

Going to university?

Exploring the value and purpose of Higher Education for  
first year sport students.

C G M PHEASEY

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Going to university?  
Exploring the value and purpose of  
Higher Education for first year sport  
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For my dear Mom, who always encouraged me to see the bigger picture.

**Jill Denise Smith**  
**1944 - 2002**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*'...I get by with a little help from my friends...'* (Lennon and McCartney, 1967)

Where to start, or more importantly should I start at all? The question of who, or what is due acknowledgment lives on across the scholarly disciplines. When seeking advice, some colleagues warned against copious acknowledgements, 'as they may appear overly indulgent to your examiners', whilst others advocated their use for the greater institutional good. So, what to do...?

Well, having made my decision to go for it - I hope the next few pages will act as a reminder that academics are people, too. And that for me this pedagogical encounter, with all its terrifying philosophical jolts and ontological shudders took place amid the daily havoc of getting two teenagers to school (inc. the GCSE exam run), overseeing the family taxiing service, series 1-4 of both Poldark and Peaky Blinders (thank you BBC!), family Sunday dinners, dark washes, and of course watering, feeding, and exercising the Pheasey family menagerie.

For some, university is a familial rite of passage, for me it was a dream held by my parents who left secondary education qualification-less. So, despite my fervent objections I became the first member of our family to graduate. And decades later, having never left the field of Higher Education, I find myself indebted to their resolute and unwavering determination to educate me.

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making this endeavour excruciating beyond that customarily experienced as part of doctoral journey. It has been agony hiding myself away from you all to write, and so I thank you for forgiving my absence – I'm back now [and so too is The Villa...]!

And so, to finish... I want to thank my participants, without whom none of this would have been possible. Rest assured, I have watched you complete your scholarly endeavours with an enormous sense of pride, but:

‘...this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end, but it is, perhaps the end of the beginning.’ (Winston Churchill: 10th November 1942).

Your vulnerable migration into the Higher Education field will forever remain the focus of my academic existence.

# ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the social constructions underpinning undergraduate entry into university, within the current ideological landscape of a neoliberal, marketised Higher Education system. More specifically, this case study explores first year sport students' understandings regarding the value and purpose of a university education. Adopting a case study methodology, the research design combines qualitative and quantitative methods in order to address three important questions: (i) how is the concept of a 'student experience' constructed by newly enrolled undergraduate sport students, (ii) what influenced newly enrolled undergraduate sport students' decisions to enrol at university, and (iii) do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?

In accordance with the UK's post-war policies regarding education as the favoured pathway for social and economic development, the narratives captured within this case study construct a clear purpose for university engagement around post-graduation employment and discourses of fiscal betterment. Moreover, despite state and media concerns regarding the UK's high university tuition fees, the sport students in this study appeared comfortable accumulating debt in order to finance their future. Importantly, drawing upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu this research also noted the influence of family educational history on sport students' constructions towards university study. A family background in Higher Education appears to impart a broader awareness of the wider opportunities available through a university education (e.g. personal development and enhanced social networks), whilst, those without this family history (i.e. First in Family students) place sole emphasis on attaining a university degree in order to improve their employment and earning potential. Although, nine months on from their enrolment these First in Family students had developed an awareness of the additional opportunities a university education could offer, in a manner similar to their peers. As a contribution to previous understandings of the UK's current Higher Education system, this thesis acknowledges the legitimate concerns raised by First in Family literature. However, it also reveals the potential for these students to alter their initial understandings, through engagement with the university experience itself.

# CONTENTS

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<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research Aims.....	1
1.2 Research Questions .....	2
1.3 Key findings .....	2
1.4 Doctoral Researcher .....	3
1.5 Organisation of the thesis .....	4
<b>2 Literature Review.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Historical Context.....	6
2.2 Policy & Funding .....	8
2.3 A Higher Education Marketplace.....	19
2.4 Widening Student Participation .....	24
2.5 The 'Student Experience' .....	29
<b>3 Research Context.....</b>	<b>34</b>
3.1 A Post-92 University .....	34
3.2 Career Opportunities in Sport .....	38
3.3 Participants .....	42
<b>4 Research Design .....</b>	<b>50</b>
4.1 Research Paradigm .....	50
4.2 Case Study Methodology .....	54
4.3 Data Collection Methods.....	58
4.3.1 Stage 1: Preliminary questionnaire.....	63
4.3.2 Stage 2: Follow-up questionnaire .....	64
4.3.3 Stage 3: Interviews.....	66
4.4 Data Analysis .....	68
4.4.1 Questionnaire data analysis .....	68
4.4.2 Interview data analysis .....	70
4.4.3 Supporting analytical framework .....	75



4.5	Ethical considerations .....	81
4.5.1	Questionnaires .....	82
4.5.2	Interviews .....	82
4.5.3	Data handling and storage .....	84
<b>5</b>	<b>Findings.....</b>	<b>86</b>
5.1	Student Experience.....	88
5.2	Why University? .....	93
5.3	Tuition Fees .....	100
5.4	Familial Influences .....	111
5.4.1	First in family (FiF) influences.....	112
5.4.2	Impact of university .....	121
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>126</b>
6.1	Contribution to Knowledge .....	126
6.2	Looking to the Future .....	129
6.3	Critical Reflections .....	131
6.3.1	Data collection tools .....	131
6.3.2	Analytical framework .....	133
6.4	After Thought.....	135
<b>7</b>	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>136</b>
7.1	Questionnaire Schedule .....	137
7.2	Preliminary Questionnaire .....	138
7.3	Follow-up Questionnaire.....	140
7.4	Word-cloud Data .....	142
7.5	Participant Information Sheet .....	143
7.6	Interview Consent Form .....	145
7.7	Interview Schedule .....	146
7.8	Interview Guide .....	147
7.9	Interview Transcript .....	149
7.10	Participant Details.....	150
7.11	Statistical Data .....	152
7.12	Raw Data.....	156
7.13	Degree attainment data .....	158
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>160</b>

# LIST OF TABLES

---

Table 1: A timeline of post 1992 developments. ....	14
Table 2: UK university tuition fees for the 2019-20 academic year (The Complete University Guide, 2019a). ....	13
Table 3: Details Manchester Metropolitan University foundations through a series of college mergers over the last two centuries ( <a href="https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/about-us/history/">https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/about-us/history/</a> ). Note: <b>bolded text</b> highlights pertinent information to contextualise the institution’s position within the UK’s Higher Education Sector, whilst <i>italised text</i> locates the specific historical information within the specific timeframe of this case study.....	35
Table 4: Graduate employment data taken from *The Physiological Society’s (2019:11) report: Sport & Exercise Science Education: Impact on the UK Economy and the #HESA Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education report 2016/17 (2018:unpaginated).....	38
Table 5: A summary of the online career information available to prospective sport students considering a degree in sport <sup>17</sup> . Data has been drawn directly from the National Careers Service (2017; 2019) and UCAS (2019b). Note: for ease any information making reference to a university degree is highlighted in <b>bold</b> . ....	41
Table 6: Details of the Department of Exercise and Sport Science’s three single honours undergraduate sport degree programmes for the academic year 2015-2016.....	43
Table 7: First year enrolment data for all three undergraduate sport degrees offered by the Department of Exercise and Sport Science during its location on MMU Cheshire’s Crewe campus. Key: (#) indicates recruitment target for each programme, ## indicates number of male sport students; * identifies a noteworthy increase in enrolment following the announcement of increased tuition fees (from £3,000 to £9,000) scheduled for 2012-13; ^ identifies the reduction in enrolment following the announcement of the campus closure in 2018-19.....	43
Table 8: Percentage of Year 1 full time students with household incomes assessed below key thresholds (Source: HE Bursary portal, March 2018).....	47
Table 9: Preliminary questionnaire completion rates (n=93). (Note: to aid the analysis process, each degree programme had a specific colour for the questionnaire text, the colour is indicated in the table below). ....	64
Table 10: Follow-up questionnaire completion rates for the three undergraduate sport programmes (n=96). (Note: to aid the analysis process, each degree programme had a specific colour for the questionnaire text, the colour is indicated in the table below).....	64
Table 11: Preliminary themes were generated from the two questionnaires: (1) Following Phase 2: a series of (2) initial codes were produced and used to code the interview transcripts. Following Phases 3-4 the (3) working themes were identified and extracts coded at Levels 1-2 (Braun and Clarke, 2006:91-92).....	71

Table 12: The themes identified through Phase 5 of thematic analysis process (referred to pages 66-70). .....	88
Table 13: Programme responses to question 5 on the preliminary questionnaire: What is your main reason for coming to university (please tick one option)? Data is reported as: number of responses (percentage). .....	93
Table 14: Responses to question 11 on the preliminary questionnaire: When considering which university to go to, did you make use of any of the following (tick all that apply to you)? .....	99
Table 15: A crosstabulation of the 5-point attitudinal scale responses to question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire: Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university? Data coded accordingly: no, unimportant = 1; no = 2; moderately so = 3; yes = 4; yes, extremely = 5. Percentage data provided for each group (HE-I and FiF) and for all sport students. ....	103
Table 16: A cross tabulation of previous family exposure to Higher Education (FiF or HE-I) and sport students' self-reported reasons for university study, obtained from question 5 on the preliminary questionnaire: What is your main reason for coming to university (please tick one option)? .....	116
Table 17: The thesis appendices and their locations. ....	136
Table 18: Preliminary questionnaire schedule .....	137
Table 19: Follow-up questionnaire schedule.....	137
Table 20: Interviewee undergraduate degree programme details.....	146
Table 21: Interview schedule, Higher Education experience category (First-in-Family = FiF, Higher Education–Informed = HE-I) and assigned pseudonym. ....	146
Table 22: Participant demographic data. ....	150
Table 23: Responses to: Has anyone in your family been to university... and if so, who? Using the O'Shea and colleagues' (2017) definition five sport students were identified as first in family (FiF) and six as Higher Education-Informed (HE-I). .....	151
Table 24: In response to question 4 on the preliminary questionnaire: Does anyone in your family have a university degree (tick all that apply); 57 sport students (61%) were classified as first in family (FiF) according to O'Shea and colleagues' (2015b:vii): [A] first-in-family student is defined as no one in the immediate family of origin, including siblings or parents, having previously attended a higher education institution or having completed a university degree. Note: rows indicate the 'immediate family' criteria and 36 as were classified as HE-I.....	151
Table 25: A summary outlining all statistical methods used. ....	152
Table 26: This yielded a value of the test statistic as 2.21 with a p-value of 0.766 (bolded), suggesting little evidence of an association between the categorical variables of first in family (FiF) and HE-I, and reasons to attend university ....	153

Table 27: Contingency table of first in family (FiF) and career motivation.....	153
Table 28: Test of Association between first in family (FiF) and attitude. This yielded a value of the test statistic of 3.007, p-value of 0.610 (bolded) suggesting no link between the categorical variables of FiF and HE-I, and attitude towards tuition fees .....	153
Table 29: Association of change in attitude to fees from starting university to completing first year .....	153
Table 30: Association of change in 'Student Experience' from starting university to completing first year.....	154
Table 30: Percentiles of attitude towards university fees across programmes. Interquartile Ranges are 2, 2, 1 respectively for CSD, PESP and SES, indicating less variation in the SES cohort. ....	155
Table 31: Results of Krusk Wallis Test. Result is borderline significant, as p-value close to the $\alpha=0.05$ set for significance. ....	155
Table 32: Responses to question 8 on the initial questionnaire: The media often portrays university students as 'customers' because of tuition fees, the sport students were asked: Do you think paying tuition fees will change how you view your university education (in comparison to school/college)? Students were asked to indicate their response using yes or no, and to explain their answer. Reoccurring themes (uncoded in black):.....	156
Table 33: The predicted probability of getting a good honours degree based on key student characteristics (Male/Female; BAME/White; Vocational/Academic and Low socio-economic status / High socio-economic status) .....	159

# LIST OF FIGURES

---

Figure 1: Prospective employment information (key aspects highlighted) taken from page 14 of the Sport & Exercise Science Education: Impact on the UK Economy (key findings version) report by The Physiological Society and Guild HE.....	22
Figure 2: Employment and salary data (key aspects highlighted) taken from page 4 of the Sport & Exercise Science Education: Impact on the UK Economy (full) report by The Physiological Society and Guild HE.....	22
Figure 3: Examples of the social media exposure to the Sport & Exercise Science Education: Impact on the UK Economy report ‘key findings’ in May 2019 (note the use of the term ‘graduate premium, discussed earlier in this chapter). .....	23
Figure 4: Department of Exercise and Sport Science’s ‘good honours’ (i.e. 2:1 or 1 <sup>st</sup> class honours degree) attainment data for academic year 2017-18 (i.e. the year the participant in this case study were due to graduate) by sport student characteristics: family educational status (FiF/HE-I), ethnicity (BAME/White), entry qualification (Vocational/Academic), and gender (Male/Female). See Appendix 7.13 for degree programme specific attainment data for the sport students participating in this case study.....	26
Figure 5: Examples of the pervasive employment narrative associated with Higher Education engagement. Note the the timing of such tweets, at the start of the University Open Day calendar (September) leading into the first (and most significant) UCAS application deadline (in January). ....	40
Figure 6: Data collection took place across three stages within the 2015-16 academic year. The questionnaires administered in Stages 1 and 2 were completed in September 2015 and April 2016, respectively, whilst the individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in May 2016. ....	59
Figure 7: Data taken from an interview transcript to illustrate Phase 3: the coding process for ‘tuition fees’. ....	73
Figure 8: The mind map created during Phase 4. The seven pre-constructed themes (black) were the starting point for the creation of a set of Working Themes (colour coded for future phases). ....	73
Figure 9: Phase 6 of thematic analysis, involved categorising the two participant groups. Interview transcripts were grouped by previous family experience of Higher Education, resulting in six interview scripts labelled as Higher Education – Informed (HE-I) and five as scripts from First-in-Family (FiF) sport students. ....	74
Figure 10: A visual representation of Bourdieu’s Thinking Tools (1984:101 & 2010).....	77

Figure 11: Word-cloud generated by Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus (Pro Word Cloud add-in) illustrating the themes generated in response to question 6 on the preliminary questionnaire: What do you hope to gain from your university experience? Refer to Appendix 7.4 for the raw data use to construct this image. ....94

Figure 12: A stacked bar chart illustrating the 5-point attitudinal scale responses to question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire: Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university? Data coded accordingly: no, unimportant = 1; no = 2; moderately so = 3; yes = 4; yes, extremely = 5..... 101

Figure 13 A boxplot of the 5-point attitudinal scale responses to question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire: Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university? Data coded: no, unimportant = 1; no = 2; moderately so = 3; yes = 4; yes, extremely = 5, for the three undergraduate programmes, illustrating less variability in the SES programme. (Notes interpretation of this boxplot: the thicker black lines indicate the medians, whilst the length of the boxes reflect the data's inter-quartile range, and the 'T' tails indicate the maximums and minimums). ..... 106

Figure 14: A stacked bar chart illustrating the FiF and HE-I responses to question 5 on the preliminary questionnaire: What is your main reason for coming to university (please tick one option)? ..... 116

Figure 15: Word-clouds generated by Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus (Pro Word Cloud add-in) illustrating the themes generated in response to question 6 on the preliminary questionnaire: What do you hope to gain from your university experience? ..... 118

Figure 16: Department of Exercise and Sport Science degree attainment data by student characteristics: entry qualification (Vocational/Academic), ethnicity (BAME/White), and gender (Male/Female). ..... 158

Figure 17: 2017-18 undergraduate degree attainment data by student characteristics: family educational status (FiF/HE-I), ethnicity (BAME/White), entry qualification (Vocational/Academic), and gender (Male/Female). ..... 158

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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This Introduction chapter provides the reader with the rationale for this research. In doing so, the chapter begins with a brief overview of the study focussing upon the three underpinning research questions and key findings associated with them. Following this, the reader is introduced to the professional doctoral researcher, thereby acknowledging any interconnections between personal biography and the Higher Education research embarked upon. The chapter then closes with an outline of the thesis document itself.

## 1.1 RESEARCH AIMS

Education is considered fundamental to a nation's social and economic development. As a result, understanding why people elect to participate in post-compulsory education is of significant interest to all those working within the UK's Higher Education sector; especially when this decision is considered alongside influential contextual factors, such as: the sector's contemporary neoliberal, marketised landscape (with its published metrics, KPIs and league tables); the significant personal investment currently required through annual tuition fees (currently £9,250pa for the majority of UK<sup>1</sup> students), and the saturated graduate employment market (i.e. according to the Office for National Statistics, in 2017 nearly half of employed recent graduates were working in a non-graduate role).

The aim of this research was to examine the social constructions associated with the decision to study at university. More specifically, the research aimed to explore first year sport students' understandings regarding the value and purpose of a university education. Employing a case study methodology, the research combined qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods, through a series of questionnaires and interviews, deployed at specific times across the 2015-16 academic year.

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<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation UK refers to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As outlined in the abstract, this case study explores sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of a university education, within the contemporary landscape of a marketised UK Higher Education system.

Through three research questions, the case study explores specifically: how the discourse of 'student experience' is constructed; what influences sport students' decisions to enrol into the university system, and whether exposure to Higher Education [via immediate family members] prior to enrolment influences the constructions underpinning sport students' decision to study at university.

- RQ1.** How is the concept of a 'student experience' constructed by newly enrolled undergraduate sport students?
- RQ2.** What influenced newly enrolled undergraduate sport students' decision to enrol at university?
- RQ3.** Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?

To guide the reader, when directly referring to any of the three research questions above, the following insertions are used: RQ1, RQ2, or RQ3.

## 1.3 KEY FINDINGS

This professional doctorate makes a number of important contributions to our understanding of sport students' engagement with the UK's Higher Education system. Whilst the case study itself is specifically located in a sports department of a post-92 university, located in the north of England; its findings may resonate more widely, as the issues surrounding the value and purpose of a university education within a saturated sports graduate job market are relevant to UK Higher Education section as a whole.

Focusing on the three research questions, this section summarises the findings of this case study.



**RQ1: How is the concept of a ‘student experience’ constructed by newly enrolled undergraduate sport students?** Whilst the majority of first year students were not aware of the term ‘student experience’, those that did associated it with characteristics of a student lifestyle as opposed to the university’s educational provision. This highlights the need for caution when employing this term, as ‘student experience’ within student-facing university documentation, may lead to misunderstandings between different audiences (i.e. between students, staff, and university management).

**RQ2: What influenced newly enrolled undergraduate sport students’ decision to enrol at university?** A number of factors appear to influence the decision to enrol at university. For some sport students the decision reflects family expectation and/or a personal desire to attend. However, for many there was a clear association between university and future employment. In addition, sport students’ use of published marketing data confirmed the important status of national metrics in a university’s recruitment process.

**RQ3: Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students’ constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?** Familial Higher Education experience appears to encourage an awareness of the broader benefits of a university education (beyond the degree itself). Consequently, those sport students whose educational family histories do not include university engagement appear unaware of these additional benefits, placing sole emphasis on discourses of employment and betterment.

## 1.4 DOCTORAL RESEARCHER

As a pre-1992 science graduate, my undergraduate experiences within the Higher Education sector were considerably different from those currently enrolled in the UK’s university system. Furthermore, since securing a lecturing position in 1996, there have been a number of strategic policy changes within the sector, altering both staff and student constructions surrounding the notion of university engagement (Lewis, 2018). For university staff like myself the commodification of the UK’s Higher Education system (e.g. embracing quality metrics, league tables, and a neoliberal, market ideology) and the introduction of significant tuition fees

has altered our expectations of, and relationship with the undergraduate students we teach (Williams, 2013; Giroux, 2014; Nixon et al., 2018).

Also, within my specific university discipline (sport) the combination of: (i) a rapid increase in university sports degree provision over the last fifty years (for example, within just one of the sport disciplines in my department: 'sport science' the number of UK university students has increased from: 0 in 1975/76; to 7,657 in 1975/6; to 27,005 in 2016/7 according to HESA (2019) and the Physiological Society (2019)), (ii) the saturated UK and graduate job market, and (iii) inconsistencies in the purported requirement of a university degree within certain sport-based careers, makes understanding current undergraduate sport students' constructions surrounding the purpose and value of university engagement vitally important for staff, students, and the wider university community.

Consequently, as this is a professional doctorate, I chose to complete the research element of the doctoral programme within my specific university department (the Department of Exercise and Sport Science, at Manchester Metropolitan University), where I am currently employed as Principal Lecturer in Sport Science. By doing so, I hoped to develop an understanding of the contemporary constructions surrounding the value and purpose of a university education for undergraduate sport students.

## 1.5 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. In this introductory chapter the reader is offered a rationale for the case study, alongside its key contextual features. The chapters within this thesis are as follows:

**Chapter 1** serves to introduce the researcher to the reader, contextualising the key elements of the doctoral thesis, including a rationale for the research and its relevance for the twenty-first century.

**Chapter** Error! Reference source not found. presents a review of relevant literature, including an overview of the UK's Higher Education system through the decades. This is followed by an examination of the current Higher Education

sector, with its funding strategies, widening participation policies and contemporary notions of student experience.

**Chapter** Error! Reference source not found. outlines the context for this case study and provides an overview of the institutional location, the three participating undergraduate sports degree programmes, and the specific case study participants.

**Chapter** Error! Reference source not found. provides details of the research design, acknowledging the influence the research questions had over paradigm and methodology selection. In doing so, it offers an account of the social constructionist paradigm, alongside a rationale for its use with this research. The chapter closes with details of the data collection methods, data analysis process, and associated ethical considerations.

**Chapter** Error! Reference source not found. delves into the findings of the research. Exploring sport students' constructions surrounding the value and purpose of a university education, using the four emergent themes (student experience; why university, tuition fees, and family influence) as a scaffold to present the qualitative and quantitative data.

**Chapter 5** offers as an opportunity to reflect upon the study's key findings and their implications for the future.

**Chapter 6** closes the thesis with a record of the essential documents, analyses data outputs, and citations, in the form of appendices and a reference section.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

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In order to provide the reader with the background to this study, an examination of the UK's current Higher Education system is required. However, it is also important to briefly glance back at the historical underpinnings of the system and how these have contributed to the educational context this research inhabits.

When considering the historic development of the UK's Higher Education system the most obvious approach to take is a sequential one. However, whilst it may be argued that it is impossible to avoid this strategy, I have chosen to combine this with a thematic approach in order to emphasise the contextual importance of key events. Consequently, the first section of this Literature Review chapter will briefly acknowledge the historic perspective of the UK's Higher Education system per se, before leading the reader through the present-day issues in order to contextualise any findings. The latter sections aim to specifically examine the three interconnected themes central to this case study: the contemporary notion of a university 'student experience'; the marketisation of the Higher Education system and familial influences on engagement with Higher Education.

### 2.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Education is considered fundamental to social and economic development, and throughout history philosophers and law makers, such as priests and politicians, have recognised the importance of education as a means of regulating and ordering the masses. Armytage (1995), provides a comprehensive history of the UK's universities originating through what he terms the "Monastic Matrix" (596-1154 AD), when clerics struggled to save the nation's culture and education from the legacy of the Roman Empire and the monarchy attempted to 'civilise' the titled law enforcers, in an effort to preserve society (Armytage, 1995:15-30).

Accordingly, whilst the history of Higher Education in the UK may be traced back as far as the twelfth century, prior to the nineteenth century Higher Education consisted of a few relatively small institutions, few of which were formally designated as universities. At the turn of the nineteenth century, a formal Higher Education system did not exist within the UK, with just two university

establishments in England (Oxford [est. 1096] and Cambridge [est. 1209]) and four in Scotland (St Andrews [est.1413], Glasgow [est. 1451], Aberdeen [est. 1495], and Edinburgh [est. 1583]). Moreover, much of what did exist was either vocationally focussed (i.e. training for doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.) or devised as a finishing school for the higher echelons of society.

