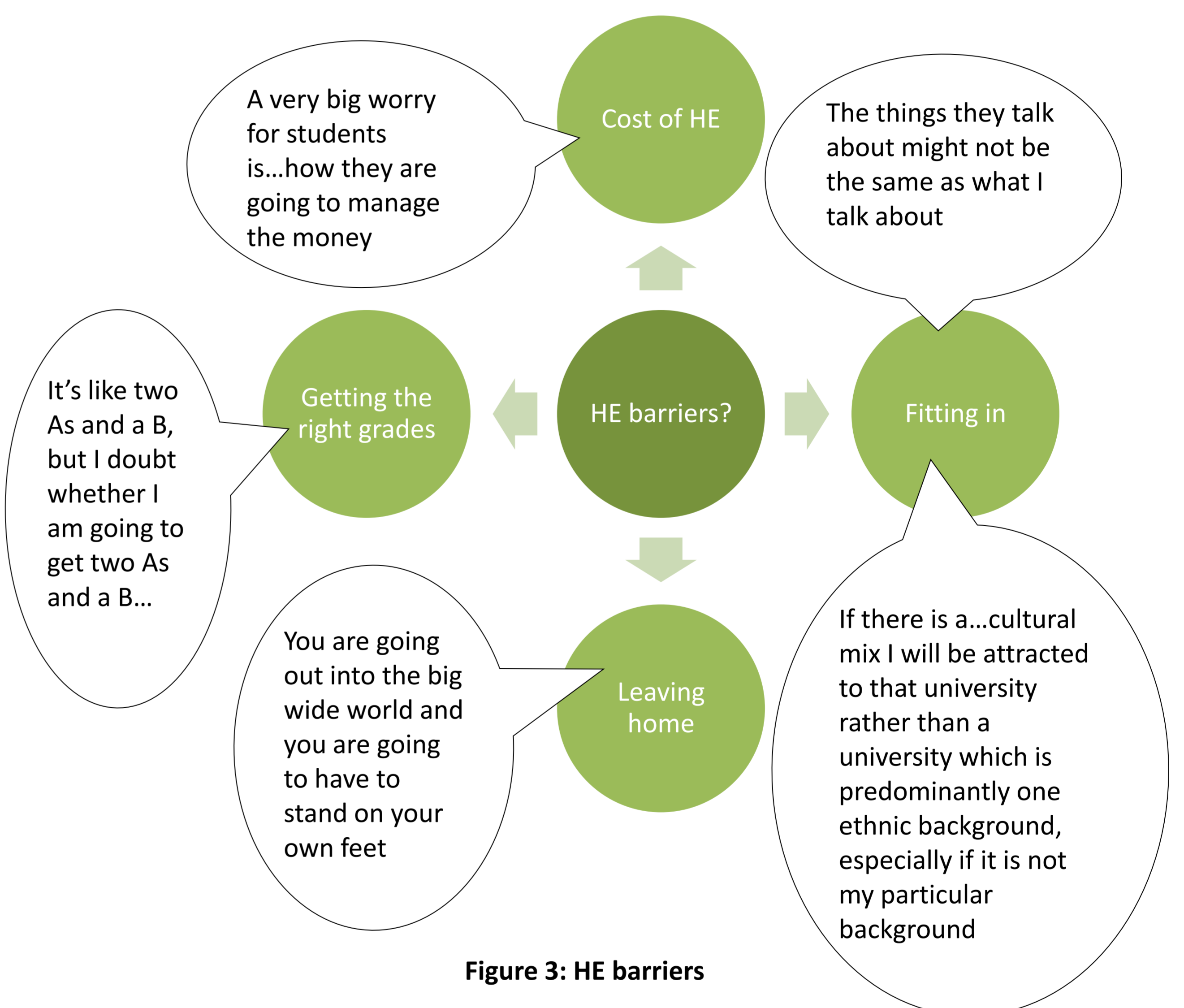


Figure 3: HE barriers

