Bad advice from teachers is harming university chances

Greg Hurst  Education Editor

Teenagers applying to university are given such bad advice by teachers that it can harm their chances of being offered a place, a study suggests.

Research by the Sutton Trust, an education charity, found that teachers had little or no clue of what admissions tutors at leading universities looked for in personal statements.

Forty-four students from poor backgrounds who had identical predicted A-level grades were graded on their personal statement.

Less than a quarter were awarded the same mark by the admissions tutor and teacher, according to an analysis by Steven Jones of the University of Manchester. Twenty statements were one grade out; 13 were two grades out; and one was three grades out.

One teenager applying to study medicine wrote a detailed account of watching an operation while on work experience. The teacher said that this would harm the application because it was too "long and impersonal"; the admissions tutor said it would "strongly improve" the candidate’s chances of being offered a place, describing the section as "excellent analysis of a complex case".

The Sutton Trust called for better training for teachers on advising candidates and said that universities should be more transparent in what they looked for in personal statements.