From the nineteenth century onwards, new universities and colleges were founded, their intention being to promote the benefits of education more widely. These universities were predominantly situated within the UK's largest cities, with a curriculum focused on the 'demands of society' rather than the more traditional subjects such as the classics and mathematics (Jones, 1988:4). During the mid- to late-twentieth century additional universities were established from existing polytechnics, central institutions or colleges of Higher Education, through a number of state strategies including the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (c.13), including the institution central to this case study: Manchester Metropolitan University (see Table 3, page 35 for more historical details regarding this institution).

Importantly from the perspective of this case study, the accumulative effect of these historic alterations (and associated political policies discussed later in this chapter) has been a substantial increase in Higher Education participation rates, altering the sector from a small-scale arrangement to a significant Higher Education system, as graduate numbers<sup>2</sup> steadily increased: from 10,800 in 1923; to 81,705 in 1954; to 305,008 in 1984 (Tight, 2009:56); to 366,019 in 2012 and to 418,895 last academic year (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019). However, this expansion did little to reduce the socioeconomic inequalities of access to Higher Education prior to the 1990s (when enrolment rates for the most advantaged social class had reached saturation point), as those from more advantaged social class backgrounds remained better placed to take up the new educational opportunities the expansion afforded (Archer, 2005). In fact, the qualitative inequalities between social classes in terms of 'the odds of enrolment on more traditional and higher status degree programmes and at 'Old' universities remained fundamentally unchanged' (Boliver, 2011:229).

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<sup>2</sup> Figures quoted are for *graduate* students, numbers for full-time students enrolled at UK Higher Education institutions have risen from approximately 400,000 in the 1960s to just under 2 million in 2013/14 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015b).

Alongside the increase in university engagement, there have been fundamental changes to the core tenets of the UK Higher Education sector, including the introduction of student tuition fees and the development of a Higher Education marketplace, all of which are noteworthy economical and scholarly adjustments that will be discussed further in the next section (to assist the reader Table 2 provides the factual information underpinning future policy discussions within this Literature Review chapter).

## 2.2 POLICY & FUNDING

The key trend underlying the UK's post-war Higher Education policy and funding has been the growth in participation rates, radically altering the university sector from a small-scale arrangement designed to support the elite, into a large-scale education system intended to serve the majority of the population at some point in their lives (Lee et al., 1998; Woodrow et al., 2002; Kettley, 2007; Tight, 2012; Department for Education, 2016a). Consequently, as the state's funding discussions coalesced around the political notion of capitalism, individualism and social betterment through successful participation in education, the UK's university sector was forced to endure significant fiscal policies, shifting it from a system entirely financed by the taxpayer, to one where graduates are encouraged to pay for the perceived financial benefits of having a degree (i.e. through the discourse of increased *economic capital* and enhanced graduate salaries) (Ingram and Waller, 2015): a fiscal model dubbed the 'graduate premium' by many economists (Chowdry et al., 2010:7).

Moving away from the medieval foundations of Oxford and Cambridge, with their local and private financing, by the mid-nineteenth century the state had become inextricably involved in Higher Education policy and funding. In 1919, the established University Grants Committee encouraged the steady expansion of universities within the UK, and by the mid-twentieth century, the state had become a dominant funder of these institutions. During the 1950s, there were just 24 universities in the UK, however by 1969 this had almost doubled to 47 with the establishment of new campus universities; the transfer of the colleges of advanced technology (CATs) to the university sector; the division of some

existing universities; and according charters to a few long-established specialist Higher Education institutions.

Importantly from the perspective of this case study, undergraduate student numbers from the 1940-1960s are portrayed as a period of growth based on the state's confidence in the Higher Education system. Rising student numbers were matched by new staff appointments, 'allowing academic workloads to remain manageable' (Tight, 2009:271). Alongside this was a steady improvement in state and local authority funding for students, resulting in the establishment of a national system for student financial support in the early 1960s. However, with increased monetary support from the state, came increased state expectations and an intensifying desire to influence the future direction of the university sector.

Ostensibly, the state's desire was to further transform the Higher Education sector from an elite system towards a large-scale provision, as the number of secondary school pupils achieving the minimum standard or better for university admission increased following the Education Act of 1944 (Geo.6, c31). A widening participation strategy articulated in the Macmillan Government's Robbins Report (1963:8):

Higher Education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so.

And the ensuing adjustment of the Robbins' axiom by the University Grants Committee (1984:2), who assert that:

Higher Education should be available for all those who are able to benefit from them and who wish to do so.

As Shattock and Berdahl (1984) remark, the subtle change in language within two decades is noteworthy, from the 1960s emphasis on academic prowess ('those who are qualified by ability and attainment') to the 1980s focus upon individualism ('those who are able to benefit from').

During this twenty-year period the state intervened in the Higher Education system on several occasions, as it became increasingly concerned that the sector appeared relatively insignificant when compared to the rest of the developed world, with participation rates amongst the lowest in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. In particular, the government was concerned with the impact of this low participation rate on the

nation's economic growth potential, alongside other important factors including notions of citizenship and social cohesion. From this point onwards a narrative of national and individual betterment became entrenched within state communication regarding post-compulsory education, as participation within the Higher Education system was marketed as vital to economic success, and a route to liberation from 'previous social constraints' (Department for Education, 2010:unpaginated).

Consequently, this discourse of national- and self-betterment generated a state imperative to increase access to Higher Education. However, the question of how to finance such an expansion has remained on the agenda of successive UK governments to this day (Wyness, 2010; Belfield et al., 2017; Moran and Powell, 2018, Department of Education, 2019), as a widely accessible, high-quality, university system is expensive and must compete for public funding with other imperatives (Barr, 2004). Indeed, by the early 1980s institutional funding and the issue of financial support for undergraduate students had gained significant prominence, as all political parties acknowledged concern that public funding could no longer support the combination of increasing student numbers and continuation of the student grant policies established in the 1960s. Consequently, whilst participation rates for young people were doubling, the 'nadir of government support for Higher Education was reached' (Fulton, 1990:151), as political policies manoeuvred the Higher Education sector towards a variety of student-centred funding initiatives.

In 1989, universities were still entirely state financed, despite participation rates increasing to 15% of the population (in comparison with 6% in 1963) and funding per full-time equivalent (FTE) increasing to £8,818<sup>3</sup> (in comparison with £6,115 in 1963) (Wyness, 2010:6). This successful period of participation growth attracted attention from central government, who sought to significantly alter the university funding strategy, through the introduction of student loans and subsequently tuition fees. In 1990, the first UK student loan scheme was implemented, whereby financial support for student maintenance (i.e. living costs) was made up of 50% grant and 50% loan (means-tested against parental income). Two years later, the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (c.13)

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<sup>3</sup> Represents funding from public sources, excluding fees at 2006 real prices (GDP deflator).



resulted in the greatest period of university institutional growth in UK history, as abolition of the binary system established in the mid-1960s resulted in the establishment of a 'single funding structure for teaching in universities, polytechnics and colleges' (Department of Enterprise Services, 1991:14). However, importantly from the perspective of this study, the alteration in funding structure did not alter the 'binary' nature of the UK's Higher Education system from the perspective of prestige. The dualistic assessment of institutional choice merely shifted from: university or polytechnic, to traditional/pre-92 university or modern/post-92 university (for an account of the hierarchy of prestige among British Higher Education institutions see Halsey, 1992).

As a consequence of the continued rise in participation rates (from 23% in 1992 to 33% in 1997), reports that many students were living below the poverty line, and significant concerns regarding an impending funding crisis (Barr and Crawford, 1998), the serving Conservative government commissioned the Dearing report in 1996 (formally known as the National Enquiry of Inquiry into Higher Education), with the single political focus: what to do with student funding? The Dearing report (1997) made a total of 93 recommendations, the most pivotal being R79, recommending that students should contribute significantly towards the cost of their tertiary education. The report proposed that:

'...graduates in work [should] make a flat rate contribution of around 25 per cent of the average cost of Higher Education, through an income contingent mechanism, and that it ensures that the proportion of tuition costs to be met by the contribution cannot be increased without an independent review and an affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament.' [emphasis added] (Dearing, , 1997:323)

This report instigated one of the most substantial policy changes in the post-war period: the Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998) and the introduction of a £1,000 upfront annual tuition fee for all UK undergraduate programmes.

Despite further increases in participation (~40% by 2004), the government remained concerned about university engagement within lower socio-economic groups<sup>4</sup>, where rates showed only modest improvements. In addition, concern grew regarding the UK's underfunding of universities in comparison with the rest of the OECD. As a result, the Labour government sought to improve on the post-Dearing reforms through the 2004 Higher Education Act (to be implemented in

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<sup>4</sup> For example, during this time participation rates by social class indicated that 80% of young people in social class I entered Higher Education, whilst only 14% of young people from social class V entered Higher Education (CVCP, 1999).

the 2006/7 academic year). Most notably this act abolished upfront fees (believed to deter engagement for some lower socio-economic groups), replacing them with variable deferred tuition fees (up to £3,000) to be repaid once graduate earnings had exceeded £15,000. More recently, in response to the Browne report (2010), extensive amendments were made to the UK's deferred tuition fee arrangement, as the elected Coalition Government established a fiscal reform programme that transferred the lion's share of university funding to undergraduate tuition fees, with direct state support only available for a limited number of state priority areas (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2011:4):

Our reforms tackle three challenges. First, putting higher education on a stable footing. We inherited the largest public deficit in post-war history, requiring spending cuts across government. By shifting public spending away from teaching grants and towards repayable tuition loans, we have ensured that higher education receive the funding it needs even as substantial savings are made to public expenditure. Second, institutions must deliver a better student experience; improving teaching, assessment, feedback, and preparation for the world of work. Third, they must take more responsibility for increasing social mobility.

The key recommendation from this report was that students should pay at least £21,000 for a three-year degree (raising the cap from its 2011/12 level of £3,375 per annum). Focusing specifically on the participants within this case study (who enrolled at university in September 2015), Manchester Metropolitan University opted to set the tuition fee for its undergraduate sports programmes at £9,000 per annum from 2012-13 onwards.

Following the permitted rise in line with inflation in 2017-18, universities in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland may now charge up to £9,250 per year for undergraduate courses, whilst Welsh universities can charge up to £9,000. There are however noteworthy funding differentials across the UK's devolved administrations (Table 1 below provides details of the current 2019-20 tuition fees, based on student country of residence). So, whilst the last decade has seen successive changes in UK governance (from a Labour government, to a Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition, to the incumbent Conservative government), Higher Education funding has remained high on the political agenda, as the state searches for ways to further reduce public expenditure whilst meeting the increasing demand for university places, generated by the rising post-16 educational success.

Indeed, in February 2018 the Prime Minister acknowledged government concerns that whilst public funding of the Higher Education sector needed to

reduce further, current undergraduate students in England faced ‘one of the most expensive systems of university tuition in the world’ (BBC News, 2018:unpaginated), ordering an independent review of the current tuition fee scheme, to be led by Philip Augar.

Table 1: UK university tuition fees for the 2019-20 academic year (The Complete University Guide, 2019a).

Original country of residence...	Country of university study...			
	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
England	£9,250	£9,250	£9,000	£9,250
Scotland	£9,250	£1,820 <sup>5</sup>	£9,000	£9,250
Wales	£9,250	£9,250	£9,000	£9,250
Northern Ireland	£9,250	£9,250	£9,000	£4,160

Having been granted permission to include the whole post-compulsory education system, the Augar report (Department for Education, 2019) considered both the Higher and Further Education sectors’ role: (i) in supporting research, scholarship and innovation; (ii) promoting citizens’ ability to reach their full potential; (iii) contributing to civic wellbeing; and (iv) meeting the economic and skills needs of the nation. In particular the report considered the purpose of the UK’s post-compulsory education system and the perceived skills gaps at levels four and five. The report also reflected upon the consequences of a fully marketised system, including the overall decline in participation since 2010/11, the specific decline in part-time study and lifelong learning, and the rise of ‘low-value’ courses that fail to deliver student outcomes in line with the fiscal objectives of participation (i.e. the marketised graduate premium).

Following on from this most recent report into the consequences of a marketised Post-18 education system, the next section of this chapter will explore the contemporary notion of marketisation and its place within Higher Education.

<sup>5</sup> This fee is usually paid for by Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) provided students satisfy residence criteria.

Table 2: A timeline of post 1992 developments.

	Policy developments	Institutional matters	Student fees/loans
1992	Further Education Act Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Wales, and Scotland (HEFCE, HEFCE, SHEFC) are established.	38 (mostly former polytechnics) are established.	
1993		University status granted to three further institutions.	
1994		Abertay Dundee established.	
1995	Department for Education merged with Employment to become Department for Education and Employment.		
1996	Education (student loans) Act		
1997	Dearing report: Higher Education in the Learning Society.		Following the 1997 referendum, Scottish parliament abolished up-front tuition fee for Scottish and EU students.
1998	The Teaching and Higher Education Act passed into law in 1998, setting an annual tuition fee of £1,000 for English Universities (with the expectation that means testing would mean a third of students would not pay anything).		Students starting university in the autumn term are the first to pay £1,000 tuition fees, which must be paid "up front".
1999	The 'Education UK' brand strategy was launched through a Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI).		

2000	The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom (CVCP) renamed Universities UK.		<u>Plan 1 Student Loans</u> : income threshold is £18,935 at which point employers automatically take 9% of income above the threshold from the salary along with tax and NI. Student loans include tuition fee loan and a maintenance loan to help with your living costs.
2001		Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education gains university status.	
2002		London Guildhall and North London universities combine as London Metropolitan University.	
2003	White paper, the future of Higher Education establishing variable top-up fees with an upper limit set at £3,000 per year, to be re-paid once graduates earn above £15,000, with a means-tested package of support.		
2004	Higher Education Act.	University of Manchester and UMIST amalgamate. Cardiff separates from the University of Wales.	The 2004 Act (2004:13) also granted the Welsh Assembly decision making rights on tuition fee policy. In 2005, the Welsh Assembly maintained the £1,200 tuition fee, exempting Welsh domiciled students from the top-up fees through an additional £1,800 grant.
2005	National Student [Satisfaction] Survey (NSS) is launched.	Bath Spa, Bolton, Canterbury Christ Church, Chester, Chichester, Liverpool Hope, Northampton, Roehampton, Southampton Solent, Winchester, and Worcester achieve university status.	Almost all universities tuition fees set at £3,000.

2006		Edge Hill achieved university status.	Students starting university in the autumn become the first to be charged £3,000 .
2007	Applications to university increase, despite the introduction of the £3,000 fee.	St. Martin's College achieves university status as University of Cumbria. Buckinghamshire Chilterns College becomes Buckingham University. Queen Margaret University College (Edinburgh) becomes Queen Margaret University. Imperial College separates from the University of London.	
2008	National Union of Students drops its opposition to tuition fees.	Glyndwr and Swansea Metropolitan achieve university status within the University of Wales.	
2010	Lord Browne's recommendation that students should pay at least £21,000 for a three-year degree.		<p><b>Universities in England:</b> Upper limit set at £9,000 from 2012. <b>Universities in Wales:</b> Welsh students' fees above £3,465 are paid by the Welsh assembly wherever they study in the UK, whilst students from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland pay full fees.</p> <p><b>Universities in Scotland:</b> Scottish students do not pay fees, but universities may charge those from elsewhere in the UK up to £9,000 (note: the Welsh Assembly will subsidise costs for Welsh students).</p> <p><b>Universities in Northern Ireland:</b> Fees for students from Northern Ireland remain at ~£3,500 per year, but students from Scotland, England and Wales are charged higher fees.</p>

2012	Undergraduates with A-Level grades of at least AAB (or equivalent) removed from student number controls.		<u>Plan 2 Student Loans</u> : income threshold is increased to £25,725 at which point employers automatically take 9% of income above the threshold from the salary along with tax and NI. Student loans include tuition fee loan and a maintenance loan to help with your living costs.
2013	The student number control threshold was lowered to ABB for academic year 2013/14.  In December 2013, the Coalition government announced the ending of 'student number control' for England for academic year 2015/16.	'We are not yet convinced the government can deliver on its promise that the quality of provision will not suffer with such a significant expansion of numbers' [Russell Group, 2013].	
2014	As global competition for international students intensifies, the UK remains a top destination, attracting 13% of all foreign students (OECD, 2014).	A minority of universities start providing 'unconditional offers' to prospective 2014/15 students predicted to achieve >320pts (e.g. ABB).	
2015	Removal of 'student number control' allowing universities to enrol as many students as they wish.	Manchester Metropolitan University's Cheshire Faculty trials 'unconditional offers' to 2015/16 sport, music, dance and drama students: (i) predicted to achieve >320pts (e.g. ABB) and (ii) select MMU as first choice institution.	
2016	White Paper: Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice. Key areas include: widening participation, opening the HE market; and boosting research and innovation.		Upper limit for tuition fees rises to £9,250.

2017	First round of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) published in June 2017. An assessment of undergraduate teaching quality in universities and other Higher Education providers, it measures excellence in three areas: teaching quality, learning environment, and the educational and professional outcomes achieved by students. In October 2017 the official title was renamed from Teaching Excellence Framework to the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (acronym remains TEF).	Institutions are rated as Gold, Silver, Bronze and Provisional. A total of 296 Higher Education providers of all types currently have a TEF award.  Manchester Metropolitan University (the location for this research) achieves a silver rating.	1st September 2017 – 31st August 2018: interested rate for student loans increased to RPI+, plus 3% (6.1%).
2018	Review of Higher Education funding: ‘...university tuition fees should reflect the economic benefit graduates will have to the country’, (Education Secretary, 2018).		2nd July 2018 – the Minister for Universities, Sam Gyimah MP, confirms that the tuition fee cap for students starting undergraduate courses in 2019/20 would remain at £9,250.
2019	Tuition fee review: the Prime Minister acknowledges that students in England currently face ‘one of the most expensive systems of university tuition in the world’ (BBC News, 2018).	30 <sup>th</sup> June 2019: Manchester Metropolitan University satellite campus in Cheshire (the location for this research) closes.  1 <sup>st</sup> July 2019: the Department of Exercise and Sport Science moves to the city-centre campus, Manchester.	The Augar report, published on 30th May 2019 makes a number of recommendations to the government, including reducing maximum tuition fees to £7,500 a year. In addition, the reintroduction of the maintenance grant (to replace some of the maintenance loan).
2020	TEF discipline (subject) level awards area initially due to be published in spring 2020.	20 <sup>th</sup> March 2020: Manchester Metropolitan University closes all non-essential buildings in response to the CoVid-19 pandemic.	The CoVid-19 pandemic results in cancellation of GCSE and A-level examinations, with implications for entry procedures for September 2020 (Department for Education, 2020).
2021			If the Augar report is adopted, <u>Plan 3 Student Loans</u> : are envisaged to roll out for 2021-22.

Information sourced from Smith (2004); BBC (2009); Tight (2009); Blake (2010), Universities UK (2011; 2012) Department for Education (2018; 2019), OFS (2018), SLC (2018), HESA (2019).



## 2.3 A HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETPLACE

Through an exploration of the ideological landscape of marketisation, this third section will contextualise the Higher Education system this case study's participants have chosen to enter.

As discussed previously, state intervention transformed the UK's Higher Education sector from a small number of medium-sized research- and education-focused institutions, to a knowledge-based service industry incorporating institutions with a diverse range of objectives, profiles, and reputations. During this time, the political landscape adopted the contemporary economic philosophy of neoliberalism<sup>6</sup>, a fiscal ideology favouring free trade, privatisation, minimal government intervention in business, and reduced public expenditure on social services (Brown, 2011; Chomsky, 2012; Giroux, 2014). This resulted in amplified marketisation in nearly all aspects of society, including within the context of this case study: the education sector as a whole (for example: from primary school Key Stage 1 and 2 Standard Assessment Test (SATs) targets and published 'value-added' metrics; to regionally and nationally published secondary school, Further Education college, and university league tables). It is often held that markets are sound economic mechanisms for organising society's resources, where the 'social coordination' of supply and demand is balanced economically, in order to provide consumers choice, based on elements such as: price, availability, quality, reputation, proximity and so forth (Brown, 2011:13).

There is however some debate surrounding the contemporary nature of this marketisation, as some do not consider the Higher Education marketplace to be a new phenomenon, claiming universities have operated within a competitive, post-compulsory education market for centuries. As Foskett (2011:26) proclaims, 'the giant has awoken in response to the direct intentions of government' through a 'process of enhanced-marketisation in an unprecedented manner', resulting in significant changes to the 'character, modus operandi and impact' of the UK's Higher Education sector.

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<sup>6</sup> Some trace the modern origins of neoliberalism to the 'Washington Consensus': a set of 10 market-based policies deemed necessary for recovery from the Latin American economic and financial crises of the 1980s (Williamson, 1989), whilst others associate it with the economic policies introduced in the early 1980s by Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the USA (Chomsky, 2012).

According to Brown (2011) there are four indicators of a marketised Higher Education sector: institutional autonomy (i.e. freedom to determine programmes, fees, admissions, staffing etc.), institutional competition (i.e. student choice regarding what, where, when and how to study), price (i.e. variable tuition fees and potential for subsidies), and availability of information (i.e. encouraging prospective institutional selection through guides, rankings, and league tables). Indeed, the notion of a neoliberal university is now commonplace (Giroux, 2014), with students positioned as market-orientated consumers (Williams, 2013), whilst at a sector level, universities are encouraged to behave in a marketised manner (e.g. through promotional and branding strategies) in order to increase their income potential through both home- and international-student recruitment (Lomer et al., 2016).

So, whilst traditional notions regard universities as a locale for academics to disclose what is important to know (since students do not have the knowledge or expertise to decide this for themselves), applying a neoliberal ideology assigns students consumer status, indeterminably linking the value of their university engagement with a market demand. Focusing specifically on the participants in this case study (who have opted to study the non-traditional graduate subject of sport) the consequence of a government-promoted, student-funded (through accumulative future debt), marketised Higher Education system is an important area for consideration. Entry into the graduate employment market may not be straightforward, given the significant mismatch between the considerable growth in sport degree provision across the sector, and the relatively limited increase in graduate career opportunities in sport (discussed in more detail in section 3.2).

Especially when the pervasive, eye-catching (but potentially misleading) university-to-employment narrative encourages engagement with university sports courses as a gateway to economic betterment, through the partial and/or selective reading of employment statistical data (for example: Figure 3). For example, The Physiological Society and GuildHE commissioned the report: 'Sport & Exercise Science Education<sup>7</sup>: Impact on the UK Economy', to assess the benefits of studying sport at university to local and national economies, and the

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<sup>7</sup> As an aside, note the use of the overarching term 'Sport and Exercise Science' to encompass all university sport provision, coded using the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA) Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) codes: C600 sport & exercise science; C610 sport coaching; C620 sport development; C630 sport conditioning, rehabilitation & therapy; C640 sport studies; C650 sport technology; C813 sport psychology and N880 sport management.

contributions of these students, universities, and colleges to the wider UK economy. Alongside the significant benefits to the UK economy (in excess of £3.9 billion) (2019:3), the 24 page 'key findings' report also quantified the individual employment and salary benefits to studying sport at university:

'For example: the average SES [sport and exercise science] graduate from AY [academic year] 2016-17 will gain employment with an annual salary of £21,100 six months after leaving with a SES qualification' (2019:14).

However, scrutiny of the data underpinning this claim (available within the separate 56 page 'full report') constructs a somewhat different employment narrative, as just 2,890 respondents (~25%) from a total of 11,505 first degree sports graduates categorised themselves as in full-time employment six months after graduation, earning an average salary of £21,158 (calculated using salary data provided by these 2,890 individuals only). Figure 1 offers details regarding the context for the 'key findings' claim referred to above, whilst Figure 2 provides the employment and salary data behind this claim, and Figure 3 provides examples of the eye-catching marketing tools published across social media.