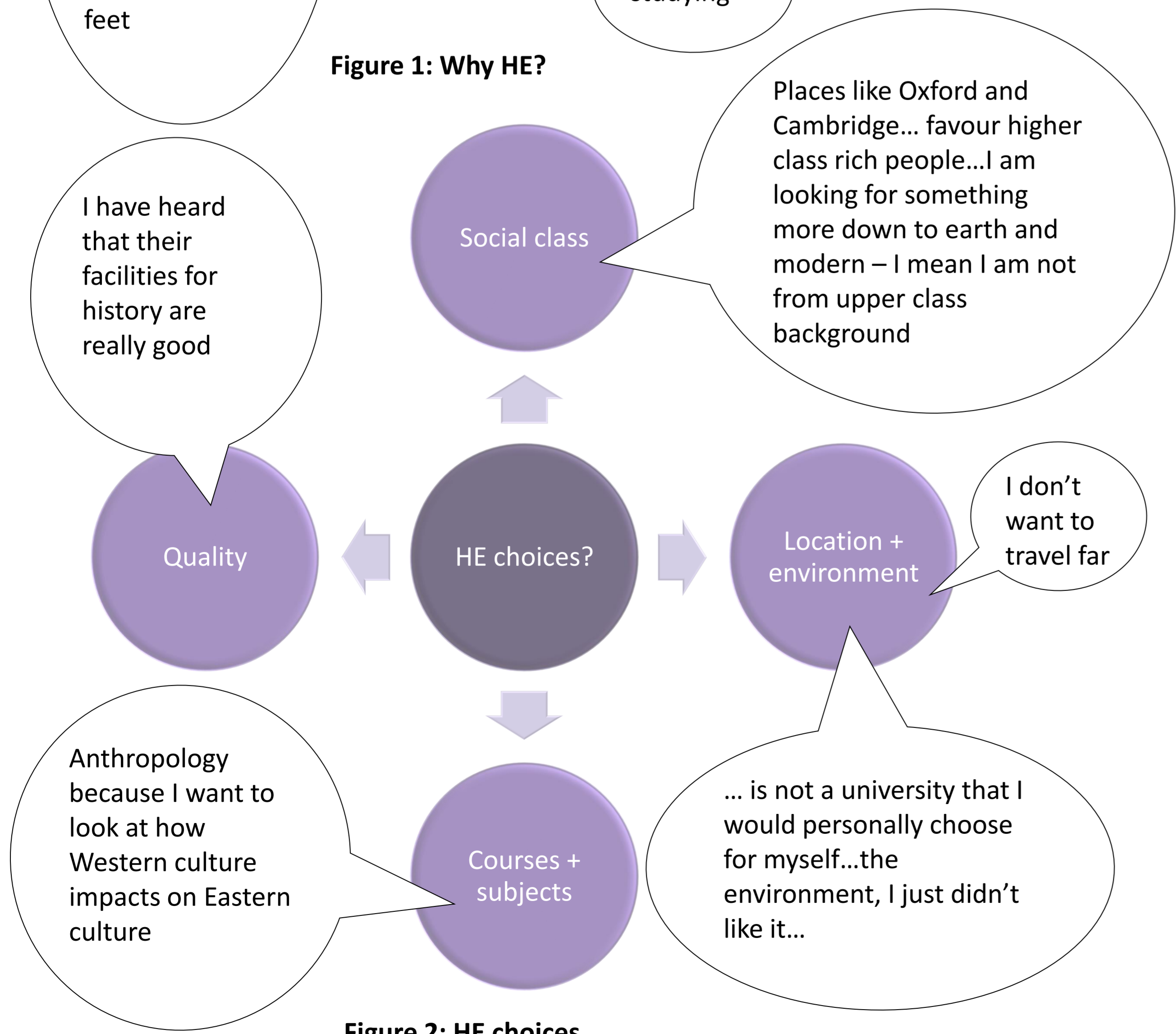


Figure 2: HE choices