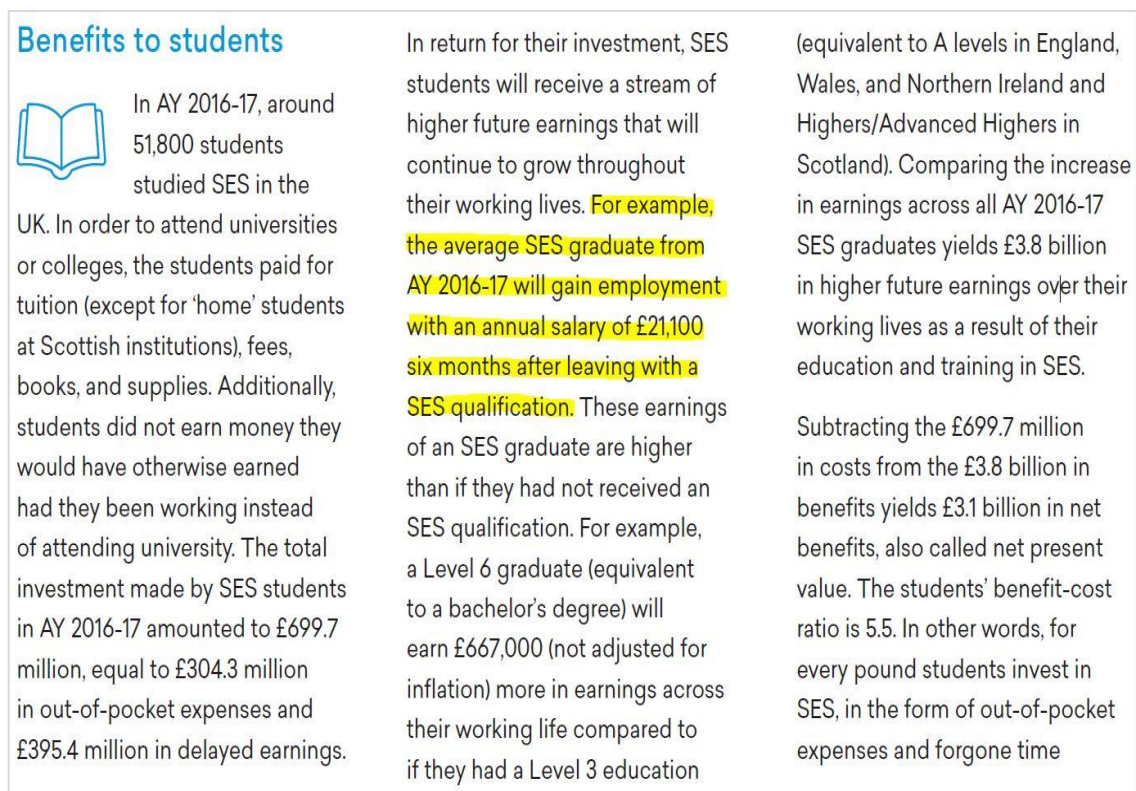


Figure 1: Prospective employment information (key aspects highlighted) taken from page 14 of the Sport & Exercise Science Education: Impact on the UK Economy report by The Physiological Society and Guild HE (key findings version).

Note from the blurb associated with Table 1.2 in Figure 2 below, the inherent bias within the salary data presented – excluding considerably more of the 11,505 first degree sports graduates (~75%) than it includes. More specifically (and possibly intentionally, to the benefit of the report’s projected salary figures): it excludes the lower wages of those in part-time work, those working whilst studying, those still studying, as well as those who did not respond to the survey. This brings into question the legitimacy of the statistics behind the marketised narrative focused predominantly on future graduate employment prospects.

Table 1.1 shows the student FPE data around SES, with rows representing the notional level of the FPE categorised by whether a qualification was awarded or is in-progress. The latter category reflects, for example, a student who completed year one of a planned three-year programme. The categorisation between

Table 1.2 presents the salary bands of AY 2016-17 SES students six months after leaving a university with a qualification. The data was provided by HESA and is based on the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Providers AY 2016-17 survey. Furthermore, the table represents students who are in full-time employment. In other words, it excludes students in part-time work, those who are working while studying, and those who are still studying. It also only includes students who responded to the survey.

**TABLE 1.1: SES STUDENTS AND CREDITS BY AWARD LEVEL, AY 2016-17**

Awarded Qualification	FPEs	Awarded Credits
Foundation degree	550	62,400
HND	185	17,400
First degree	11,505	1,791,200
Masters	1,955	204,800
Doctorate	165	19,935
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>14,360</b>	<b>2,095,735</b>
Qualification In-Progress	FPEs	Awarded Credits
Foundation degree	935	109,200
HND	255	26,400
First degree	27,005	4,189,600
Masters	1,520	160,800
Doctorate	1,060	128,065
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>30,775</b>	<b>4,614,065</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>45,135</b>	<b>6,709,800</b>

**TABLE 1.2: SES STUDENT EARNINGS BY SALARY BAND, AY 2016-17**

Salary Band	Headcount	% of Students
Under £10k	35	1.2%
£10,000 to £14,999.99	440	15.2%
£15,000 to £19,999.99	1,150	39.8%
£20,000 to £24,999.99	715	24.7%
£25,000 to £29,999.99	265	9.2%
£30,000 to £34,999.99	115	4.0%
£35,000 to £39,999.99	65	2.2%
£40,000 to £44,999.99	35	1.2%
£45,000 to £49,999.99	20	0.7%
£50,000 to £54,999.99	15	0.5%
£55,000 to £59,999.99	5	0.2%
£60,000 to £64,999.99	15	0.5%
£65,000 to £69,999.99	0	0.0%
£70,000 to £74,999.99	5	0.2%
£75,000 to £79,999.99	0	0.0%
£80,000 to £84,999.99	5	0.2%
£90,000 to £94,999.99	0	0.0%
£100,000 and above	5	0.2%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,890</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Figure 2: Employment and salary data (key aspects highlighted) taken from page 4 of the Sport & Exercise Science Education: Impact on the UK Economy report by The Physiological Society and Guild HE (full report version).

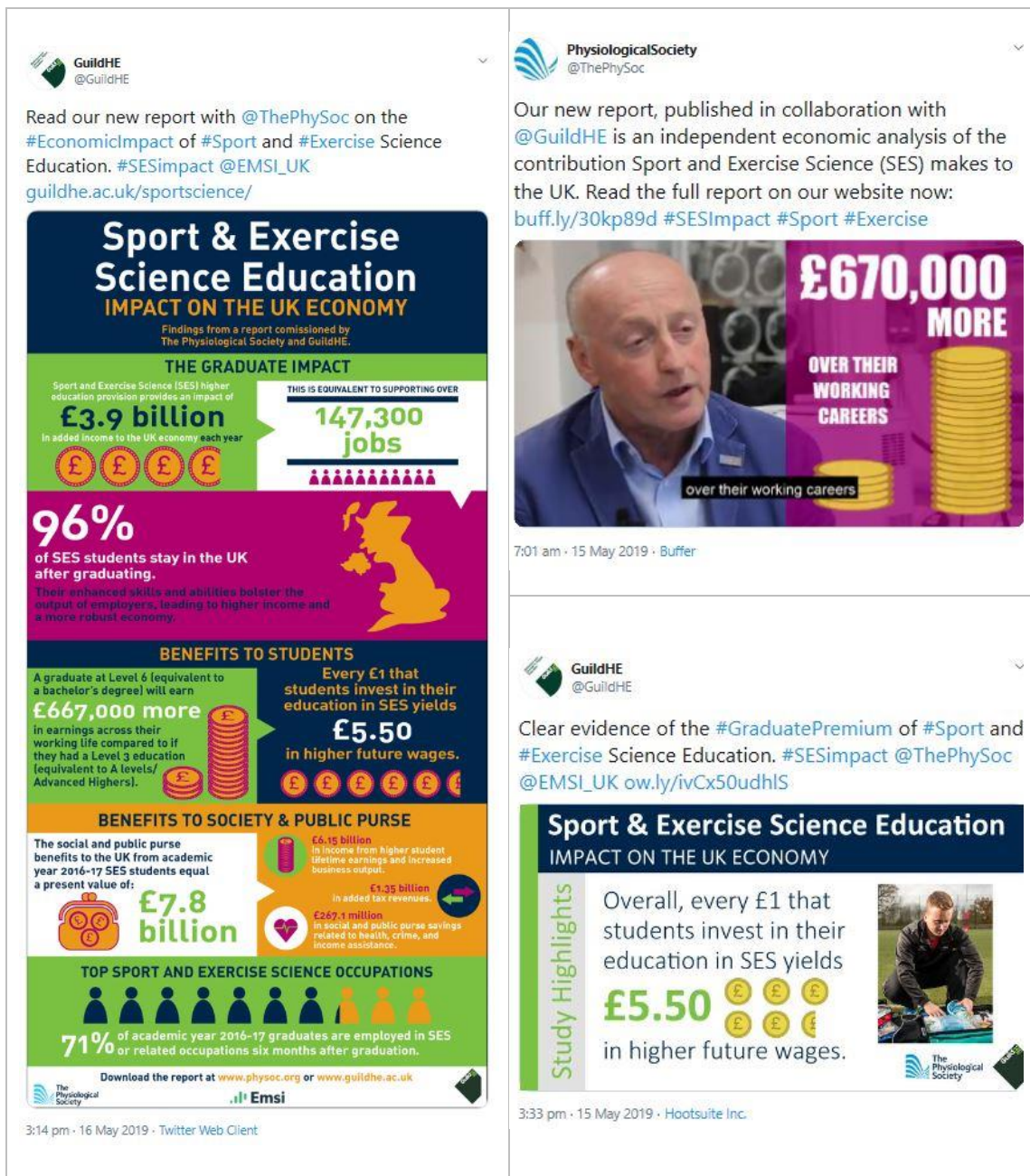


Figure 3: Examples of the social media exposure to the Sport & Exercise Science Education: Impact on the UK Economy report 'key findings' in May 2019 (note the use of the term 'graduate premium', discussed earlier in this chapter).

Alongside the notion of a Higher Education marketplace and the potential (and possibly intentional) use of inflated average employment and salary statistics, Molesworth and colleagues (2011:2) propose that this heightened marketisation of Higher Education 'is as much about social engineering as economic concerns'. This interpretation is encouraged by successive governments, who promote engagement in Higher Education as a pathway to success, through liberation from previous social constraints:

Throughout history, most individuals have been the victims of forces beyond their control. Where you were born, both geographically and in class terms, was overwhelmingly likely to dictate your future. Jobs were rarely a matter of choice and normally decreed by who your father was. Opportunities for women outside the home were restricted. Wealth governed access to cultural riches. Horizons were narrow, hopes limited, happiness a matter of time and chance.

But [higher] education provides a route to liberation from these imposed constraints. Education allows individuals to choose a fulfilling job, to shape the society around them, to enrich their inner life. It allows us all to become authors of our own life stories.

That is why it matters so much that access to educational opportunities is spread so inequitably in England. The gulf between the opportunities available to the wealthy and the chances given to the poor, is one of the widest. (Department for Education, 2010:6)

In order to explore more specifically this purported 'social engineering' role, the next section moves beyond the fiscal aspects of the Higher Education sector in order to explore the state's agenda regarding widening university participation. In doing so (and in line with the case study's third research question), the section will focus upon one of UK's the low-participating population groups: those students who do not have a family history of university participation (i.e. their parents and/or siblings have not attended university and/or obtained a degree).

## 2.4 WIDENING STUDENT PARTICIPATION

As discussed in earlier sections of this Literature Review chapter, the location of this case study within the UK's Higher Education system requires an appreciation of the political ideology in which it finds itself. In this section I consider the government's impetus to widen university participation, focusing specifically on those who are the first in their immediate family to enrol for a university degree.

Developments such as the UK's 1944 Education Act (offering free secondary education for all), the diminution of manual work in the 1970-80s (Bean and Metzner, 1985) and contemporary changes in attitudes towards ethnic and gender equality (Ferguson, 2012; Remenick, 2019), have gradually encouraged minority groups into post-compulsory education. Consequently, students now enrol into tertiary education for a variety of reasons, embracing scholarly, economic, and social considerations. For some, 'when it comes to higher education, the acorn falls close to the oak' (Grayson, 2011), insofar as those whose parents have been to university before them, may perceive a degree as merely the 'next logical, expected, and desired stage in the passage toward personal and occupational achievement' (Terenzini et al., 1994:62). For others,

however, university may represent a deliberate attempt to improve their social and/or economic position relative to that of their parents (Nunez and Carroll, 1998), an outlook that aligns itself with the current state position linking Higher Education with discourses of self-betterment, as previously discussed. State and media publications chronicle the widening pay gap between graduates and non-graduates, with eye-catching headlines, such as the Telegraph's article entitled: 'Graduates earn £500,000 more than non-graduates' (Anderson, 2015).

However, despite the steady rise in university participation rates over the last four decades, the UK government remains concerned about certain socio-economic groups, where rates have shown only a modest improvement. According to a recent report by the Department for Business Innovation & Skills:

...socio-economic differences in HE participation remain substantial: pupils from the highest socio-economic quintile group are around 40 percentage points more likely to go to university than those in the lowest socio-economic quintile group; the difference in terms of participation at the most selective institutions is around 20 percentage points (2015:unpaginated).

With specific regard to this case study, it is important to look beyond the UK's standard socio-economic indicators<sup>8</sup> (for example: household income, area of residency [i.e. low participation neighbourhoods], and ethnicity), in order to understand the significance of prior exposure to university education, on student constructions concerning the value and purpose of engagement. First in Family (FiF) students (i.e. students who are the first in their immediate family, including siblings and/or parents, to attend a Higher Education Institution or complete a university degree (O'Shea, 2015b:vii)) are now recognised as an important subgroup of non-traditional university students. Indeed, in recent years the issue of familial exposure to post-compulsory education has increased in prominence within the literature, although this social group remain an under-reported student demographic in comparison with the UK's more traditional socio-economic classifications constructed through ethnicity (e.g. non-white ethnic minority) and economics (e.g. family household income) (Choy, 2001; Bui, 2002; Engle, 2007; James et al., 2010; Luzecky et al., 2011; Luzecky et al., 2017).

In line with the well documented relationship between parental educational attainment and aspirations towards Higher Education participation (James, 2001; Grayson, 2011; Wilks and Wilson, 2012), evidence suggests that FiF students'

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<sup>8</sup> Current HESA benchmark factors: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/definitions>

progression, completion and attainment rates tend to be below those of their peers, even when the other more widely reported socio-economic characteristics are taken into account (Nunez and Carroll, 1998). Indeed, Spiegler and Bednarek's (2013:330) review of the FiF literature from Canada, Germany, the UK and USA, identified FiF students as an important 'at risk' group within the university student population. An observation echoed within the 2017-18 'good honours' attainment data from this case study's department (see Figure 4 below).

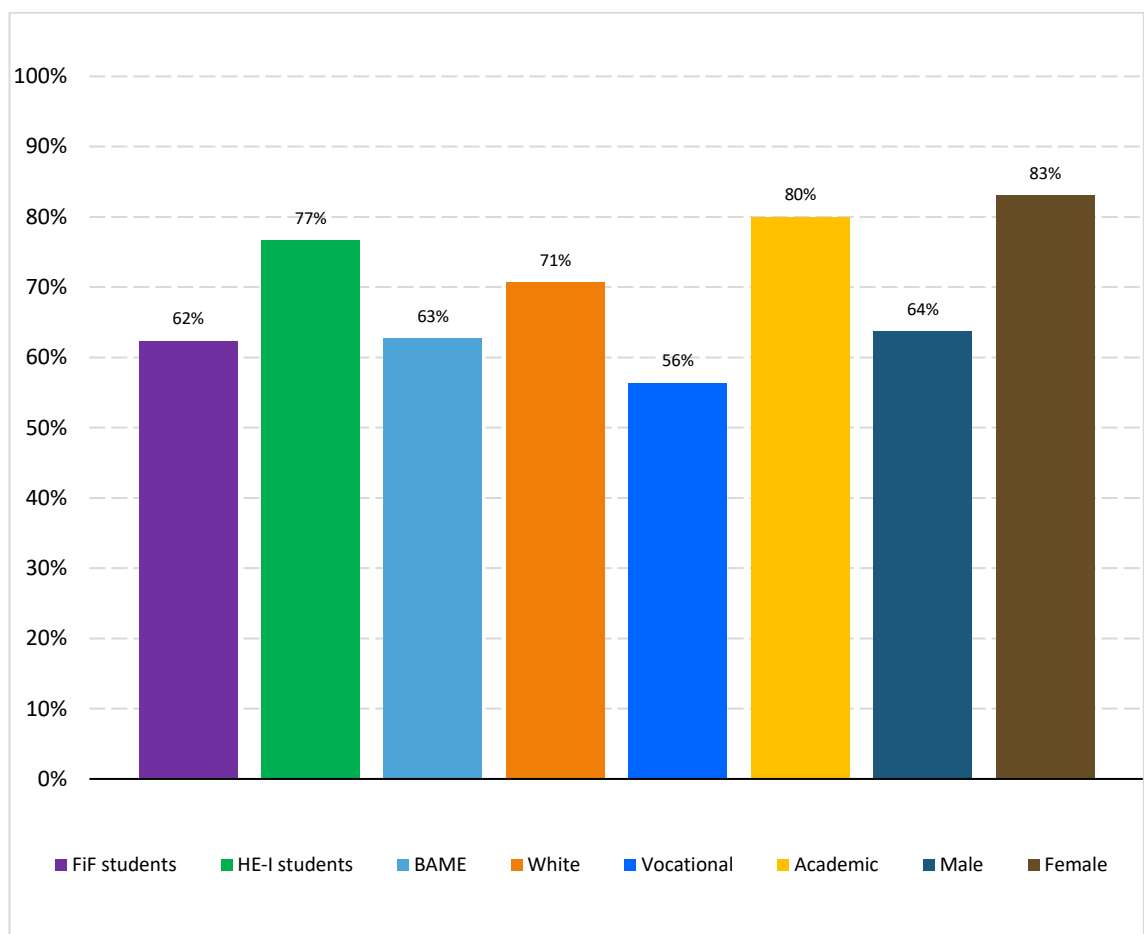


Figure 4: Department of Exercise and Sport Science's 'good honours' (i.e. 2:1 or 1<sup>st</sup> class honours degree) attainment data for academic year 2017-18 (i.e. the year the participant in this case study were due to graduate) by sport student characteristics: family educational status (FiF/HE-I), ethnicity (BAME/White), entry qualification (Vocational/Academic), and gender (Male/Female). Note: Manchester Metropolitan University internally reports its undergraduate entry qualifications using the categories: Academic (i.e. A-Levels, Scottish Highers, International Baccalaureate) and Vocational (i.e. BTEC, NVQ or Access course), See Appendix 7.13 for degree programme specific attainment data for the sport students participating in this case study.

One explanation for the precarious position of FiF students, is the 'conflicting requirements of family membership and educational mobility' associated with post-secondary educational enrolment (London, 1989:145).



Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, page 75) has been used by researchers (for example: Reay, 2004; Luzeckyj et al., 2011; Jessica Abrahams and Ingram, 2013; O'Shea, 2015b; Christodoulou, 2016) to explore the difficulties experienced by non-traditional student groups (i.e. working class, mature, and FiF students) upon entry into Higher Education. According to Bourdieu (1977), *habitus* is the subjective representation of our unconscious and embodied dispositions, expressed through day-to-day *practices* and social interactions. As a result, the transition into university life may be relatively smooth for some, whilst others grapple with the dissimilar social requirements of home and university, an experience described by London (1989:168):

It is only when we see that mobility involves not just gain but loss, most of all, the loss of a familiar past, including a past self — that we can begin to understand the attendant periods of confusion, conflict, isolation, and even anguish that first-generation students report...

This interpretation could provide an explanation for some of the difficulties experienced by FiF students upon entry into Higher Education, as their social and cultural assets (Bourdieu refers to these as *cultural* and *social capital*, see page 75) may not easily align with those dominant within university (Luzeckyj et al., 2011). As a consequence of this cultural mismatch, university not only requires academic success, but also the additional task of social and cultural adaptation for FiF students (London, 1992). Importantly, this cultural mismatch is well-documented in social class research, as the 'structural and individual barriers [still] present within the UK higher education system affect opportunity, decision-making and choice' (Burke, 2016:51). Social and cultural deficiencies draw attention to the directive influence of *a priori* social barriers (stemming from *habitus* and *social capitals*<sup>9</sup>) on attitudes toward Higher Education and social and employment trajectories (Burke and Scurry, 2019). According to Nicola Ingram (2011:288 emphasis in original) being educationally successful is problematic for the working class as success requires the abandonment of certain aspects of working-class culture: '*being* working class and embodying that culture can itself be a barrier to success' and therefore 'in order to overcome the disadvantage, one must first overcome being working class and modify one's behaviour to the 'right' middle-class way'. Indeed, the findings from a number of social class research articles identify classed attitudes towards: reading for a degree, the role

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of *habitus*, and its related thinking tools proposed by Bourdieu, will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4, and put to work as an analytical framework in Chapter 5.

of the family in making decisions, the position of students' secondary level educational institutions within the educational hierarchy, and the role of cultural competencies (articulated by many in Bourdieusian terms through cultural and *social capital*) during the university selection and application process (Archer et al., 2005; Reay et al., 2010; Abrahams and Ingram, 2013; Bathmaker et al., 2013; Wilkins and Burke, 2015; Thatcher et al., 2016; Abrahams, 2017).

Focusing specifically on this research, social constructions surrounding the value and purpose of a university education also appear to reflect the influence of previous family exposure for Higher Education (Wilks and Wilson, 2012). For the majority of university students the purpose of university engagement is associated with enhancing future employment (London, 1992; Brinkworth et al., 2013), however research suggests there may be discreet distinctions between FiF students, and those with an educational family history that includes Higher Education (i.e. Higher Education - Informed [HE-I] students), as FiF students appear more keenly focused on improving employment and financial prospects (Nunez and Carroll, 1998; Luzecky et al., 2011; Sellar, 2013; O'Shea et al., 2016). An observation recently documented by Australian FiF researchers O'Shea and colleagues, who noted that:

[y]oung FiF students and their families share discourses of betterment and opportunity in relation to university education. However, these discourses often focus narrowly on the ability to acquire financial capital through successful tertiary study, failing to explicitly recognise and acknowledge other empowering types of social and cultural capital which higher education can confer. (O'Shea et al., 2018:1030)

Interestingly, from the perspective of this case study, the FiF students' narrow focus may reflect a three-way interaction between their initial social and economic position, the prevailing 'politics of aspiration' (relating parental education with their aspirations) (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Sellar, 2013), and the marketised narrative linking the value of a university degree with future employment and earning potential. It may also reflect a familial lack of awareness and/or appreciation for the other benefits of a university education (for example: enriched social networks, and an altered disposition more closely aligned to graduate employment), a potentially significant oversight discussed in later chapters.

## 2.5 THE 'STUDENT EXPERIENCE'

To conclude this final chapter of the Literature Review, it is important to acknowledge the implications of a university marketplace upon the present-day constructions concerning students' university experiences. The use of the term 'student experience' is a contemporary one, with origins in the commodification of education and the marketisation of the university sector (Marr, 2007; L. Bell et al., 2009; Attwood, 2012; Nixon et al., 2018), where a university degree is considered a commodity to be exchanged for employment, rather than a liberal educational experience designed to prepare graduates for life and citizenship (Wilmott, 1995; Naidoo and Williams, 2015). However, defining the term 'student experience' is notoriously difficult, as descriptions may vary greatly depending on the context. For example, despite increasing participation rates and greater student diversification, middle-class notions of the typical university experience still persist (Ingram and Waller, 2015). For some prospective university students, therefore, the term may conjure up hedonistic images of personal independence, halls of residence parties and packed lecture theatres, whilst for others less unfamiliar with this traditional representation of university life, or those unable to partake in such a lifestyle because of personal circumstance, the term may have little meaning as attending university may be viewed as similar to their other educational experiences (i.e. living at home, commuting to university and maintaining pre-university friendships).

However, for institutions and academics, the term is often used synonymously with provision quality, as students are encouraged towards consumerism: 'expecting services and experiences commensurate with the tuition fees charged' (Foskett et al., 2006:126). Indeed, Universities UK (2019) use the term student experience to refer to '...world-class education so that [students] can achieve their full potential'. Within the UK the National Student [Satisfaction] Survey (NSS) has been the principal tool for assessing 'student experience' since 2005. Administered by Ipsos MORI, the NSS is an independent online exit survey completed by final year students at publicly funded UK Higher Education universities/colleges in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The survey asks students to rate the quality of their student experience through a

series of 28 questions<sup>10</sup>, focusing on eight areas of university life: teaching on my course, learning opportunities, assessment and feedback, academic support, organisation, and management, learning resources, learning community, and student voice. According to Ipsos MORI:

[t]he main purpose of the NSS is to help prospective students, their families, and advisors to make study choices. Participating institutions and students' unions also use the data to improve the student learning experience. Since its inception, the NSS has highlighted where institutions do well and not so well. For example, in 2005, at a national level 'assessment and feedback' scores were relatively low. As a direct result of what students have said in the NSS, action has been taken at institutional and faculty level to address this and scores in this area have improved significantly over time. The results of the NSS often drive improvements across Higher Education Institutions in relation to the quality of teaching and the overall student learning experience (2013:unpaginated).

Debate surrounding the validity of the NSS in capturing student experience has taken place in popular and academic media, with criticisms levied, for instance at the sensitivity of the questions in highlighting disparity in what students consider to be a good university experience (Carless, 2006). For example, one of the foremost difficulties with such an exit-based survey is that it constructs 'student experience' as a coherent, homogeneous, and unproblematic notion, as opposed to a complex yet poorly expressed construction, widely influenced by diverse contextual influences, many of which are not intrinsically related to the quality of teaching and learning (CHERI, 2003 cited in Schuck et al., 2008:543). Indeed, research indicates that the issues of greatest importance to students differ between universities, subject disciplines and students themselves (Gaell, 2000), thus supporting the observation that student experience is a 'complex' notion (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002:193). Consequently survey responses designed to capture student experience discourse may be inappropriately influenced by a variety of diverse, extraneous factors, including: age of student and/or tutor, grades obtained, assessment type, class size, challenging nature of the topic, time at which classes are held (Zabaleta, 2007); and more recently, whether cookies are available during students' taught classes (Hessler et al., 2018).

Despite the limited number of well-documented studies exploring the reliability of such measures and the overall academic polemic against the use of such metrics:

I have never come across an instrument that has more function heaped upon it or importance imbued in it than the NSS... There is an almost a religious belief in the power of the NSS to enhance experience (Sabri, 2011:unpaginated).

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<sup>10</sup> The NSS uses the following 5-point response scale: Definitely agree; Mostly agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Mostly disagree; Definitely disagree; Not applicable.

Successive governments continue to encourage the acquisition, collation and publication of student experience and satisfaction data, in a belief that the process fosters student engagement in their learning, and aids quality enhancement in UK universities. As Ipsos MORI testifies, time after time:

The **NSS is taken seriously** by universities, colleges, and students. The results are a testament to high quality standards in UK Higher Education... Institutions use the NSS results to assess their strengths and weaknesses, benchmark against peer institutions, **improve** the student experience and overall standards and attract prospective students. (Ipsos MORI, 2013:unpaginated) (emphasis added)

The NSS gives students a powerful collective voice to help shape the future of their course and university or college... The results of the NSS are used by Institutions to **enhance** teaching quality and the overall learning experience for students. (Ipsos MORI, 2015:unpaginated) (emphasis added)

[The] information can be used to help make changes designed to **improve** the learning experience for both current and prospective students. More widely, the NSS provides information as part of the **higher education quality assurance system**. (Ipsos MORI, 2019:unpaginated) (emphasis added)

Wiers-Jenssen and colleagues (2002) assessed whether the overall student experience could be dissected into the broader aspects of students' university learning experience. Examining the data overlap between student experience surveys and surveys interested specifically in students' assessment of teaching, these authors revealed teaching quality to be the crucial determinant of a successful university student experience. This interpretation was supported more recently by Burgess et al. (2018), whose 10-year NSS case study<sup>11</sup> also identified teaching quality as the most valuable predictor of overall undergraduate student satisfaction. Although significantly, these Aston University academics also criticised the NSS for 'its insensitivity to major changes in the economic costs of HE to the individual' (2018:1). Embracing the commodification of university degrees, these researchers recommend that the contemporary concept of student experience be broadened to accommodate more economic measures, including 'perceived value-for-money', through a student post-graduation survey to ascertain 'value of their degree in the workplace' (2018:1).

As discussed in previous sections of this Literature Review chapter, the key objective of the UK's marketised Higher Education system is to accommodate greater student numbers, without compromising quality. Consequently, many of the state's policy initiatives have compelled the Higher Education system towards a market culture, where students' progression, attainment, and overall

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<sup>11</sup> Including NSS data representing 2.3 million full-time undergraduate students, participating between 2007 to 2016.

experience are considered paramount metrics to course, department and/or university success. However, we should not underestimate the influence of such performance indices to reinforce a university's notability and kudos. Commodification and marketisation praxes, such as quality control, auditing, ranking and league tables, create the impression that some institutions are better than others, whilst all are operating within the same, complex, mass-education system with no single definition of quality (Green, 1994). Indeed, at a university-, departmental- and programme-level, the annually published NSS data are assumed to reflect students' university experience and the overall course quality, delivering a key device by which universities compete for student recruitment.

Furthermore, league tables may serve to strengthen the market position of already prestigious and well-funded universities, at the expense of those institutions seeking to construct a reputation by attending to the needs of students and employers. So, whilst meritocratic surveys such as the Times Guide, the Guardian University Rankings and the NSS influence prospective students' future study decisions through performativity data, these same measurement tools may also influence the standing and financial health of universities, within the current climate of marketisation and reduced public funding in favour of student debt. In turn, encouraging institutions to reinforce another market tendency: to use their resources to improve external attractiveness rather than quality (Foskett, 2011:33). However, despite national employment of the NSS and other student surveys as tools to assess and subsequently market the UK's university 'student experience', little is known about prospective students' understanding of the term 'student experience'. As a result, one of the aims of this research is to unearth any notions of a 'student experience', prior to university enrolment, in order to explore sport students' preordained expectations of their university experience.

## SUMMARY

Exploring the interconnected themes central to this case study, the Literature Review chapter has provided the reader with the educational context to this research. Thereby examining the UK's Higher Education system, from its historical underpinnings through to the present-day neoliberal, metric-driven,

student-funded (through accumulative future debt), marketplace, where the value of a university degree is linked to market demand.

Despite the pervasive (but possibly misleading) university-to-employment narrative advocating Higher Education as a gateway to economic betterment, the legitimacy of such a graduate employment marketplace (at least for this study's participants), may not be straightforward. This is highlighted in the growing disparity between the number of sport graduates and the available graduate career opportunities in sport, and supported by evidence suggesting that, despite the state's agenda regarding widening university participation; progression, completion, and attainment rates remain lower for students from many of the identified socio-economic groupings.

Moving beyond a review of the literature, the next chapter provides more detail regarding the specific context to this case study. In doing so it will outline the case study's institutional location, sports degree programmes and the participants themselves.

# 3 RESEARCH CONTEXT

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*'The function of sociology, as of every science, is to reveal that which is hidden'. (Bourdieu, 1998:17)*

Before progressing on to a detailed account of the research methods, this third chapter provides the reader with the contextual location of this case study. As outlined in the Introduction, this scholarly undertaking is part of a professional doctorate programme, and therefore the research is deliberately located within my area of employment (as a Principal Lecturer within the Department of Exercise and Sport Science at Manchester Metropolitan University), with the overarching aim of developing an understanding of sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university. Therefore, whilst the research findings may transfer to other similar contexts, the primary rationale for this undertaking was to explore the distinctive context of this specific department and its sport students.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Opening with a brief overview of the institutional location, the first section outlines the historical and institutional background to the university, its faculty and department, before providing the reader with specific details regarding the three undergraduate sports degree programmes embarked upon by the case study's participants, within the second section. The final section then completes the chapter, with a summary of the case study participants themselves.

## 3.1 THE UNIVERSITY

Manchester Metropolitan University's beginnings draw upon a number of the college mergers in the late nineteenth century. However, today the university is one of the largest in the UK, with a community of over 38,000 students spread across six faculties: Arts and Humanities; Business and Law; MMU Cheshire; Education; Health, Psychology and Social Care; and Science and Engineering (The Complete University Guide, 2019b). Outlining out the institutional setting for this case study, Table 3 provides a snapshot of the institution's history, including any noteworthy events pertinent to the historical context of this research. As the location of this research is within a post-92 university, events associated with the establishment of the university within the UK's Higher Education Sector are also



included within Table 3. Additionally, as the participants were all enrolled on one of three undergraduate sport courses at the university's Cheshire campus, the noteworthy institutional events associated with the: Crewe and Alsager Colleges and their merger with Manchester Polytechnic; the establishment of Manchester Metropolitan University in 1992, the subsequent creation of the MMU Cheshire Faculty, and its Department of Exercise and Sport Science are also noted.

Table 3: Details Manchester Metropolitan University<sup>12</sup> foundations through a series of college mergers over the last two centuries (<https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/about-us/history/>). Note: **bolded text** highlights pertinent information to contextualise the institution's position within the UK's Higher Education Sector, whilst *italised text* locates the specific historical information within the specific timeframe of this case study.

YEAR	INSTITUTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE
1878	<b>Manchester School of Education</b> was established from a number of significant college mergers. (Original foundation dates: 1824 - Manchester Mechanics Institute; 1838 - Manchester School of Design 1880 - School of Domestic Science; 1889 - School of Commerce; 1906 - City of Manchester College; 1991- Domestic and Trades College; 1912 - Crewe College of Education; and 1947 - Alsager Training College.)
1970	Manchester School of Education renamed itself <b>Manchester Polytechnic</b> .
1974	Crewe College of Education and Alsager Training College merged on 1 <sup>st</sup> September 1974, creating the Crewe & Alsager College of Higher Education.
1992	<b>Manchester Metropolitan University</b> is established, as Manchester Polytechnic gains university status under the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). Additionally, Manchester Metropolitan University incorporates Crewe & Alsager College of Higher Education, forming the Crewe and Alsager Faculty.
<i>OCTOBER 1995</i>	<i>Researcher starts employment as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Sport Sciences.</i>
1996	Manchester Metropolitan University's Department of Sport Sciences is renamed the <b>Department of Exercise and Sport Science</b> .
	The Department of Exercise and Sport Science's curriculum portfolio expands to include a Combined Honours provision and three single honours degree programmes: <b>BSc (Hons.) Coaching and Sports Development, BSc (Hons.) Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy, and BSc (Hons.) Sport and Exercise Science</b> .
2003	The Crewe and Alsager Faculty is rebranded to <b>MMU Cheshire</b> to reflect foreseen closure of the Alsager campus.
2010	Alsager campus closes, resulting in the transfer of all departments to the Crewe campus. The merger of the two campuses creates five departments: Department of Business, Department of Contemporary Arts, Department of Education, Department of Exercise and Sport Science, and Department of Interdisciplinary Studies.
<i>SEPTEMBER 2012 – AUGUST 2015</i>	<i>Taught element of the professional EdD programme.</i>
<i>SEPTEMBER 2015 – JUNE 2016</i>	<i>Data collection period for this case study.</i>
<i>SEPTEMBER 2016</i>	<i>Final year of Level 4 student recruitment, in response to scheduled closure of the Crewe campus in August 2019.</i>
<i>2015-2018</i>	<i>Expected undergraduate duration of study for the participants within this case study.</i>
2019	<b>MMU Cheshire</b> closes 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2019, as Manchester Metropolitan University reduces its number of faculties to five: Arts and Humanities; Business and Law; Education; Health, Psychology and Social Care; and Science and Engineering.

<sup>12</sup> Additional information for Table 3 sourced from: Geoffrey D.C. Doherty. A Marriage of Convenience. 1981. Privately published; Faculty Co-ordinating Committee minutes for a meeting held on the 27 October 1978; Annual Academic Report Number 9 1982-83. November 1983, 10.

## MMU Cheshire Faculty

MMU Cheshire has a tradition of providing sport related courses for over a century. Initially established as single sex teacher training colleges, Crewe College of Education (female students) and Alsager Training College (male students) merged to create the Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education in 1974. In 1992, as a result of the Further and Higher Education Act, the newly established Manchester Metropolitan university established a sixth faculty: Crewe and Alsager Faculty which was later rebranded MMU Cheshire in 2003.

## Department of Exercise and Sport Science

Following amalgamation of the two Physical Education departments, as a result of the merger of Crewe College of Education and Alsager Training College in 1974, there was significant growth in student recruitment on the college's physical education courses. This expansion in student recruitment continued over the next two decades through a broader curriculum (new courses included: BTEC Higher Diploma in Sports Coaching, BA Sports Studies<sup>13</sup>, and BA Sports Science<sup>14</sup>), and was supported by successive government policies designed to increase university student numbers, as outlined in previous Literature Review chapter.

By the time the college was integrated into Manchester Metropolitan University in 1992, the Department of Physical Education had extended its academic portfolio further, and renamed itself the 'Department of Sport Science' (Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education, 1991:8). According to the campus magazine, this retitling was stimulated by: sport science's inclusion in the national curriculum (within the new GCSE and A-Level Physical Education syllabus); increasing staff engagement with the British Association of Sport Sciences (BASS), and a collective desire to enhance the scientific profile of the department (in order to secure lottery funded sport science support projects and increase access to external research grants). A final name change to 'Department of Exercise and Sport Science' occurred in 1996, as a result of the expanding role of all sport graduates within the healthy society initiatives (indicated by the government's

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<sup>13</sup> Internal information source: Faculty Co-ordinating Committee minutes for a meeting held on the 27 October 1978.

<sup>14</sup> Internal information source: Academic Report Number 7. 1980-81. Autumn 1981, 17.

Health of Nation white paper (1992)), and BASS's adoption of the term 'exercise' into its title in 1995 (Department of Sport Science, 1996:4; BASES, 2020). As a result of these changes the department's academic portfolio was revised to include three degree pathways: physical education<sup>15</sup>, sport coaching, and sport science, and it is from these pathways that the participants in this case study are drawn. A précis of the pathways is provided below, with more detail regarding their translation into specific degree programmes provided in Table 6 page 42.

- **Physical Education:** considers the physical activity and sport provision within primary and secondary schools, including: its history, social and political context, and the delivery models prescribed within the current national curriculum.
- **Sport coaching:** considers the provision of sport nationally and globally, including its function within the historical, social, and political context; differing funding models; participation rates across different societies and the practical skills required to work within sport coaching.
- **Sport Science:** considers how the human body reacts to sport and physical activity, and how the application of different scientific principles can be used to enhance sports performance and promote physical activity and health across society.

During the academic year in which the case study data was collected (2015-16) there were approximately 1850<sup>16</sup> undergraduate students studying full-time at the MMU Cheshire Faculty, across five departments (Business and Management, Contemporary Arts, Education, Exercise and Sport Science, and Interdisciplinary Studies). The participants within this case study were all located within the Department of Exercise and Sport Science. At this time the department had 373<sup>15</sup> undergraduate sport students enrolled onto its three sport degree programmes (including 133 first year sport students); 23<sup>15</sup> sport students enrolled on its taught post-graduate provision, and 7<sup>16</sup> full-time PhD students. In addition, it employed 36<sup>17</sup> full-time members of staff, providing a staff-student-ratio of 1:12.

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<sup>15</sup> Following the increase in undergraduate tuition fees and significant alterations to the teacher training pathways within the UK (including the introduction of the **School Direct Salaried Scheme** where trainee teachers are employed on point 1 of the unqualified teacher pay spine for the maximum of a year by a school), a number of universities including MMU decided to remove the 4th year of their degree programmes that led to automatic Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

<sup>16</sup> Internal information source: data taken from the Tier 2 Examination Board on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2016 and Tier 1 Progression Board on 22nd June 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Internal information source: Department Telephone directory 2015-2016.

## 3.2 CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN SPORT

With a focus upon sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university, within a marketised Higher Education system (where engagement is inextricably linked with future employment), graduate career opportunities have contextual relevance to this research. In accordance with the increasing university participation rates, discussed in Chapter 2, undergraduate sport degrees gained popularity through the 1990s (UCAS, 2019a). However, despite this popularity and the acknowledged transferrable employment skills (including: communication, numeracy, statistical analysis, evidence-based reasoning and report writing (The Physiological Society, 2019)), graduate employment prospects within the area of sport have not kept pace with the number of students graduating with sport-related degrees from UK universities.

Table 4: Graduate employment data taken from \*The Physiological Society's (2019:11) report: Sport & Exercise Science Education: Impact on the UK Economy and the #HESA Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education report 2016/17 (2018:unpaginated).

	#All graduates	#Medicine	#Biological sciences	#Education	*Sport <sup>16</sup>
Number of UK first degree leavers in 2016-2017.	325,535	5,881	21,568	23,065	11,505
Number of first degree leavers in full-time employment six months after leaving university	182,300 (56%)	5,469 (93%)	8,843 (41%)	14,300 (62%)	2,890 (25%)
Average full-time salary for first degree leavers six months after leaving university	£24,000	£27,689	£21,750	£24,373	£19,000

For example, analysis of the graduate employment data published by the UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and The Physiological Society (2019) revealed that whilst 56% of **all** first degree leavers are in full-time employment within six months of leaving university, the employment figure is only 25% for those whose first degree is in any of the sport related disciplines<sup>18</sup>. As a comparison with other university study areas, Table 4 provides summary employment data for a variety of HESA JACS codes (used by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to manage UK university applications).

<sup>18</sup> Higher education provision in the sport and exercise science disciplines was defined using the HESA Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) codes: C600: sport & exercise science; C610: Sport coaching; C620: sport development; C630: sport conditioning, rehabilitation & therapy; C640: sport studies; C650: sport technology; C690: sport & exercise science not elsewhere classified; C813: sport psychology; N880: sport management.

A key factor contributing to the inferior graduate employment prospects for sport undergraduates – and one which is of central importance for understanding employability amongst sport students – is that, whilst sport<sup>17</sup> degree provision has increased across the UK Higher Education sector, many of the careers associated with these degrees are not considered graduate occupations. Indeed, according to the UK's National Careers Service, UCAS and HESA's Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey (together with the government's forthcoming Longitudinal Education Outcomes data), the majority of the occupations associated (by corresponding degree title, e.g. JACS code C620: Sport Development) with university undergraduate sport degree provision are not classified as 'graduate' professions. For example, on Manchester Metropolitan University's [webpage](#) for the current BSc (Hons.) Sport: Coaching and Development undergraduate degree programme (the latest iteration of the BSc Coaching and Sports Development programme considered within this case study, validated in 2018) the 'graduate' career prospects allied to this degree include positions such as: sport coach, personal trainer, and positions in community sports clubs and facilities, despite none of these being classified as 'graduate' positions on the National Careers Service website (see Table 5). An important consideration from the perspective of this research (focusing upon sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university) as the mixed messages encircling graduate employment within sport, singles out these students as a particularly interesting group to investigate through a case study.

As a result of the UK's current marketised Higher Education model examined within Chapter 2, enhanced employment prospects are promoted as a key driver for university engagement, often with the unspoken implication that these enhanced prospects are available to all Higher Education students. However, as the data in Table 4 demonstrates, there are noteworthy inequalities in graduate employability prospects between different degree disciplines. Significantly, these disparities create a particular challenge for sport students: as whilst they may be continually encouraged to construct university as being primarily a means of improving their employability, for the majority, such a construction is unlikely to be supported by their employment experiences following graduation.

To further investigate the graduate employment prospects associated with an undergraduate degree in sport, I carried out six career searches (careers were

selected in line with the university 'sports' JACS codes<sup>17</sup> and the three undergraduate degree programmes in this study) on two of the UK's key careers websites. These websites were purposefully selected because they epitomise the online resources commonly used by secondary school teachers, school careers officers (National Careers Service), and prospective students (UCAS).

The career data for these six roles are summarised using both resources in Table 5 (further discussion on other resources used by prospective sport students can be found in Chapter 5.2). Significantly, of the six sport careers identified by the UK's National Careers Service and UCAS, just two considered a degree 'essential': PE teacher and sport scientist. The other four careers recognised a variety of occupational pathways, including Level 2 and 3 college courses, apprenticeships, volunteering and 'working towards the role'. This further endorses university sport students as a distinct undergraduate population group, who encounter discipline specific challenges in relation to the previously discussed pervasive social mobility and employability narratives associated with graduate status. Illustrations of this narrative can be glimpsed throughout the university recruitment cycle (mid-May to August), as all facets of the Higher Education sector encourage people to consider university study (illustrated by the Office for National Statistics and Universities UK tweets in Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Examples of the pervasive employment narrative associated with Higher Education engagement. Note the the timing of such tweets, at the start of the University Open Day calendar (September) leading into the first (and most significant) UCAS application deadline (in January).



Table 5: A summary of the online career information available to prospective sport students considering a degree in sport<sup>17</sup>. Data has been drawn directly from the National Careers Service (2017; 2019) and UCAS (2019b). Note: for ease any information making reference to a university degree is highlighted in **bold**.

National Careers Service		UCAS – After GCSEs		
Career option	How to become a...	Salary	Essential qualifications	Desireable qualifications
<b>Health Professional:</b> Promote healthy living and help people make healthier lifestyle choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>college course</li> <li>apprenticeship</li> <li>volunteering</li> <li>working towards role</li> </ul>	Starter £16,750  Experienced £28,500	Level 2 Award in Improving the Public's Health and/or Nutrition for Health.  5 GCSEs at grades 9 to 4 (A* to C), usually including English and maths, for an advanced apprenticeship.	You can work towards this role by starting with a community sport and health officer advanced apprenticeship.
<b>PE Teacher:</b> Work in schools + colleges, teaching sport and fitness to young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>university course</b></li> </ul>	Starter £17,682  Experienced £62,735	<b>Undergraduate education degree or undergraduate degree and PGCE/PGDE</b>	Coaching qualifications
<b>Sports Coach:</b> Teach sports skills to individuals and teams of all abilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>university</b> or college course</li> <li>apprenticeship</li> <li>working towards role</li> <li>volunteering</li> </ul>	Starter £14,000  Experienced £35,000	Coaching qualifications  5 GCSEs at grades 9 to 4 (A* to C), usually including English and maths.	<b>Sport Science degree</b>
<b>Sports Development:</b> Organise projects and training to encourage people to take part in sport and have a healthier lifestyle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>college course</li> <li>apprenticeship</li> <li>volunteering</li> <li>applying directly</li> </ul>	Starter £21,000  Experienced £50,000	5 GCSEs at grades 9 to 4 (A* to C), usually including English and maths.	<b>Foundation degree</b> , higher national diploma or degree in a related subject like: sports development; sports coaching or sports science.  Coaching qualifications
<b>Sport / Leisure Management:</b> Use knowledge of how the body works to help people improve their health or sporting ability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>university</b> or college course</li> <li>apprenticeship</li> <li>working towards role</li> <li>graduate training scheme</li> </ul>	Starter £15,000  Experienced £28,500	Level 3 Diploma in Leisure Management and/or Extended Diploma in Sport.  4 or 5 GCSEs at grades 9 to 4 (A* to C) for a level 3 course	<b>Foundation degree</b> , higher national diploma or degree in a related subject like: sports development or sports coaching.
<b>Sport Scientist:</b> Use knowledge of how the body works to help people improve their health or sporting ability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>university</b> course</li> </ul>	Starter £18,000  Experienced £60,000	<b>Sport Science degree</b>	

### 3.3 PARTICIPANTS

From a professional perspective, as the Principal Lecturer responsible for student experience (per se, alongside departmental success in any associated internal and external metrics), I sensed a growing mismatch between academic and student constructions of a university experience (alongside a frustration for the metrics used to judge the quality of the experience). Since securing a lecturing position in 1996, the commodification of Higher Education (incorporating neoliberal quality metrics and league tables) has not only altered the structure of the sector, but also the expectations of its participants (Rodgers and Raider-Roth, 2006), transferring Higher Education sovereignty from educator and knowledge provider, to commodity [degree] supplier (Anyangwe, 2012). Importantly from the perspective of this case study, the personal research aspect of the professional doctorate provided an opportunity to explore this mismatch through the students' pre-university constructions of their future university experience.