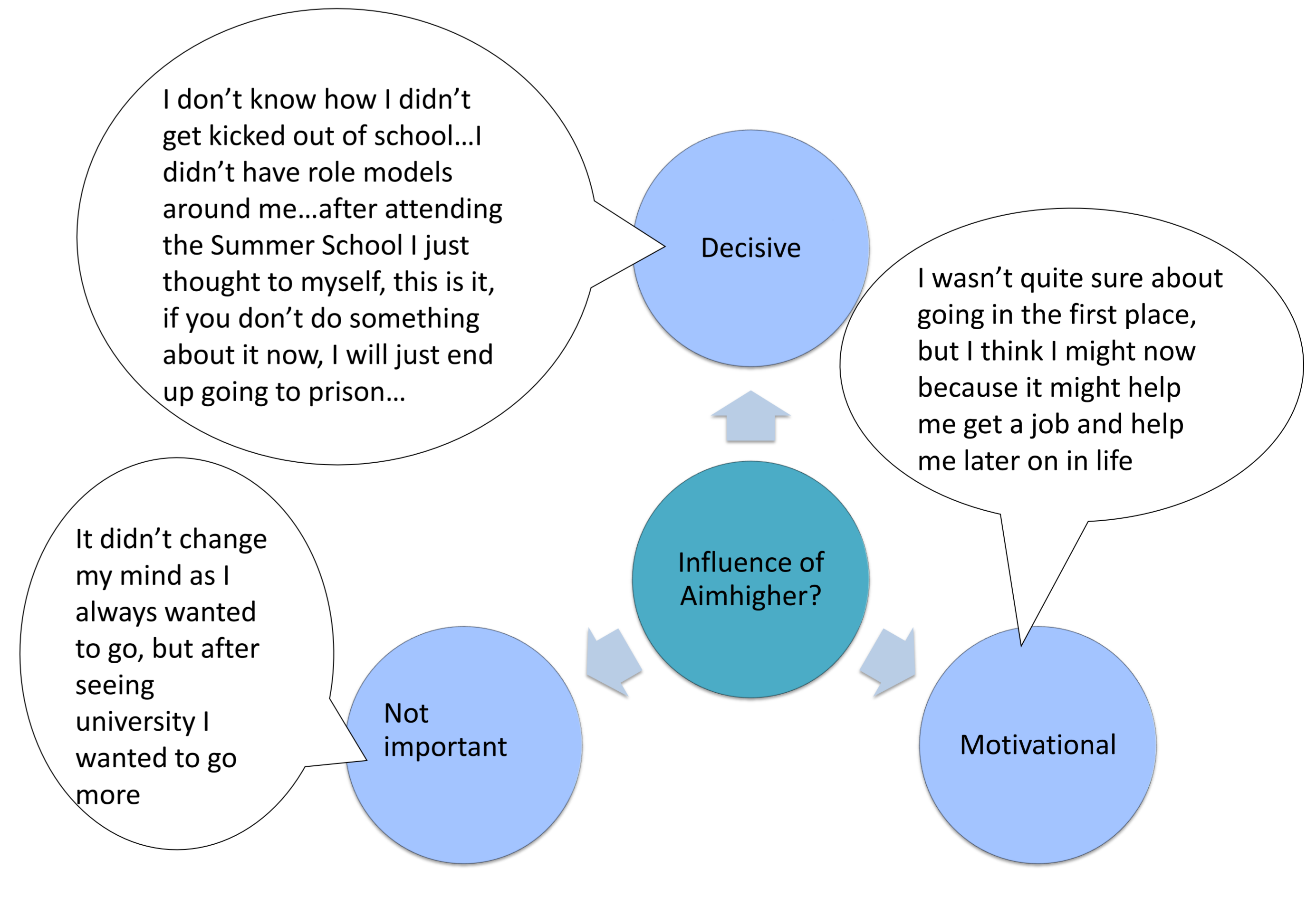


Figure 4: influence of Aimhigher