As sport students entering university for the first time, the participants in this case study possess a kaleidoscope of cultural and educational experiences. However, collectively these participants have an underlying interest in sport. The final section in this chapter explores the wider demographic data of this case study's participant pool. In doing so this section considers important elements such as: male:female ratio, compulsory educational experience, university entrance qualifications, resident or commuting category, and socioeconomic engagement factors such as: Widening Participation (WP) and First in Family (FiF) status.

**SPORT STUDENTS:** Drawn from the Department of Exercise and Sport Science's entire 2015-16 first year undergraduate population enrolled at Manchester Metropolitan University, the participants in this case study were all newly enrolled onto one of three undergraduate sport degree programmes (summarised in Table 6). These degree programmes were offered as 3-year full-time or 6-year part-time options, with an additional 1-year taught Masters pathway available upon successful completion with an upper second-class degree. To provide further insight, Table 7 provides the first year enrolment data for the entire undergraduate provision during the Department's ten year tenure (2010-2019) on the Crewe campus of the MMU Cheshire Faculty.



Table 6: Details of the Department of Exercise and Sport Science's three single honours undergraduate sport degree programmes for the academic year 2015-2016.

Programme title	HESA JACS code	Programme Focus	Graduate prospects
<b>BSc (Hons.) Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy</b>	C600	Physical education at MMU is highly respected, with a tradition of excellence stretching back more than 50 years. This most recent iteration of this degree was revalidated in 2012. Undergraduates studying this degree programme are provided an in-depth understanding of high-quality teaching through a range of practical modules.	PE teaching, school sports, PE specialists (primary education), and post-graduate study.
<b>BSc (Hons.) Sport: Coaching and Development</b>	C610	With origins in the BTEC Higher Diploma in Sports Coaching, this most recent iteration including 'sports development' was first validated in 2008 and then subsequently revalidated in 2012. Undergraduate students study the core disciplines of coaching, sport development, and sport history.	Professional coaching, PE teaching, school sports, sports development, and post-graduate study
<b>BSc (Hons.) Sport and Exercise Science</b>	C600	This degree course was first validated at MMU in 1987 as a BA (Hons.) Sport Science, before adopting 'exercise' into the title in 1991. This most recent iteration of this degree was revalidated in 2012. Undergraduate students study the core disciplines of biomechanics, physiology, and psychology throughout the degree.	Physiotherapy, clinical occupations, health promotion, pharmaceutical sales, PE teaching, sports science consultancy, and post-graduate study.

Table 7: First year enrolment data<sup>19</sup> for all three undergraduate sport degrees offered by the Department of Exercise and Sport Science during its location on MMU Cheshire's Crewe campus. **Key:** (#) indicates recruitment target for each programme, ## indicates number of male sport students; \* identifies a noteworthy increase in enrolment following the announcement of increased tuition fees (from £3,000 to £9,000) scheduled for 2012-13; ^ identifies the reduction in enrolment following the announcement of the campus closure in 2018-19.

	2010-11	2011-12*	2012-13	2013-12	2013-14^	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
BSc (Hons.) Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy (C600)	31 <sup>25</sup> (30)	47 <sup>29</sup> (50)	22 <sup>19</sup> (30)	31 <sup>20</sup> (30)	28 <sup>17</sup> (30)	29 <sup>19</sup> (30)	26 <sup>17</sup> (30)	21 <sup>14</sup> (30)
BSc (Hons.) Sport: Coaching and Development (C610)	52 <sup>41</sup> (50)	78 <sup>59</sup> (75)	41 <sup>36</sup> (50)	50 <sup>37</sup> (50)	37 <sup>29</sup> (50)	29 <sup>20</sup> (30)	35 <sup>23</sup> (30)	29 <sup>19</sup> (30)
BSc (Hons.) Sport and Exercise Science (C600)	107 <sup>89</sup> (100)	158 <sup>129</sup> (150)	94 <sup>87</sup> (100)	102 <sup>91</sup> (100)	81 <sup>69</sup> (75)	77 <sup>70</sup> (75)	72 <sup>52</sup> (75)	67 <sup>58</sup> (75)
<b>Total number of undergraduate sports students</b>	<b>190<sup>155</sup></b>	<b>277<sup>217</sup></b>	<b>157<sup>142</sup></b>	<b>183<sup>148</sup></b>	<b>146<sup>115</sup></b>	<b>135<sup>109</sup></b>	<b>133<sup>92</sup></b>	<b>117<sup>91</sup></b>

<sup>19</sup> Internal data source: TARDIS data drawn from enrolment figures published at Programme Committee Meetings (PCM) in the first term of each academic year

**MALE:FEMALE RATIO:** At an institutional level, female undergraduate students outnumber male students, and this engagement gap has widened over the last three academic years, in line with current national trends (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019a:5). Focusing specifically on the participants within this case study; whilst first year enrolment data at the time indicated that the UK's young women were increasingly more likely to enter Higher Education than their male counterparts (UCAS, 2015:13; Weale, 2016a; Weale, 2016b), the higher ratio of female to male students detected nationally (56.2% and 43.8%, respectively) was not observed within the department's undergraduate sport degree cohort (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015a). However, when the degree discipline (sport) is taken into account, these enrolment figures follow the national trend for male dominance on college and university sport courses (Jin et al., 2011:92; Pitts, 2014).

**COMPULSORY EDUCATION:** Manchester Metropolitan University recruits the largest number of students from state schools and colleges of any Higher Education institution in the UK, with 'over 6,000 state school or college new entrants' per academic year (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019a:1). Within this case study, the participants' compulsory educational experience mirrored the national trend towards Level 3 study in Further Education Colleges<sup>20</sup> (Association of Colleges, 2016:4), with 33 students (35%) having previously studied at a school 6<sup>th</sup> form, and 60 students (65%) at college (for more detail refer to Table 22 in Appendix 7.10).

**ENTRANCE QUALIFICATIONS:** Manchester Metropolitan University internally reports its undergraduate entry qualifications using three categories: Academic (i.e. A-Levels, Scottish Highers, International Baccalaureate), Vocational (i.e. BTEC, NVQ or Access course), and Mixed. In 2015-16<sup>21</sup> the overall University recruitment figures using these categories were: 55% Academic (5,035 students), 32% Vocational (2,838 students), and 13% Mixed (1,218 students), whilst the Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences' recruitment figures were: 21% Academic, 52% Vocational, and 27% Mixed (unfortunately programme level breakdown of this data is not available). Departmental figures were in line with

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<sup>20</sup> In 2016-17 819,000 (65%) 16 to 18-year-olds choose to study in FE colleges, compared with 433,000 (35%) in schools.

<sup>21</sup> Past 2015-16 data drawn from the University's 2019-20 Access and Participation Plan (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019a:1-28)

other socioeconomic demographics, for example, internal data analysis on academic/vocational qualifications indicates that students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPNs) are more likely to enrol with vocational qualifications (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019a:3). For more details on LPNs please refer to the Widening Participation subsection. Whilst exploring pre-university educational qualifications and experiences was outside the scope of this case study, it is important to acknowledge the potential for different scholastic encounters as a result of students' pre-university educational pathways as these may have shaped the students' constructions of a university education. Colleges, with their tradition of BTEC qualifications, are seen to offer a different learning experience to the more structured A-Level syllabus found within school sixth forms. Notably, despite the fact that most online career websites (for example: Studential.com, 2017; 2019 and 2020) suggest little difference in the success rates between schools and colleges, annually published league tables point to higher attainment rates at school sixth forms (Department for Education, 2016b), and university admissions data reveals a preference for school sixth form applicants in some university subject areas (McManus et al., 1998; Havergal, 2015; Olowoselu, 2016).

**COMMUTING STUDENTS:** Despite the diversification and significant increase in number of undergraduate students within the UK, notions surrounding the typical university experience remain affiliated with a class discourse (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Reay et al., 2010; Ingram and Waller, 2015), encouraging non-traditional students to embrace the 'middle-class way' of studying (Abrahams and Ingram, 2013:1). However, whilst these traditional middle-class notions include personal (as well as academic) experiences such as moving away from the family home, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are often forced to commute to university because they cannot afford to live on or near campus, (Ogren, 2013).

Whilst Manchester Metropolitan University did not specifically collect data on commuting student status in 2015-16, the Department of Exercise and Sport Science gathered this data in order to support programme-level timetabling and seminar allocations. In 2015-16, the Programme Leaders<sup>22</sup> for the three

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<sup>22</sup> Internal data source: Department Executive Committee (DEC) minutes, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

undergraduate degree programmes within this case study reported that: 24% (Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy), 21% (Sport: Coaching and Development), and 37% (Sport and Exercise Science) of their newly enrolled first year sport students had identified themselves as commuting.

**WIDENING PARTICIPATION:** Tramonte and Willms (2009) highlight how families from lower socio-economic backgrounds are generally perceived as having lower levels of *cultural capital* to draw upon, which in turn limits the educational success of the learners within the family. Whilst these researchers were predominantly concerned with compulsory (school) education, the conceptualisation of different forms of *cultural capital* may also be applied to Higher Education as, just like schools, universities are also: 'places where codes from higher socio-economic status groups are recognized and where the possession of cultural capital is rewarded' (Tramonte & Willms, 2009:202). Equally, a student's *habitus* may impact upon their proficiency in understanding and translating the implicit 'rules of the game' they confront within university (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997).

According to The Higher Education Academy (2018) marketisation of the sector and state initiatives, including variable tuition fees and Student Number Control (SNC), have jointly intensified competition for ABB students and exacerbated the under-representation of widening participation (WP) students at pre-1992 institutions. As a post-92 university, Manchester Metropolitan University has always been committed to supporting students from all Widening Participation (WP) categories, with nearly a quarter of its tuition fee income allocated to supporting WP students. The MMU Cheshire Faculty traditionally recruited a greater proportion of students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPNs) than its city centre campus (in part due to significant recruitment from the surrounding areas of Crewe and Stoke-on-Trent). In 2015-16 the University was the UK's second largest recruiter of undergraduate students from LPNs, with 1,400 of its 9,091 (15.4%) newly enrolled first year (Level 4) students coming from LPNs. Significantly, 32% of these students were enrolled onto undergraduate programmes located across the MMU Cheshire Faculty (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019a:1-3).

Other WP enrolment indicators include equality groups and household income. In line with sector data reporting a strong correlation between urban locality and significant numbers of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students enrolled at post-1992 institutions (HEA, 2018) the proportion of BAME students at Manchester Metropolitan University has increased from 27.9% of all UK new university entrants in 2015/16 to 29.8% in 2017/18. However, in contrast to the University's BAME data, the proportion of full-time students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance has seen a year on year reduction, placing it significantly below the benchmark set by HESA<sup>23</sup>. Finally, with regard to household income, a high proportion of Manchester Metropolitan University's undergraduate students come from low income households (Table 8), despite thresholds remaining fixed over the last five years, allowing wage inflation to take many households out of them.

Table 8: Percentage of Year 1 full time students with household incomes assessed below key thresholds (Source: HE Bursary portal, March 2018).

Students with household income at or above:	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
£25,000	48%	47%	43%	39%	38%
£42,611	62%	60%	55%	51%	50%

Moving beyond the participant demographic data explored so far, it is important to consider the research context in terms of the key socioeconomic indicators of interest within this case study: familial exposure to university prior to enrolment.

**FIRST-GENERATION / FIRST IN FAMILY:** Despite mounting evidence indicating that progression, completion and attainment rates tend to be lower for students without a family background in Higher Education experience (even when the other more widely reported socio-economic characteristics are taken into account) (Nunez and Carroll, 1998), Manchester Metropolitan University did not start formally collecting data on students' familial experience in Higher Education until three years after the data collection period of this study. In part, this was a direct response to internal reporting of the data analysis (i.e. analysis of department's degree attainment [degree classification] data for the participant

<sup>23</sup> HESA benchmarks provide an objective measure of how the UK Higher Education sector is performing regarding WP: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/widening-participation-summary-1819>.

pool's anticipated completion year: 2017-18) conducted during the writing up phase of this case study. For more information, refer to Figure 4 in the Literature Review chapter or for specific degree programme analysis, Figure 17 in Appendix 7.13.

Identifying students' First-Generation or First in Family status can be problematic, as some authors advocate reporting parental education levels only (Billson and Terry, 1982; Ishitani, 2006; Engle, 2007; Grayson, 2011; Spiegler and Bednarek, 2013; Center for Student Opportunity, 2014), whilst others recommend the inclusion of the student's immediate family, including: parents and siblings (Luzeczyj et al., 2011; O'Shea, 2015a; O'Shea et al., 2016; O'Shea et al., 2017; Luzeczyj et al., 2017). Within this research, O'Shea and colleagues' (2015b:vii) concise definition of a 'First in Family' (FiF) student was employed to classify participants as First in Family (FiF) or Higher Education – Informed (HE-I).

[A] first-in-family student is defined as **no one** in the immediate family of origin, including siblings or parents, having previously attended a higher education institution or having completed a university degree [emphasis added].

As a result, over 50% of the case study's pool from which the undergraduate participants were drawn, were classified as First in Family sport students.

## SUMMARY

As previously established, the aim of this case study was to explore sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university, within the context of a student-funded (through accumulative future debt), government promoted, marketised Higher Education system. Following on from the Literature Review, this chapter provided the reader with data and evidence relating to the participants, their chosen university, and the discipline's graduate employment, in order to contextualise the study participants (i.e. undergraduate sport students) with regard to the pervasive employment discourse within the UK's marketised Higher Education sector. A discourse which positions university education as a means of improving future employment and wage opportunities, whilst such constructions may not be supported by the sport students' occupational experiences following their graduation.

In doing so, this chapter has ascertained that the population from which the participants were drawn followed the national assessment of undergraduate sport students enrolled at a UK post-92 university (Office for National Statistics, 2017) in 2015-16. In particular, and as expected for sport related university degree courses, the participant pool was male dominated (by way of a 1:2 male:female ratio), with two-thirds having completed their compulsory education in college (rather than at a secondary school sixth form), and just under one-third self-identified as commuting (predominantly from the surrounding LPNs of Stoke-on-Trent and Crewe). Finally, with specific focus on the third research question [RQ3], over 50% of the department's newly enrolled undergraduate sport students would be considered First in Family students according to O'Shea and colleagues' definition (2015b:vii).

Having provided both an institutional and educational context to this research and more specifically the undergraduate pool from which participants were drawn, the next chapter provides specific details of the case study's design and its associated methodology.

# 4 RESEARCH DESIGN

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'...the dogma of [my] past is inadequate for the stormy present'. (Abraham Lincoln: 1862)

This chapter provides specific details of the research design employed within this doctoral study, acknowledging the significant influence the three research questions had over the chosen paradigm and methodology, as a result of their qualitative nature and assumption that social knowledge is constructed rather than absolute:

- RQ1.** How is the concept of a 'student experience' constructed by newly enrolled undergraduate sport students?
- RQ2.** What influenced newly enrolled undergraduate sport students' decision to enrol at university?
- RQ3.** Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?

This chapter opens with an account of paradigms and more specifically the social constructionist paradigm, before providing a rationale for the selection of a case study as the overarching research methodology, and a précis of the: data collection methods, data analysis process, and associated ethical considerations.

## 4.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Providing a definition for the term paradigm is a challenge in itself. With its aetiology in the Greek for 'pattern', American philosopher Thomas Kuhn first used the term in 1962 to represent a philosophical way of thinking. In doing so Kuhn (1970) proposed paradigms as a conceptual structure encompassing both philosophical and theoretical frameworks in order to provide researchers with the constructs to guide: methodological design, inquiry focus and subsequent theories, laws and postulations. Supporting this notion, Patton (1975; cited in Morgan, 2007) referred to paradigms as frameworks for thinking about research design, measurement, analysis, and personal involvement; deeply embedded in the socialisation of the adherent researchers, telling them what is important, what is legitimate and what is reasonable. Decades later, Guba and Lincoln (1994)



offered a definition of paradigm, cited by many educational researchers to this day (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017):

the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways. (1994:105)

In doing so they identified four paradigms for researchers to select from: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism. More recently, Carr and Kemmis (2003) claimed that different methodologies available to researchers represented 'knowledge-constitutive interests', advocating three methodological paradigms: empirical, interpretive and critical. Current research methods textbooks, such as Creswell and Creswell (2014) and Denzin and Lincoln (2018) identify a number of paradigms that are said to structure and organise current qualitative research: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism, pragmatism, and participatory action frameworks.

Importantly, whilst debate surrounding the notion of paradigms remains active today (refer to articles by Lather, 2004; Adams St. Pierre, 2019 as examples) what is clear is that contemporary use of the term has altered from its original Kuhnian perspective, as the paradigms begin to 'interbreed' (Lincoln et al., 2018:164) and 'the borders and boundary lines between paradigms begin to blur' (2018:167), thus moving the construction of the term towards one that is more able to distinguish the 'levels of generality' within a researcher's belief system (Morgan, 2007:50). However, some researchers still consider the notion of research paradigms 'unhelpful', suggesting that they should not be regarded as static perspectives, but as useful: 'tools' (Biesta, 2010:97) or 'stances' (Greene and Hall, 2010:127) situated within the research process as 'different research methods illuminate only particular aspects of a situation. None give a whole picture.' (Waters-Adams, 2006:7). At the same time some researchers, including Shannon-Baker (2015:320) consider methods and paradigms to be independent, advocating instead an 'aparadigmatic' approach where research paradigms are distinct from research methods:

The main point of an aparadigmatic stance is [therefore] to put aside paradigmatic affiliation in favour of allowing two research paradigms to collaborate in producing more comprehensive explanations about the phenomenon under study (Riazi, 2016:10).

For this case study, I have chosen to draw upon Berger and Luckmann's (1991) account of 'the social construction of reality' and in doing so I commit to a

worldview that much of the social phenomena we encounter is the result of social constructions drawn from meaning-making activities (by individuals and/or groups), and that it is these social constructions that shape human action (or inaction). Drawing from a community consensus regarding what is 'real' and what has meaning, this paradigm permits an ontological commitment to realism (i.e. the sport students within this study exist independent of our consciousness of them), and epistemological commitment to the construction of meaning (i.e. current undergraduate students' understandings of Higher Education have been constructed within a different context to that of previous graduates, including many of the university's academic staff).

It is however important to acknowledge the wide spectrum of nuanced (often retrospectively) and overlapping ways in which the term (social) constructionism is used across educational and social science literature. From the perspective of this case study the term constructionism is employed in line with the work of Berger and Luckmann, and their view that 'reality is socially constructed and the sociology of knowledge must analyse the processes in which this occurs' (1991:1). In doing so, Berger and Luckmann's understanding of reality encourages the researcher to embrace the collective construction of knowledge, emphasising within the specific context of this research, the role of family, social experiences, and culture, in shaping the way we understand the world we interact with<sup>24</sup>.

**Ontological Realism:** This research aims to provide findings that are of use to academics like myself, for the purposes of teaching and supporting sport students in Higher Education. However, like myself, many of these academics come from a science background and so share a similar 'philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate' (Maynard, 1994:10). Ordinarily, my peers do not concern themselves with what is 'real', as '[t]he world of everyday life proclaims itself' as real, without need for additional verification over and beyond its simple presence (Berger and Luckmann, 1991:37), '[i]t is simply *there*, as self-evident and compelling facticity' [emphasis in original] (Appelrouth and Desfor Edles, 2011:286). In this regard, they take the reality of everyday life for granted

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<sup>24</sup> Further reading on this version of the term constructionism includes the works of: Berger and Luckmann (1991), Burr (2003), Gergen (1999), Hacking (2000) and Gergen and Gergen (2003).

in a manner akin to Berger and Luckmann's portrayal of 'the man in the street's' (1991:14) 'common sense' view of reality:

The reality of everyday life is taken for granted as reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence. It is simply *there*, as self-evident, and compelling facticity. I know that it is *real*. While I am capable of engaging in doubt as I routinely exist in everyday life. This suspension of doubt is so firm that to abandon it, as I might want to do, say, in theoretical or religious contemplation, I have to make an extreme transition. [emphasis in original] (Berger and Luckmann, 1991:37)

And whilst most are capable of engaging in doubt about the reality of life (they merely choose to suspend such debate as they engage with everyday life), to require them to abandon this 'natural attitude' (Muzzetto, 2016:247), in order to engage with the findings of this research, would require them to undertake 'a deliberate, by no means easy' philosophical and ontological deliberation (Berger and Luckmann, 1991:37). Therefore, for the findings to be useful to colleagues within my profession, they need to be located within the ontological world of realism, where Berger and Luckmann's 'common sense' view of reality is the 'natural attitude of common sense consciousness' experienced by the many; as 'common sense knowledge is the knowledge I share with others in the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life' (Appelrouth and Desfor Edles, 2011:286).

**Epistemological Constructionism:** As a result of the radical changes in the history of Higher Education, as outlined in the Literature Review, the lived reality of Higher Education today is very different to how it was in the past, and as such there is the potential for a significant disjuncture between staff and student constructions of what Higher Education is and should be. Consequently, the location of this research requires a paradigm that is attuned to understanding these kinds of contextual differences. Social constructionism is therefore helpful because as academic staff, our constructions regarding the value and purpose of Higher Education were initially formed in a historical context different to that currently experienced by our sport students (e.g. before many of the government Acts discussed in the Literature Review, including the requirement to pay tuition fees) and as a result these constructions may need revisiting during the current climate.

Furthermore, as this research also wishes to search for possible differences between sport students' understandings, there is a requirement for the research paradigm to acknowledge the potential for different social constructions between

groupings, as 'people create social reality(ies) through individual and collective actions' (Charmaz, 2006:189).

As a result, this ontological and epistemological worldview allows the examination of sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of Higher Education engagement, within the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, neoliberal Higher Education marketplace. Accordingly, this research contends that:

- the world can be considered real at the level of ontology, whilst human knowledge about it is necessarily relative to the social-cultural-technical context in which that knowledge arises;
- meaning is constructed by human beings as they interact with the world;
- experience changes the way the world is constructed, therefore capturing this change is important.

Having recognised the location of this case study within the constructionist paradigm, through the adoption of Berger and Luckmann's (1991) account of social constructionism and the understanding of reality, I will now provide an explanation for, and detailed description of the methodology used.

## 4.2 CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research was to explore the value and purpose of university, for sport students enrolled onto a sport course at Manchester Metropolitan University, a post-92 university situated in the North West of England.

Case study exemplars date back beyond the nineteenth century and the seminal works of Charles Darwin (Flyvbjerg, 2011), whilst the 'antecedents of modern day case study research are most frequently cited as being conducted in the Chicago School of Sociology between the 1920-1950s' (Stewart, 2014:146). Focusing on the location of this research, educational researchers began to embrace the case study as a strategy for the exploration and evaluation of curriculum design and innovation in the 1970s (Merriam, 2009). In recent decades case study research has grown in sophistication, gaining notability as a valuable tool for capturing significant detail and enhancing the understanding of particular phenomenon.

According to Yin (2014:16) a case study is ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context’. It is an all-encompassing methodology that takes into account research design, alongside data collection and analysis techniques (Yin, 2014).

The selection of a case study methodology for this doctoral research provided the opportunity for an exploration of undergraduate constructions of Higher Education, within the contextual setting of a university sports department. As a methodology, the case study has established itself as a valid approach for exploring complex issues: ‘particularly when human behaviour and social interactions are central to understanding topics of interest’ (Harrison et al., 2017: unpaginated), providing an ‘meta-method’ (Johansson, 2003:4) for the combination of methods, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of an issue and its contextual setting (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

However, despite its versatility and all-encompassing nature, the case study as a methodology is not without its opponents:

‘Case study research is often charged with causal determinism, non-replicability, subjective conclusions, absence of generalizable conclusions, biased case selection and lack of empirical clout’. (Idowu, 2016:184)

Yin (2014) argues that criticisms of case studies are levied as a result of a lack of understanding regarding their application potential and the types of questions being asked; refuting the generalisability criticism through an explanation of the difference between analytic and statistical generalisations:

‘in analytic generalisation, previously developed theory is used as a template against which to compare the empirical results of the case study (p.67).’

Within this specific research the all-encompassing nature of a case study methodology provides the scope to employ a variety of qualitative and quantitative analytical tools in order to examine the data acquired through a variety of collection methods (in this case: questionnaires and interviews) within the real-world context of a university sports department, thus providing a unique opportunity to explore, in depth, the social constructions around the value and purpose of a university education within a distinct (and underrepresented) undergraduate discipline (sport).

Countering any criticisms of a reductionist stance, the selection of a case study methodology within this doctoral research specifically allowed ‘...the voices of participants to be heard’ (Rowley, 2002:25), by encouraging the reader to use ‘naturalistic generation[s]’ in order to ‘...recognise essential similarities to cases of interest to them’ (Stake and Trumbull, 1982:1). This assessment is supported by Rowley (2002:25), who describes case studies as:

‘...insights as they stand, with readers making their own interpretation, and taking the ideas from the case study into their own experience’

Furthermore, as ‘a bridge across paradigms’ (Luck et al., 2006:103) the ‘philosophical versatility’ afforded to the case study methodology provides fluidity within this research, as both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods were selected:

‘...engendering coherence between the researcher’s philosophical position, their research question, design, and methods to be used in the study’ (Harrison et al., 2017: unpaginated).

A case study ‘...is not assigned to a fixed ontological or epistemological position...’ (Rosenberg and Yates, 2007:447) it provides the scaffold with which the researcher may design a research programme that is specifically tailored to the inherent complexity of the research questions posed. Consequently, adopting a case study methodology enables the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis tools, through a multi-faceted approach that integrates interpretive practices without privileging one over another, as advocated by Brown (2011), Denzin and Lincoln (2011), and Yin (2014).

From the perspective of a professional doctorate, adopting a case study approach allowed me to focus intensively on the sport students I interact with, and who are integral to my academic role and that of my departmental colleagues, alongside an opportunity to explore, in depth, the contemporary notion of Higher Education engagement within my professional context. The case study approach also enhanced the generalisability of any findings in relation to the professional context, most notably, from a Higher Education sector perspective, the opportunity to gain an insight into a significant (i.e. in size within the sector) and distinctive group of university students, thereby providing a vital foundation from which my department (and those of other universities) could design and implement bespoke sport specific interventions in order to enhance the progression, retention, and attainment of its undergraduate sport students,

together with a desire to provide the underpinning groundwork for future sport specific educational research.

Case study methodology may include an in-depth examination of single or multiple cases. According to research methods authors including Stake (2003), Yin (2014) and Crotty (2015), case studies may be classified into three categories: intrinsic (single case), instrumental (single case), and collective (multiple cases), where the difference between an intrinsic and instrumental case study is not the uniqueness of the case itself, but the actual purpose of the research undertaken.

An intrinsic case study is exploratory in its nature and is often undertaken in order to capture the 'richness and complexity of the case' (as opposed to extending a particular theory) (Grandy, 2010:500). As a result, these case studies are often emergent in nature, shaped largely by the stories and experiences that surface from the data collected, and through data analysis that focuses more on interpreting meaning rather than the categorising of data, as is common in instrumental case studies. However, in an instrumental case study, the case itself provides the framework in order to 'provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization' (Stake, 2003:137). Unlike intrinsic methods, data analysis within instrumental case studies often utilises careful coding arrangements, with a focus upon the aggregate of their instances. As a result, this type of case study focuses less on the complexity of the case itself (in comparison with intrinsic case studies) and more on the specifics of the stated research questions:

'Instrumental case study does not permit generalization in a statistical sense; however, it does attempt to identify patterns and themes and compare these with other cases' (Grandy, 2010:474).

As a result, an instrumental approach is often employed in order to explore a particular phenomenon (through a specific case), and then compare the results with other cases, in order to ascertain the transferability of any findings.

With regard to this specific study, as the aim was to construct a detailed picture of the value and purpose of Higher Education for university sport students, the three research questions span multiple research interests (i.e. constructions surrounding the value and purpose of Higher Education, the notion of a 'student experience', and influence of familial histories in Higher Education, all within a

specific student population). Consequently, this case study is both intrinsic and instrumental in its nature. It is intrinsic because “first and last, the researcher wants better understanding of a particular case”, in this case specifically undergraduate sport students (Stake, 2003:136). However, the case study is also instrumental in its nature, as it aims to ‘provide insight into an issue’, in this case two issues, firstly to further examine the notion of a university student experience, and secondly to explore the established issue of First-in-Family status on university engagement (Stake, 2003:137).

As discussed earlier in this section, case studies allow the researcher to incorporate ‘a palette of methods’ in order to explore, in depth, a specific case of interest (Stake, 1995:xi). Within this doctoral research this ‘palette’ includes a range of data collection (questionnaires and interviews) and data analysis tools (descriptive and inferential statistics, and thematic analysis), and the application of Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ (Wacquant, 1989:50) as a valuable analytic resource (details of which are described in the Methods section that follows).

In the next section, I provide details of the data collection and analysis procedures applied to this case study.

## 4.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

As previously discussed, a case study methodology encourages the researcher to consider a variety of data collection tools, in order to generate a detailed insight into the participants’ lived experiences within a particular context (Hamilton, 2011). This third section specifically focuses upon the study’s data collection and analysis procedures, presenting the reader with a rationale for the three data collections stages and their associated data collection tools, before presenting details of the study’s data analysis process, analytical framework, and ethical considerations in the final two sections of this chapter.

According to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) the use of different data collection tools is ‘characteristic of a high quality case study and lends weight to the validity of the findings’ (Hamilton, 2011:unpaginated). Within this case study, data collection took place in three stages (see Figure 6 below) across the participants’ first year at Manchester Metropolitan University. In



keeping with a case study's multi-tooled approach, the data obtained included: two cohort questionnaires administered at different time points in the 2015-16 academic year (completed in September 2015 and April 2016) and a series of, semi-structured, individual face-to-face interviews (conducted in May 2016).

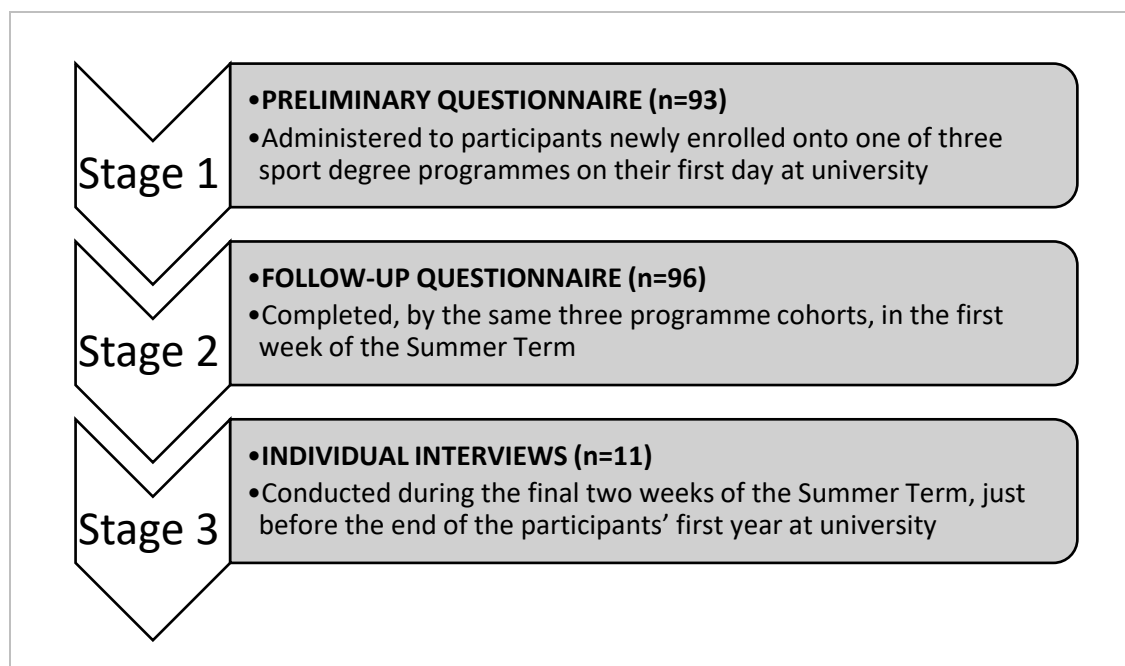


Figure 6: Data collection took place across three stages within the 2015-16 academic year. The questionnaires administered in Stages 1 and 2 were completed in September 2015 and April 2016, respectively, whilst the individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in May 2016.

The use of two or more data collection methods and/or the use of two or more perspectives is known as 'triangulation' (Hamilton, 2011). Within this case study, the examination of the data using both qualitative and quantitative analysis tools, and the triangulation of these different data forms provided a more robust understanding of sport students' constructions surrounding the value and purpose of Higher Education. In order to assemble a broad picture of these important social constructions, two questionnaires were designed as data-gathering apparatuses to collect valuable cohort-wide (i.e. potential participation pool of 133 newly enrolled first year sport students) quantitative and qualitative data from participants.

Questionnaires are 'the most widely used technique for obtaining information' (Opie, 2019:160), as they provide an opportunity to gather sizeable quantities of anonymous data, through carefully constructed questions designed specifically

for the intended purpose of the survey (Jones et al., 2008). There are of course drawbacks to using questionnaires, as their format constraints may limit the respondent's ability to fully express their opinions (although the use of open-ended questions may present spaces for unprompted responses) (Leong and Austin, 2005). To overcome this potential shortcoming, questionnaires may incorporate 'fact-finding' questions (for example, the opening questions were tasked with gathering key demographic data critical to exploring RQ3 within this case study) (J. Bell and Waters, 2014:15) and open-questions (where the data collected from these questions could be triangulated with individual interview data, in order to thoroughly identify themes) carefully designed to provide participants with the opportunity to provide additional detail and opinion with adequate space for answers provided.

Paying attention to the professional nature of this doctorate, the questionnaire design focused on a combination of the three research questions and what I perceived to be the important signifiers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century university student: motivations to study, the impact of tuition fees (student consumerism), and possible challenges / barriers to studying. Since securing my first academic position in the mid-1990s, I have witnessed significant changes in the organisation and management of UK universities, as government interventions forced a more economic and neoliberal attitude towards their scholastic provisions and practices. In parallel with this prevailing economic philosophy, undergraduate students appear to have adopted a consumer orientation mindset, expecting service levels and the quality of their experience to be commensurate with the tuition fee charged (Foskett, Roberts and Maringe, 2006:126). This is something I witnessed for myself, as Principal Lecturer responsible for student experience, when the MMU Students' Union Cheshire Student Activities Officer tweeted:

'If a lecture is cancelled or if your lecturer/tutor doesn't show up you should ask for your money back from the fees you pay'. (Asomaning, 2012)

in response to the tuition fee increase to £9,000 (Browne, 2010) in September 2012. The cultural, intellectual, and pedagogic consequences of marketisation of the sector seemingly altered the pedagogic relationship between academic and student, from educator and knowledge provider, to commodity [degree] supplier ( Foskett, Roberts and Maringe, 2006; Anyangwe, 2012).

When devising the questions themselves, I drew upon the recent student experience metric literature (including Richardson et al., 2007; Cheng and Marsh, 2010; Flint et al., 2013; and national press articles, for example Anyangwe, 2011) and my intuitive perspective of what affects sport students' experience and success at university (based upon two decades of academic experience, and including roles such: Personal Tutor, Unit Leader and the BSc Sport and Exercise Science Programme Leader for 10 years and Faculty lead for student experience) to construct two questionnaires designed to gather data around what I perceived to be important areas of influence over the decision to study at university.

In addition, Creswell and Creswell's (2014) textbook: *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, and Bryman's (2007) examination of the barriers to integrating qualitative and quantitative analysis, guided the structure of the completion process, in order to maximise the potential sample size across both questionnaires. This included the identification of specific sampling opportunities for maximum impact (in this case, working with the three Programme Leaders to identify core contact sessions, in order to increase the number of potential participants).

Taking all the guidance into account, the final format aimed to enrich the collection of data in relation to sport students' constructions of Higher Education, and therefore included: open and closed questions, 5-point attitudinal scales, and free text boxes. Closed questions were used to collate participant demographic data concerning age range, gender, previous educational establishment, and family graduates. In line with both the UK's national student satisfaction exit survey (NSS) and the university's biannual Internal Student Survey (ISS), a 5-point attitudinal scale was employed. Alongside the benefits to the researcher of matching the questionnaire response scale to these key surveys (i.e. analytical familiarity, as academic staff are regularly required to analyse internal and external student metrics using 5-point attitudinal scales), the selection of an odd-number scale allowed respondents to answer without imposing a specific position upon them (i.e. they could select the middle value of 3), and meaningfully differentiate between the response options available (i.e. differentiating between agree and strongly agree).

When designing the format of the paper-based questionnaires, guidance was sought from the literature concerning all key aspects of the questionnaire data collection process. This included drawing upon the guidance from Creswell and Creswell (2014) regarding the overall appeal of the document: including providing an attractive layout (for example: to aid this the questionnaire designs included logos, illustrations and coloured text); and taking direction from Gray (2014) regarding the importance of question order (i.e. starting with factual information, before moving on to the more open-questions designed to illicit attitudes and opinion regarding the value and purpose of university study), and the importance of clear instructions regarding where to tick, how many options to choose, and adequate space for open-question responses. Following this process resulted in a number of questionnaire iterations, refined in discussion with my supervisory team, before the final format was agreed.

In contrast, a 'richer picture' was sought using open-ended questions; ensuring that 'the more structured questions did not stifle the participants' opportunity to provide details relating to their social constructions of the value and purpose of university engagement (Newby, 2010:301). In addition, a small number of prompting questions were used to specifically ascertain whether these newly enrolled sport students were aware of media and academic constructions of them as consumers of Higher Education, (discussed previously in section 2.5 of the Literature Review). For example: question 8 of the preliminary questionnaire:

The media often portrays university students as 'customers' because of tuition fees. Do you think paying tuition fees will change how you view your university education (in comparison to school/college)?

Finally, with specific consideration for all three research questions, the precise timing of the two questionnaires was set for September 2015 and April 2016. Concerned with gaining a full picture of the sport students' pre-enrolment constructions of Higher Education, and the influence of university participation, the questionnaires were administered to the entire undergraduate sport population (rather than a smaller subset including just one degree programme) at two distinct points in an academic year seven months apart (see appendices, page 137 for the questionnaire schedule). The preliminary questionnaire was completed during the participants' first day at university on Monday 21st September 2015 (encouraging responses not yet influenced by university engagement); and the follow-up questionnaire was completed during in the first

week of the final 2015-16 university term (Monday 18<sup>th</sup> - Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2016<sup>25</sup>). On both occasions, participants were drawn from a pool of 133 first year undergraduate sport students, enrolled onto one of the three single honours sports degree programmes (BSc Coaching and Sports Development; BSc Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy; and BSc Sport and Exercise Science) administered by Manchester Metropolitan University's Cheshire-based Department of Exercise and Sport Science.

The specific procedures undertaken to administer these two cohort-wide questionnaires will now be outlined in the next two subsections.

### 4.3.1 STAGE 1: PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of the preliminary questionnaire was to explore sport students' pre-enrolment constructions regarding the value and purpose of a university education (a copy of the preliminary questionnaire is provided in Appendices 7.2, page 138-139). Consequently, completion of this preliminary questionnaire took place at the beginning of each degree programme's 'Welcome to MMU' contact session (as this was the first formal contact session for all the newly enrolled sport students), during the MMU Cheshire Faculty's Welcome Week, running from Monday 21<sup>st</sup> to Friday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

Following a standardised introduction to the research study's aims and guidance on the voluntary nature of the questionnaire (including the ability to withdraw after submission of the questionnaire) delivered by the sport students' Programme Leader, participating students were verbally encouraged to complete the one-page (two-sided) questionnaire, providing as much detail as possible, during the 15-minutes allocated for the task. In total 93 (70%) of the newly enrolled first year sport students (68 male and 25 female) completed the preliminary questionnaire. Table 9 provides details of the preliminary questionnaire completion rates for the three undergraduate sport programmes, whilst additional participant details may be found in the Appendix 7.10, page 150.

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<sup>25</sup> The Summer Term for the 2015-16 academic year ran for five weeks, from Monday 18<sup>th</sup> April to Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May, after which all formal contact ceased until the start of the next academic year on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

Table 9: Preliminary questionnaire completion rates (n=93). (Note: to aid the analysis process, each degree programme had a specific colour for the questionnaire text, the colour is indicated in the table below).

		Male	Female	Total	% of available
Programmes	B.A. (Hons.) Coaching & Sports Development	23	9	32	91%
	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	31	13	44	61%
	B.A. (Hons.) Physical Education & Sports Pedagogy	14	3	17	65%
<b>Total</b>		<b>68</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>70%</b>

Table 10: Follow-up questionnaire completion rates for the three undergraduate sport programmes (n=96). (Note: to aid the analysis process, each degree programme had a specific colour for the questionnaire text, the colour is indicated in the table below)

		Male	Female	Total	% of available
Programmes	B.A. (Hons.) Coaching & Sports Development	23	4	27	77%
	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	33	17	50	69%
	B.A. (Hons.) Physical Education & Sports Pedagogy	15	4	19	70%
<b>Total</b>		<b>71</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>70%</b>

## 4.3.2 STAGE 2: FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

With the specific aim of including perspectives from as many first year undergraduate sport students as possible, the purposeful data collection schedule described in subsection 4.3.1 was repeated for the follow-up questionnaire. Rather than choosing to sample a subset of the department's first year sport students, the study's second questionnaire was also administered to all sport students enrolled on one of the department's three undergraduate sport programmes, during a core contact session, in the first week of the university's Summer Term<sup>23</sup>. This time the programme-specific completion sessions were identified from the cohorts' attendance registers, as the most well attended contact sessions in the week.

Following the same procedure as the preliminary questionnaire, a standard re-introduction to the research study was provided by the Programme Leader, prior to the circulation of one-page (two-sided) questionnaires. In total 96 (72%) of the first year sports students (71 males and 25 females) completed the second, follow-up questionnaire. Table 10 provides the programme specific completion rates for the second, follow-up questionnaire, whilst additional participant details can be found in the Appendix 7.10, page 150.

In addition to the standard 'fact-finding' questions (i.e. questions 1-3 concerning the respondent's gender, age and previous educational establishment) (Bell and Waters, 2014:15), the questions on the follow-up questionnaire (a copy is provided in Appendices 7.3, page 140-141) were aligned to the three research questions posed by this case study. For example: questions 2-4 were designed to explore the sport students' constructions of Higher Education, whilst questions 5-11 focused on the sport students' pedagogic experience during their first year at university. In addition, as the results of the preliminary questionnaire indicated unexpectedly muted responses regarding tuition fee concern (question 7), 'consumer' branding (question 8), and the notion of a 'student experience' (question 10), the follow-up questionnaire included two questions designed to further explore the cohorts' perception of a 'student experience' (question 12) and their views regarding the UK's 'consumer model' of Higher Education (question 13).

In addition to the two cohort questionnaires, individual interviews were also incorporated into this case study. These semi-structured interviews shared many features of the two questionnaires, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the data initially uncovered and the ability to triangulate data in order to provide a more robust understanding of sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of Higher Education. The participants for these interviews were a self-selecting sample, drawn from the two questionnaire respondent pools. Details regarding these semi-structured interviews are provided next.

### 4.3.3 STAGE 3: INTERVIEWS

Although a case study methodology considers questionnaires an extremely useful pre-structured instrument, able to collect data from a sizable participant pool, for the purposes of this case study, if used in isolation they lack flexibility and consequently may fail to uncover important aspects of the sport students' constructions concerning their Higher Education engagement (Newby, 2010). Interviews encourage free expression between the researcher and the participant, revealing otherwise concealed 'personal information, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions that a paper survey might not uncover' (Leong and Austin, 2005:121). Including individual semi-structured interviews within this case study provided a means by which discrete personal information could be gathered, in an attempt to further understand the social reality of the undergraduate sport students (Fontana and Frey, 2005), making available "better knowledge' of the other as against my knowledge of myself through a face-to-face situation' [emphasis in original] (Berger and Luckmann, 1991:52). According to Berger and Luckmann (1991:49), human expressivity is capable of 'objectivation' as its products become available to the common world through social interaction, and significantly through face-to-face interactions these objectivations may be directly apprehended as indices of the subjective process of their production.

Interviews were therefore specifically incorporated into this case study 'not merely as a data collection tool', but as an opportunity for 'a social, interpersonal encounter' that may uncover the participants' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university, as face-to-face interactions (Cohen et al., 2010:361):

'mak[e] present a variety of objects that are spatially, temporally and socially absent from the 'here and now'. *Ipsa facto* a vast accumulation of experiences and meaning can become objectified in the 'here and now'. [emphasis in original] (Berger and Luckmann, 1991:54).

Interviews, however, are not the panacea of social science data collection, as the manner in which an interview is conducted can influence the information gathered. Interviews should be conducted 'carefully and sensitively' in a standard manner (Cohen et al., 2010:361), in order to avoid the possibility of response bias (Leong and Austin, 2005). With this in mind, a semi-structured interview model was designed in order to gather more detailed information regarding the sport students' perceptions of the value and purpose of university. Unlike formal structured interviews, semi-structured interviews provide a combination of rigour



through an interview guide and flexibility to act upon participant responses in order to delve into and explore further the topic being discussed (Gray, 2014).

The interview guide (see Appendix 7.8, page 147) included a series of key questions that would direct the conversation towards the specific research areas, in reverse order (i.e. focussing discussions towards RQ3 first, then RQ2 and then towards RQ1). In doing so, the interview opened with a series of exploratory questions, focusing specifically on the sport student's educational journey prior to university. The use of these initial questions was two-fold; they were placed at the start of the interview in order to help the participant relax into the interview process, but they were also fundamental to the third research question (Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport student constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?). Over the duration of the interview, the use of the interview guide subtly influenced discussions in the direction of the remaining areas of interest, firstly what influenced the sport student's decision to enrol at university, and finally the sport student's understanding of the concept of a university 'student experience'.

Participants (n=11) were identified through the final question on both cohort questionnaires. In total twenty-two sport students identified themselves as potential interview participants. Following email contact with these twenty-two sport students, eleven agreed to be interviewed (8 male and 3 female). The eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted in the final two weeks of the 2015-2016 academic year. The interviews took place at a time of the sport students' choosing, in a small meeting room. Furniture within the room was repositioned to reduce the 'formal' feel to the interview, allowing the interviewer and interviewee to sit casually opposite each other. In line with the ethical considerations discussed previous (page 82), participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 7.5, page 143) 48 hours prior to the interview. On the day itself the participants were asked to sign two copies of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix 7.6, page 145) and reminded of the voluntary nature of the interview, before the interviews commenced. Interviews were recorded on an Olympus DM-650 digital voice recorder for later transcription (Appendix 7.9, page 149).

## 4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

A number of analytical tools were used to draw together the data collected from the two cohort questionnaires and eleven individual semi-structured interviews. With the aim of constructing an rich, in-depth picture of the sport student cohort and their social constructions surrounding the value and purpose of Higher Education engagement, descriptive and non-parametric statistics were applied to the questionnaire data, whilst an adapted version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure for thematic analysis was applied to the individual interview data. Further details regarding these analytical tools is provided within this fourth section.

### 4.4.1 QUESTIONNAIRE DATA ANALYSIS

Completed questionnaires were collated into the three undergraduate programme bundles (note: to aid analysis each degree programme had a specific questionnaire text colour, these were indicated in Table 9 and Table 10 and examples are provided in Appendices 7.2 and 7.3, pages 138-140) and allocated a number, so that individual questionnaire scripts could be identified at a later date. The response data from each individual questionnaire were then input into Microsoft Excel<sup>2016</sup> using a standard: rows (individual questionnaire script) and columns (individual question) method.

In order to generate cohort-wide positions (for example, regarding the purpose of university through the sport students' responses to questions 5-6 on the initial questionnaire) and highlight potential differences between sub-populations (for example, to highlight potential differences between the degree programme and/or age of the respondent, and their previous educational experience - through the responses to questions 1-3 on both questionnaires), a series of descriptive and non-parametric statistical analysis tests were applied to the cohort-wide questionnaire data. These analysis tools included: measures of central tendency, interquartile variability, boxplots, and cross-tabulations with Chi-Squared analysis for simultaneous associations. Each of these quantitative statistical analysis

techniques will be described in more detail next. A summary table outlining all statistical methods used can be found in Appendix 7.11.

**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS:** Microsoft Excel<sup>2016</sup> software was utilised to perform the initial descriptive statistical analysis. A series of statistical tools were applied to the raw questionnaire data in order to produce quantitative descriptions that conveyed the demographic structure of participant population (e.g. age, gender, participant compulsory educational experience, family post-compulsory educational experience), alongside broad-spectrum quantitative summaries of the sport students' constructions of Higher Education. Quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data included data comparison methods (e.g. tallies, means, medians, and modes) in conjunction with visual analysis tools such as, stacked and side-by-side bar charts (where necessary data were numerically coded to ease the analytical process). The statistics software platform IBM SPSS Statistics<sup>2017</sup> was used for all inferential statistical analysis.

**CENTRAL TENDENCY, INTERQUARTILE VARIABILITY, AND BOX PLOTS:**

Inferential statistical analysis tests were used to detect and set apart different social constructions of Higher Education. In addition to descriptive and central tendency statistics (i.e. mean, median, and mode) for each identified data set (for example: sport students grouped by age, gender, undergraduate programme, FiF/HE-I status, etc.), the interquartile range was calculated to assess data variability. The addition of box plots to the analysis process provided a valuable means to describe the centre and variability of sport students' constructions, alongside any outliers. In addition, a non-parametric, one-way analysis of variance (Kruskall-Wallis test) was applied to the data in order to establish whether samples (for example, sport students' constructions relating to the current tuition fee payback scheme) originated from the same distribution.

**CROSS-TABULATIONS WITH CHI-SQUARED ANALYSIS:** Finally, the categorical data collected from the two questionnaires (i.e. age, gender, undergraduate programme, FiF/HE-I status, etc.) were examined using cross-tabulations, in order to identify any potential sub-population social constructions not initially apparent when the data were considered through initial analysis of whole-survey responses. To supplement the cross-tabulation analysis, Fisher

Freeman Halton and Chi-square tests were performed in order to determine whether there were any significant associations between any of the identified social constructions.

## 4.4.2 INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS

As an analysis tool 'not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:81), thematic analysis has been used to identify, analyse, and report patterns across an entire data set (as opposed to individual interview data). Within this case study the broad-spectrum rubric provided by thematic analysis offered the opportunity to work within an identified case study methodology and research paradigm, whilst ensuring a level of rigour to the results obtained.

As a 'worldview that guides the investigator' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:105) the location of this case study within social constructionism and its appreciation for the 'objectivation' of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1991:49), supports the use of thematic analysis. Furthermore, the commitment to ontological realism (i.e. the sport students within this case study take the reality of everyday life for granted in a manner akin to Berger and Luckmann's 'common sense' view of reality (1991:14)) and epistemological constructionism (i.e. the objectivation of social constructions related to Higher Education, produced the individual or group, with the existing context), allows the identification of products (themes) and the indices of the subjective process of their production through social interaction.

Drawing upon Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guidelines, I generated an eight-phase approach, incorporating two additional phases (identified with an \*asterisk\*) in order to take into account the specific elements of the third research question (RQ3). These supplementary phases allowed for the grouping of participants by previous family experience of Higher Education (for specific analysis relating to RQ3) [\*Phase 6], and the supplementary exploration of the data-generated themes using Bourdieu's 'thinking tool' as an analytical framework [\*Phase 7].

**PHASE 1:** involved transcribing the interview data and then familiarising myself with the data by reading and rereading the transcripts at least twice, without making annotations on the scripts themselves. To assist the next phase, I created

a set of preliminary themes drawn from a combination of the literature review, my personal and professional interest in the social constructions associated with university engagement and the questionnaire data (see column 1 in Table 11). Initial analysis of the two questionnaires revealed a number of key themes to be further considered, including: a lack of awareness regarding the notion of a 'student experience' and the concept of students as a customer; a future employment focus towards university study; and a general complacency towards university tuition fees and the debt repayment model.

Table 11: Preliminary themes were generated from the two questionnaires: (1) Following Phase 2: a series of (2) initial codes were produced and used to code the interview transcripts. Following Phases 3-4 the (3) working themes were identified and extracts coded at Levels 1-2 (Braun and Clarke, 2006:91-92).

(1) PRELIMINARY THEMES	(2) INITIAL CODES	(3) WORKING THEMES
Employability	Career aspirations	Career aspirations (light green)
Implications for the NSS	Employability	Employability (light green)
Motivation to study at university	Family experiences	Family experiences (orange)
Personal transformation	Friendship groups [home and university]	Quality provision (blue)
Students as customers	Quality provision	Implications for the NSS (purple)
Student Experience	Motivations to study	Motivations to study (pink)
Tuition Fees	Networking	Student Experience (purple)
	Reading	Teaching and assessment (peach)
	Teaching styles	Tuition Fees (dark green)
	Tuition fees	Students as customers (dark green)
	Vocabulary / language	Unconventional notions (red)

**PHASE 2:** began as soon as I felt confident that I was sufficiently familiar with the data set to begin coding. With some initial thoughts regarding the data and the preliminary themes created in Phase 1, I generated a list of data-driven codes, more closely reflecting the entire interview data set (see: column 2, in Table 11 above). Following the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006:89), these codes covered 'as many potential themes/patterns as possible'. Working systematically through

each transcript, I coded the text using a variety of coloured highlighter pens (using similar colours for similar codes) and corresponding coloured sticky-notes, attached to the right-margin (tagging the location of the code for future reference). For an example of the coding see Figure 7, and for the page tagging, see the script bundle in the centre of Figure 9.

**PHASE 3:** involved searching for broad themes (rather than codes). To do this, I focussed on the notion that themes tend to reveal themselves through the question: 'What is this expression an example of?' (Ryan and Bernard, 2003:87). With this in mind, I reviewed my codes, grouping them into overarching themes. I then collated the relevant coded data into these themes, using a combination of coloured pens (see Table 11 for the colour list) and mind maps (see Figure 8). I then reread the transcripts once more, this time focusing my attention on how the broad data-driven themes aligned to my research questions. The iterative nature of this process led to a set of working themes (see column 3, Table 11).

**PHASE 4:** involved revisiting the coded data extracts for each theme, in order to confirm the presence of a coherent pattern. This phase involves two levels of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006:91-92):

**Level One** required a rereading of the coded extracts for each theme in order to confirm the presence or absence of a coherent pattern. If the themes formed a coherent pattern, then I moved to Level 2, if they did not then I scrutinised both the theme and data extracts further, in order to ascertain whether the theme needed reworking, or whether the data extracts needed rehomeing or disregarding.

**Level Two** required a rereading of the interview scripts to ascertain whether the identified themes 'work' in relation to the data as a whole (Braun and Clarke, 2006:92) and to code any additional data missed during the previous stages.

**PHASE 5:** involved fine-tuning the working themes (listed in column 3 in Table 11) into a list of final themes. In doing so, I identified 'the 'essence' of what each theme is about' [emphasis in original] (Braun and Clarke, 2006:92). These final themes were defined (see Table 12, in the next Chapter) and are discussed in the Findings chapter. Following a number of unexpected thematic observations allied to the sport students' familial educational engagement, Phase 6 was added to the thematic analysis process.

So did the fact that you'd got to pay for university have any...

Yeah.

Was that stopping you coming initially?

Yeah. Because I'm dead conscious about money. And the thought of my parents having to pay, like, nine grand a year, I just don't like the fact of my parents having to pay that much for me. Which is why I didn't stay. But they just reassured me, don't worry about money, like, we've got it, don't stress, which has helped. And they've never mentioned it. But yeah.

Figure 7: Data taken from an interview transcript to illustrate Phase 3: the coding process for 'tuition fees'.

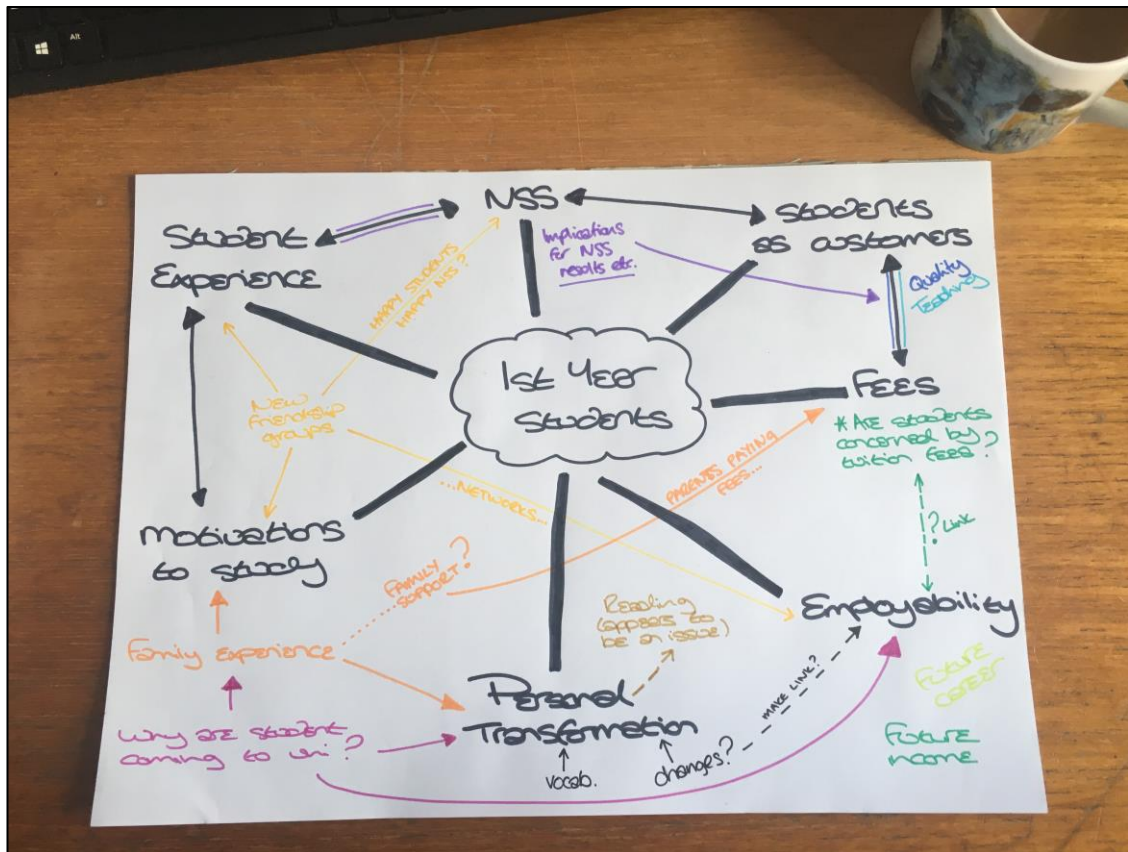


Figure 8: The mind map created during Phase 4. The seven PRE-CONSTRUCTED THEMES (black) were the starting point for the creation of a set of WORKING THEMES (colour coded for future phases).

**PHASE 6\*:** specifically focused on the third research question [RQ3], relating to the sport students' familial university experiences. In order to do this, the eleven interview transcripts were grouped by the respondent's previous family experience of Higher Education. This process resulted in six interview scripts

being categorised as conducted with Higher Education – Informed (HE-I) sport students and five with First-in-Family (FiF) sport students (i.e. the first member of their immediate family to attend university (O'Shea et al., 2017)). Having completed this identification task, I then reread the interview scripts once more, this time noting the prevalence of the final themes from Phase 5 (listed in column 3 in Table 11), for each sport student group (i.e. HE-I or FiF) on two separate pieces of A3 paper (see Figure 9).

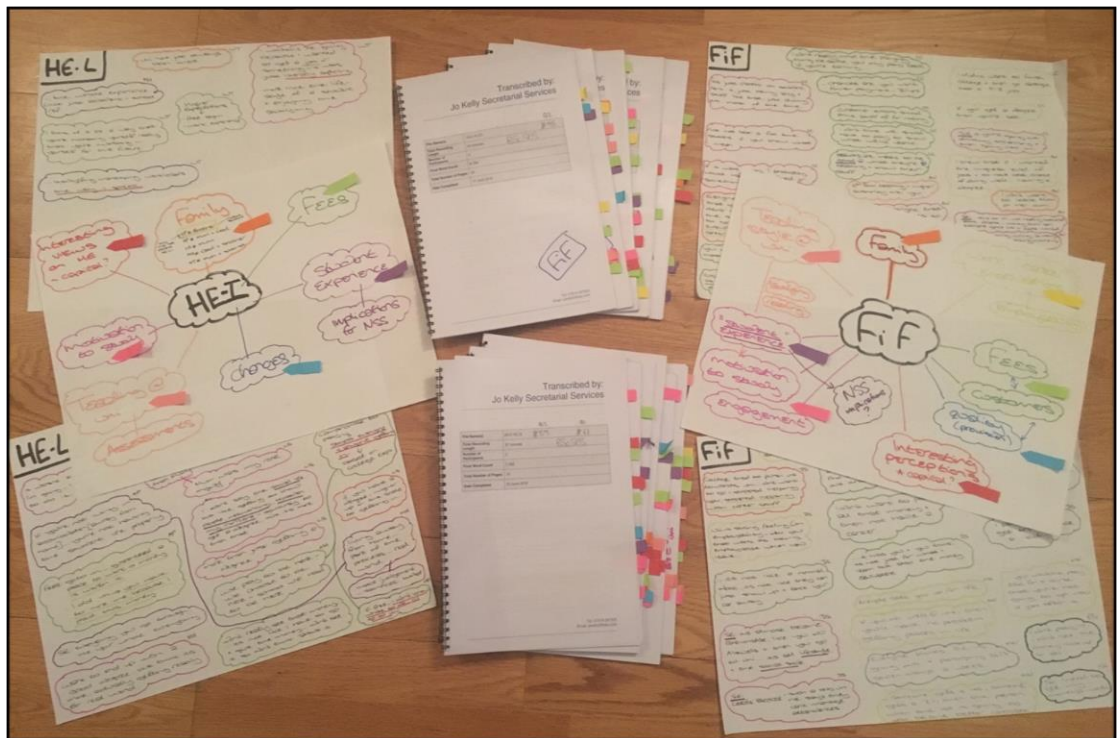


Figure 9: Phase 6 of thematic analysis, involved categorising the two participant groups. Interview transcripts were grouped by previous family experience of Higher Education, resulting in six interview scripts labelled as Higher Education – Informed (HE-I) and five as scripts from First-in-Family (FiF) sport students.

**PHASE 7\*:** involved attending to the interview data through the analytical framework provided by Pierre Bourdieu. Exploring Berger and Luckmann’s work on *the social construction of reality* (1991) and Bourdieu’s *theory of practice* (1977) encourages researchers to adopt the position that education per se (as a social construction) is socially stratified. Therefore, in order to provide an insight into the possible social origins underpinning sport students’ constructions regarding the value and purpose of university education, this penultimate phase required the researcher to engage with Bourdieu’s *thinking tools* during the analysis process.



Rereading the colour coded interview scripts and coded data extracts, Bourdieu's concepts of *capital*, *habitus*, *field*, and *practice* (outlined in the next section) were employed as analytical tools to illuminate relationships between the individual (in this case undergraduate sport students), the family, and external social structures (i.e. neoliberalism, the marketised Higher Education system, and contemporary notions of graduate employment prospects). This is a technique successfully employed by a number of researchers also interested in exploring the social stratification of Higher Education (Bathmaker et al., 2013), and most notably (for this thesis) how the decision to enrol at university is not always a straightforward one (e.g. Reay, 2006; Gale and Parker, 2015; O'Shea, 2015a).

**PHASE 8:** involved the selection of compelling extract examples for inclusion within this doctoral research. This phase included a final analysis of the extracts in relation to the literature and research questions.

### 4.4.3 SUPPORTING ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The introduction of a theoretical resource at this juncture in a thesis is somewhat unusual. However, from the perspective of the researcher, its location is key to the research journey, as this significant resource was not part of the initial research design. Indeed, the decision to search for an analytical resource to enhance the research process was not taken until after initial analysis of the questionnaire data, when I became acutely aware that my deductive *habitus* (as a scientist) had inadvertently stifled my ability to explore the social constructions behind the data I had collected. Dissatisfied with the results of this deductive approach, I decided to challenge my unconscious and embedded methodological dispositions in order to secure a richer, more nuanced worldview.

In seeking this resource, the 'thinking tools' offered by Pierre Bourdieu (Wacquant, 1989:50) were identified as the most applicable, from a range of potential analytical resources, including most notably the works of Michel Foucault and Karl Marx. In a similar vein to Foucault and Marx, Bourdieu's *thinking tools* have been drawn upon successfully by researchers interested in our contemporary Higher Education system. However, what stands his 'thinking tools' apart from other concepts is their relevance to: the case study context (i.e. the participants

location within a marketised Higher Education system with its state constructed narratives on engagement benefits), the research questions posed (i.e. including the role of the family in the sport students' constructions), and the social constructionist paradigm.

For example, Foucault's ideas about biopolitics, biopower, and the neoliberal art of governance (May, 2006) might seem well suited for this case study insofar as higher education can be seen as an apparatus of power-knowledge that shapes individual subjects. Yet Foucault's analyses tend to be orientated less towards economic and class-based structures, looking instead, for example, at the government of the self, of populations and of life (Rabinow and Rose, 2006; Peters, 2007). These emphases do not fit with the context of this case study, in which staff and students are enrolled into discourses that explicitly promote university engagement as a route to social and fiscal betterment through enhanced employment potential. In other words, narratives of economic and class-based change are operative within this case study, to an extent that might not be well served by a Foucaultian analysis. Likewise, the work of Marx, and his notions of class and class control through concepts of production relations and productive forces (Mandel, 2002; Berlin, 2013), may also have a bearing on this research location (i.e. within a state endorsed, marketised Higher Education system). However, his emphasis on market processes, via concepts such as the labour theory of value, capitalist profit as an extraction of surplus value from the exploited in society, and the fetishism of commodities, are all orientated towards economic capital (Cutler et al., 2012) and relations of material production. Where Foucault might be insufficiently attuned to economic factors, Marx is arguably too dominated by them to serve the focus of the study on sport students' social and cultural constructions of educational value and purpose.

From the perspective of this case study, engaging Bourdieu as an analytical resource both framed the data analysis process within social constructionism and provided an opportunity to explore the complex social notions (i.e. beyond market and economic ones) underpinning sport students' understandings of the value and purpose of a university education. More specifically Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Wacquant, 1989:50) provided a framework from which to conceptualise the sport students' understandings and how the construction of them may be intertwined with important contextual factors such as: the commodification and marketisation

of the UK's Higher Education system, the state sponsored promotion of post-compulsory education for social mobility and future employment, and preceding familial engagement with university study.

Indeed, Pierre Bourdieu's *thinking tools* have been drawn upon successfully by several researchers interested in our contemporary Higher Education system. This includes those engaged in research into some of the focal issues encapsulated within this case study: widening participation (Archer et al., 2005; Reay et al., 2010); first generation/first in family university students (Luzekyj et al., 2011; O'Shea, 2016) and graduate employability (Abrahams, 2017; Clark and Zukas, 2013; Glaesser and Cooper, 2014). In addition, the formulaic nature of Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (illustrated in Figure 10) offers the researcher a heuristic account of social orderliness, its structures and regularities; and encourages the examination of interconnections between sport students' familial and societal environment (be that the global contemporary political environs of neoliberalism; or a more insular family locale imbued with Higher Education histories) and the meaning-making process regarding the value and purpose of university study.

With origins in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, Bourdieu (1984 & 2010) adapted and reworked his framework of 'thinking tools' to construct a generalist formula to explain their inter-relationships.

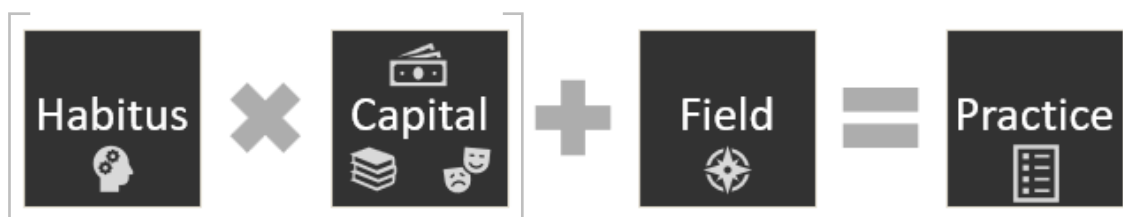


Figure 10: A visual representation of Bourdieu's Thinking Tools (1984:101 & 2010).

Habitus<sup>26</sup> is defined as the subjective representation of our unconscious and embodied dispositions, expressed through an individual's day-to-day *practices* and social interactions (Bourdieu, 1990). It is the embodiment of our lived experiences; it is the language, cultural biography and individual history we

<sup>26</sup> Originally a Latin word associated with Aristotelian philosophy "habitus" refers to a habitual or regular condition, state, or appearance, especially of the body.

incorporate as a consequence of our life encounters, including: our family structure, personal histories, and moral code (*primary habitus*); our bestowed cultural heritage; and our educational status (*secondary habitus*) (Nascimento and Marteleto, 2008). Whilst *habitus* is inherently bound to the individual, it is also communal in nature, through the amassing of ‘shared social conditions and cognitive structures’ (Bourdieu, 1977, cited in Nascimento and Marteleto, 2008:400), providing an important appreciation for the constitutive social structure, the position occupied by the individual within the social structure, and their attitude towards the social structure (Nascimento and Marteleto, 2008).

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus has been employed by researchers (for example: Reay, 2004; Luzeckyj et al., 2011; Jessica Abrahams and Ingram, 2013; O’Shea, 2015b; Christodoulou, 2016) to explore the difficulties experienced by non-traditional student groups habitus in the subjective representation of our unconscious and embodied dispositions, expressed through day-to-day practices and social interactions. Within the location of this case study Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* may be put to work with the aim of drawing attention to the potential involuntarily influence of family educational histories (within Higher Education), in guiding the individual and collective towards certain social constructions regarding the value and purpose of Higher Education (the latter of these has been explored in great detail by Reay and colleagues (2004; 2006; 2010)). Bourdieu (1998) refers to *habitus* as the ‘feel for the game’, as it generates *practices* for particular social groups and sets the structural limits of what is perceived possible (Swartz, 1997).

Having the feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to master in a practical way the future of the game; it is to have a sense of the history of the game ... the good player is the one who anticipates, who is ahead of the game ... she has immanent tendencies of the game in her body, in an incorporated state: she embodies the game. (Bourdieu, 1998:80-81)

The *game* within the context of this study is conceptualised as engagement within the UK’s marketised Higher Education sector for the purpose of enhancing future employment prospects (and thereby *economic capital*) through *institutionalised cultural capital* (i.e. a sport degree).

Capital on the other hand, represents the assets and resources available to be exchanged to gain advantage within the social world:

... firstly economic capital, in its various kinds; secondly cultural capital or better, informational capital, again in its different kinds; and thirdly two forms of capital that are very strongly

correlated, social capital, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership, and symbolic capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate. (Bourdieu, 1987:4)

According to Bourdieu *economic capital* is anything that may be ‘immediately and directly convertible into money’ (Bourdieu, 1986:243), whilst other *capitals* such as educational qualifications (*cultural capital*) and social interactions (*social capital*) may be converted indirectly, via engagement in activities such as employment (Calhoun, 2006). *Cultural capital* exists in three forms: the *embodied state* - the knowledge residing within us (e.g. an individual’s accent or dialect); the *objectified state* – the material objects we use to indicate our social class or *capital* (e.g. a luxury car, or mobile phone model), and *institutionalised state* – the way in which society measures prestige and *cultural capital* (e.g. an individual’s credentials and/or qualifications, such as academic qualifications and/or titles that denote cultural competence) (Bourdieu, 1986). *Social capital* is ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources’ associated with the establishment of durable interrelationships and social networks (Bourdieu, 1986:243). *Symbolic capital* on the other hand, is the automatic form these *capitals* take when recognised within the *field*, in other words, the assets that bring social and cultural advantage or disadvantage within the *field* (Moore, 2012). Researchers such as Burke and Scurry (2019) and Thatcher et al. (2016) have applied this conceptual tool to their work on social class, graduate resilience, and future employment prospects. Within this case study, Bourdieu’s notion of *capital* is also applicable. For example: *economic capital* through sport students’ constructions associated with university tuition fees and future employment earnings; *social capital* through some sport students’ acknowledged desire to increase their social circle, and *cultural capital* through the asset the participants are seeking to acquire (namely the *institutionalised capital* of a university degree) with its potential to broker advantageous employment in the future.

Field represents the distinct, hierarchical arenas where agents are located according to the social positions assigned to them through tangled interactions between the specific rules of the *field* and the attributes of the agent, namely their *habitus* and *capital* (in the forms of social, economic, and cultural capital). As Grenfell (2012:67) explains, the inter-dependant and co-constructed trio of *habitus*, *capital*, and *field* are a ‘Gordian knot which [can] only be understood through case-by-case deconstructions’. According to Bourdieu, social *fields* are

a human construction, operating semi-autonomously, with their own set of rules, rituals, prodigies, and celebrities. However, despite their differing conventions, what is at stake within any social *field* remains the same: the accumulation of *capital* per se. Within this case study, the research location is within the UK's Higher Education *field*. Nevertheless, by the very nature of a competitive, post-compulsory educational *field* the majority of participants will be located within this conceptualised site of struggle for a fixed period of time (in this case, for three years whilst completing their undergraduate degree) before using the assets accrued within this *field* to negotiate ever advantageous positions within other social *fields*, such as the graduate employment.

Following Bourdieu's formulaic approach, *practice* is not merely the product of any one of his *thinking tools*, but a complex product borne out of an interlocking relationship between the three: *habitus*, *capital*, and *field*:

...'practice results from relations between one's disposition (*habitus*) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field)' (Maton, 2012:50).

Therefore, in order to understand the agency or *practice* of an individual:

...and not least their products, entails understanding that they are the result of the meeting of two histories: the history of the positions they occupy [within the *field*] and the history of their dispositions [i.e. *habitus*]. (Bourdieu, 1993:61)

Within this case study, Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' are used as an analytical resource to guide interpretation of the case study's data. In doing so Bourdieu's concept of *practice* is used to explore sport students' agentic constructions regarding their engagement with Higher Education (demonstrated through the decision to enrol at university to study a sport degree), through the interlocking influences of their family histories and the current tuition fee structure, within the neoliberal political landscape, of the UK's marketised Higher Education sector.

In line with Bourdieu's work on reflexivity (to 'expose [my]self' through open dialogue with the reader (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992)) a reflection on the decision to position Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' as an analytical resource to guide data interpretation can be found in Chapter 6.

## 4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

An important feature of every thesis is the disclosure of the ethical considerations that require attention in order to protect the interests of its participants (Flick, 2010:36). In this final section I provide an overview of the ethical issues associated with this case study.

As a senior member of academic staff within the participants' university department (although participants were not taught by me during their first year of study), establishing a rapport with the participants regarding my role within the investigation was an important ethical consideration; both in terms of the research tools being employed (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) and the social structure of the research location (university). Scrutiny of the unavoidable academic-student dynamic, between myself and the participants, required careful consideration during each data collection stage. In an attempt to lower the probability of participants behaving in an expectation-consistent manner (for a formalised review of the initial Hawthorne Effect research, see Demand Characteristics by Orne, 1996), the research expectations and predictions were not included within either the (i) verbal directions (for completion of the questionnaires) and (ii) the interview Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 7.5, page 143). In addition, the methods employed within this investigation allowed for multiple approaches to the data collection and analysis. As a result, if findings were reported across several data collection tools (questionnaires and interviews) and analysis methods, then assumptions could be drawn with more confidence.

With specific reference to the location of this investigation, Manchester Metropolitan University is committed to 'ensuring that its research activities minimise risk to participants, researchers, third parties, and the University itself' (MMU, 2019b:unpaginated). Consequently, MMU's Ethical Framework (2010) was recognised and applied rigorously throughout this investigation. In doing so, ethical approval was applied for and approved through Manchester Metropolitan University's Education and Social Research Institute, in January 2015. In upholding this framework, the ethical implications associated with undergraduate student participation and the data collection tools employed, were considered throughout each stage of the research process. This included a commitment to

ensuring informed consent was obtained, alongside rigorous arrangements to protect participant identity, and safeguard participant welfare, as the participants were being asked to provide personal opinions on their university degree programme, and the impact the programme may have upon them. Details of this are provided in the sections below.

### 4.5.1 QUESTIONNAIRES

From an ethical perspective it is important to recognise that respondents are not passive providers of data, they are participants, and should be viewed in a similar manner to interviewees, as the same ethical rules apply. For example, from a recruitment perspective, participants cannot be coerced into completing the questionnaire; they may be encouraged to take part, but ultimately 'the decision whether or not to become involved and when to withdraw from the research is entirely theirs' (Cohen et al., 2010:317-8). Indeed, Cohen and colleagues counsel that participant involvement is likely to be the result of various factors, including: the potential to improve the participant's situation; guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity; question sensitivity and/or threat levels; and the reaction of the respondents to the content (e.g. is an item offensive, intrusive, misleading, biased, etc.); and as such these issues should be carefully considered at each stage of the questionnaire development, completion, and analysis process.

### 4.5.2 INTERVIEWS

Interviewing participants requires specific ethical consideration, as interviews are an 'interpersonal interaction [that] produce[s] information about the human condition' (Cohen et al., 2010:382), with three key areas of ethical concern: informed consent, confidentiality and consequence, that require specific consideration prior to any research undertaking (Kvale, 1996).

Although it may not be possible to create a complete ethics rulebook, there are a number of important factors pertaining to these three areas of concern that should be considered (for an extensive list of possible ethical questions, please refer to Cohen et al., 2010:382-383). In order to provide the reader with an example of



this process, I have specifically addressed some of these ethical issues, drawn from the work of Cohen and colleagues. According to Diener and Crandall (1978:57):

‘the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of the facts that would be likely to influence their decisions’.

Indeed ‘How much can a researcher tell the pupils about a particular piece of research?’ (Cohen et al., 2010:69), or as Ruane (2016:53) enquires: ‘How much information is enough? How relevant is relevant?’, are all important questions, especially when the information provided has the potential to affect recruitment and/or the integrity of the results. Currently, the consensus appears to recommend providing as much information as is required to make an informed decision regarding the prospective participant’s desire to take part (Ruane, 2005; Somekh and Lewin, 2005; Cohen et al., 2010; Newby, 2010; Ruane, 2016).

Within this study, the Participant Information Sheet outlined the research aims, why participants had been invited to partake, what was involved in taking part, what would happen to the data, and advice regarding withdrawal from the study (Kirkby et al., 2011), allowing participants to make a voluntary, informed decision whether to participate in the study (Peled and Leichtentritt, 2002). Interview participants were given a hard copy of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 7.5, page 143) and Informed Consent Form (Appendix 7.6, page 145), 48-hours prior to the interview.

At the start of the interview session these documents were revisited, providing participants with the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the research process. This included the concept of informed consent and the participant’s opportunity to withdraw and/or abstain from answering particular questions. Two copies of the Informed Consent Form were signed and dated by the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewee kept one copy of the form, whilst the other was kept by the researcher, who scanned the file and uploaded it into an anonymised, date labelled folder containing the interview audio file and transcript.

Sources of tension within human research include notions of: ‘[n]on-maleficence, beneficence and human dignity’ (Cohen et al., 2010:58). With regard to this case study, we envisaged no direct beneficial or detrimental consequences to taking part. However, the unavoidable academic-student dynamic, between myself and

the participants required careful consideration. For example: my position within the participants' academic department needed to be taken into consideration during all interactions (although the participants had not been taught by me during their first year of study). This included additional reassurances at the start of the interview process, in order to assure participants of their confidentiality rights, and to set their minds at rest regarding the confidential nature of anything discussed during the interview. This is in recognition of the 'duty of trust' (Cohen et al., 2010:69) placed upon an educational researcher to use their data appropriately to improve conditions where possible (Finch, 1985). Finally, the Participant Information Sheet confirmed that although the outcomes of case study may not directly help the participants, the information obtained would increase understanding within the UK university section.

Focusing specifically on the requirement for confidentiality, there are a number of techniques developed to allow public access to case study data without breaching confidentiality, including: deleting identifiers, using crude reporting categories, micro-aggregations of data, and error inoculation (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2014). Within this case study, issues of anonymity and confidentiality were addressed through: the practice of removing any identifiers (e.g. previous school) from interview data at the transcribing stage, and ascribing gender-matched pseudonyms (Grinyer, 2009). The decision to use gender specific pseudonyms was not taken lightly (especially as there were just three females interviewed), however as the potential for differing responses between males and females was of interest within this case study, great care was taken to ensure that like the eight male participants, the three female participants could not be identified.

### 4.5.3 DATA HANDLING AND STORAGE

Finally, although the questionnaire and interview data were collected in the 2015-2016 academic year, all data processing will comply with the European Commission's General Data Protection Regulations (2018). From a layman's perspective, participants were informed that all hard copies of the data would be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office; whilst all electronic data (including transcripts, interview recordings and spreadsheets) would be stored on a password protected university laptop.

# SUMMARY

This chapter opened with an account of the current thinking around research paradigms, before providing a rationale for a case study approach, and a précis of the research methods undertaken. In doing so, the chapter positioned this thesis within social constructionism, and the ontological and epistemological worldview where reality can be considered real at the level of ontology, however knowledge about such reality is relative to the social-cultural-technical context in which it is constructed by human beings.

Following on from the contextual information provided in the third chapter, this Research Design chapter also provided the reader with the justification for a single case study methodology, and its inherent intrinsic and instrumental nature. In this regard, the chapter acknowledged the opportunity a case study methodology affords as it 'is not assigned to a fixed ontological or epistemological position' (Rosenberg and Yates, 2007:447), providing instead, a scaffold from which both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis tools were carefully chosen (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) in order to generate a detailed insight into the participants' lived experiences (Hamilton, 2011).

The chapter closed with specific details of the data collection methods employed within this case study, and justification for the chosen analytical tools. This included the requirement for a theoretical framework to guide a social constructionist interpretation of sport students' understanding regarding the value and purpose of Higher Education and how they may be intertwined with prior familial university engagement.

Having provided the reader with a detailed description of the case study's research design, the next chapter will explore the study's findings regarding sport students' constructions of the value and purpose of Higher Education.

# 5 FINDINGS

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*'You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view'. (Lee, 1960:30)*

Foregrounding the case study's three research questions (RQ1-3), the aim of this fifth chapter is to draw upon the data in order to explore the sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of a university education. By doing so, this chapter delves into the participant narratives to construct for the reader a unique window into the worldview of the undergraduate sport population.

- RQ1.** How is the concept of a 'student experience' constructed by newly enrolled undergraduate sport students?
- RQ2.** What influenced newly enrolled undergraduate sport students' decision to enrol at university?
- RQ3.** Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?

Making use of the data obtained from the eleven interview scripts, I have chosen to use the emergent themes identified during Phase 5 of the thematic analysis process (more detail on these themes can be found in Table 12), as the scaffold upon which I will weave together both the qualitative and quantitative data analysis. With the aim of purposefully intertwining these analytical insights, this Findings chapter has been split into the following four thematic sections:

- 5.1 Student Experience:** considers how notions of student experience are constructed prior to experience of university.
- 5.2 Why University?** explores the social constructions underpinning sport students' decisions to study at university.
- 5.3 Tuition fees:** examines the influence of tuition fees on sport students' decisions to enrol at university.
- 5.4 Family influence:** focuses on the impact of educational family histories on sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of Higher Education.

As a reminder to the reader, exploring Berger and Luckmann's work on the social construction of reality (1991) and Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977) and thinking tools (1986) unlocked a previously unfamiliar 'worldview' for the

researcher (Creswell, 2014:6). As a sport scientist unaccustomed to social constructionism, the formulaic nature of Bourdieu's individual 'thinking tools' offered a heuristic account of social orderliness, its structures and regularities. In addition, these tools have been drawn upon successfully by a number of researchers interested in the Higher Education system, including the focal issues encapsulated in this case study: widening participation (Archer et al., 2005; Reay et al., 2010); first generation/first in family university students (Luzecy et al., 2011; O'Shea, 2016) and graduate employability (Abrahams, 2017; Clark and Zukas, 2013; Glaesser and Cooper, 2014).

From the perspective of this findings chapter, utilising Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' as an analytical resource provided the opportunity to unearth the potentially complex nature of students' constructions of the value and purpose of Higher Education, and importantly the social settings within which they are imagined (a previously inaccessible worldview, through my prior experiences as a scientist). Taking the starting position that education is socially stratified, Bourdieu's *thinking tools* have been successfully employed by a number of researchers to illustrate how the decision to enter Higher Education is not always a straightforward one (e.g. Reay, 2006; Gale and Parker, 2015; O'Shea, 2015b). As discussed in Chapter 4, Bourdieu's concepts of *capital*, *habitus*, *field*, and *practice*, were employed as analytical resources to explore the conceptualised site of struggle (*field*) where social agents (in this case undergraduate sport students) with their individual pre-enrolment dispositions (*habitus*), interact and compete for resources (to enhance their *cultural, economic and, social capital*) to the benefit of their future selves (Bourdieu, 1977).

To ease the reader's passage through this chapter, three formatting tools have been employed: firstly, Bourdieu's concepts continue to be highlighted using *italics* (a technique commonly used by Bourdieusien researchers, in order to differentiate Bourdieu's work from the general prose (see Grenfell, 2012)), secondly, as a consequence of this use of italics, any emphasis added to quotations will be done using **bold** (rather than in *italic*, as convention usually dictates), and thirdly, any questions/statements taken directly from the two questionnaires are underlined, to help the reader identify them within a sentence (e.g. Programme responses to question 5 on the preliminary questionnaire: What is your main reason for coming to university (please tick one option)?).

Table 12: The themes identified through Phase 5 of thematic analysis process (referred to pages 70-75).

Theme	Research question [RQ]	Description
<b>Student experience</b>	[RQ1] How is the concept of a 'student experience' constructed by newly enrolled undergraduate students?	References to a university student experience, including constructions of this concept through 'lived experiences' (e.g. moving away from home, parties, independence), and instances where sport students suggested that they were not familiar with this concept.
<b>Why university?</b>	[RQ2] What influenced newly enrolled undergraduate sport students' decision to enrol at university?	References to the purpose of university, including student narratives regarding the value of a university degree for their future career and salary prospects.
<b>Tuition fees</b>	[RQ2] What influenced newly enrolled undergraduate sport students' decision to enrol at university?	References to the UK's current repayment scheme for university tuition fees, including constructions around the likelihood of complete debt repayment and an acceptance of indebtedness for future gain.
<b>Familial influences</b>	[RQ3] Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?	References to the familial narratives concerning the value and purpose of university engagement, including constructions associated with the discourse of self-betterment.

## 5.1 STUDENT EXPERIENCE

We never clean the toilet, Neil! That's what being a student is all about! (BBC Two, 1984)

This first section focuses on the notion of a university student experience. In doing so it draws upon Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Wacquant, 1989:50) to provide a framework through which the qualitative and quantitative data may be interlaced in order to better understand sport students' constructions of the university student experience: (i) prior to their enrolment at university, and (ii) following one-year of study at university.

In recent decades, the broadening student population has altered the way the 'authentic' student experience is conceptualised, as distinct student groups (for example: traditional 18-year-old entrants, mature students, commuting students, and FiF students) construct different notions of a university experience. According to Bourdieu (1986), these distinct groups entered university with differing dispositions (expressed through their day-to-day expectations, *practices*, and social interactions) and assets (their quantities of *cultural*, *economic*, and *social capital*) allied to academic success at university.

As discussed in the Literature Review, the use of the term 'student experience' is a contemporary one, with origins in the commodification of education and the marketisation of the university sector (Marr, 2007; L. Bell et al., 2009; Attwood, 2012; Nixon et al., 2018), where a university degree is considered a commodity to be exchanged for employment, rather than a liberal educational experience designed to prepare graduates for life and citizenship (Wilmott, 1995; Naidoo and Williams, 2015). Consequently, accessing students' perspectives on Higher Education is encouraged in order to foster student engagement, and aid the development of a more inclusive learning environment (Ginns et al., 2007; Denson et al., 2010; Buckley, 2012; Robinson and Sykes, 2014; Nixon et al., 2018). Within the UK, the National Student [Satisfaction] Survey (NSS) has been an important contributor to this process since 2005. However, there has been a great deal of debate surrounding the use of such exit feedback tools in Higher Education, as it privileges 'student experience' and 'student satisfaction' as coherent, homogeneous and unproblematic notions, as opposed to complex constructions, shaped by diverse contextual influences, many of which are not intrinsically related to the quality of teaching and learning (Zabaleta, 2007; Schuck et al., 2008). Indeed, research indicates that the notions of most importance to undergraduate students differ between universities, subject disciplines, and students themselves (Gaell, 2000; Burgess et al., 2018).

Focusing initially on pre-university constructions of 'student experience', results from the preliminary cohort questionnaire data indicated that whilst almost all of the newly enrolled undergraduate sport students were able to provide reasons for their university study (predominantly employment - refer to Table 13, on page 93 for more detail), the majority (74%) were unaware of the term 'student experience' from a university perspective. Of the 24 sport students who did indicate an awareness of the term 'student experience', five provided accounts that constructed a narrative of 'student experience' as an overarching term for university life: 'often used to describe the typical student life' (BSc CSD student) and 'the way a student experiences university, many people describe it as the best years of your life' (BSc SES student). At the same time, the majority (19/24 students) specifically associated the term 'student experience' with the socialising aspects of university life:

Parties and lots of socialising with other students. (BSc CSD student)

Party life, living in halls, meeting new circle of friends. (BSc SES student)

I believe it means the student life, living in halls, going to parties. (BScSES student)

This socialising construction of the term 'student experience' was also apparent in the male sport students' interview data. For example, when asked if they had heard of the term 'student experience' within a university context, sport students Ben, Harry, and Peter provided accounts that focused on the more hedonistic aspects of university, including socialising and inebriation:

Student experience is well known, even from the age of 14, that's when probably you start hearing about the student experience... It's not an educational one, it's just the lifestyle. Being a student means going out a lot, yeah, **a lot** (emphasised in tone of voice). Oh yeah. It's about going out, drinking, socialising, and getting up to go to uni the next day (Ben - FiF)

Everyone seems to have the idea that student experience is you come to university, not really bothered about your degree, you just get money from the government, and everyone goes out and everyone gets absolutely ruined every week, every night [laugh] and they don't really try with their work. (Harry - FiF)

Everyone knows student experience is going out and partying 24/7, seven days a week. It's about coming to uni, but not really about the degree...I've had people saying like, people in other unis but not this one, but like Leeds, I know people that have the uni experience that, well, like they just go out all the time. (Peter - HE-I)

Neil and Garry both added the idea of an indolent lifestyle, to their sociable construction of a university 'student experience':

...it's just classic uni stuff isn't it, just being lazy and stuff like that, just chilling out most of the time with your flat mates (Neil - FiF).

Everything really, you know - living away from home, with mates, doing as little as possible - going out loads. It's not about going to uni, it's about, like, the life you have at uni (Garry - HE-I)

The three female sport students interviewed, on the other hand, provided accounts that constructed an overarching notion of 'student experience', that encompassed the socialising aspects, but was not limited to them:

I suppose just everything that you go through throughout university, like your whole everything. It's like all your studying, all your social life, all your sporting, for me, your job, your finance, your budgeting. It's everything. It's just literally everything. (Molly - HE-I)

For me it's, like, the whole life journey thing. It's leaving home, meeting new friends, and learning new stuff. It was something I wanted, that's why I'm here - to like, experience it all. (Linda - FiF)

Indeed, in line with the work of Ingram and Waller (2015), analysis of interview data confirmed that despite greater student diversification over recent decades, the traditional middle-class constructions of the typical university student



experience (such as moving away from home) endure. For some students their constructions also indicated a more nuanced awareness of the benefits of a university education (such as increasing their *social capital* crudely expressed as 'networking'), beyond the degree itself, although this was more dominant in the HE-I students.

I think it's more like – I won't say the social life – but like getting to know people, networking, stuff like that. Just getting to broaden your horizons basically and get to meet everyone. Obviously, get a degree from it, but more than that, it's everything about being at university (Heidi - HE-I)

This observation is also noted in the next section, when we the move beyond students' constructions of the term 'student experience', in order to explore the social constructions underpinning their decision to study at university.

Importantly, the sport students' discourse constructs the notion of a university 'student experience' in a manner juxtaposed to the mainstream use of this term by academic establishments such as the Higher Education Academy (HEA), and government departments associated with Higher Education, all of whom use the term within their benchmarking surveys, reports and league tables, as an indicator of educational service provision quality. The sport students' articulations do however support previous educational literature, revealing the concept as a 'complex notion' (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002:193), influenced by diverse contextual factors including: age; class size; assessment type; grades obtained; Students' Union activity; challenging nature of the topic and time at which classes are held (Zabaleta, 2007).

Interestingly, when enquiring about the term 'student experience' eight months on, through the follow-up cohort questionnaire, the majority of sport students (69 of the 96 participants) remained unaware of the term within the Higher Education context: 'I don't know what you mean by the term/phrase' (BSc SES student). However, a small number of sport students (3/96) did indicate that they had become aware of the term whilst studying at university, although unfortunately none of them indicated how they had been made aware of it. Of those who were aware of the term prior to enrolment (24/96), all but one indicated that their understanding/view of the term had changed over the academic year. However, in the cases where these sport students chose to indicate how or why their views had changed, their comments related specifically to their experience studying

Manchester Metropolitan University's satellite campus in Cheshire, as opposed to any alterations indicating a closer alignment with the prevailing 'student experience' discourse within the mainstream UK Higher Education sector:

Not as good as I had hoped – especially in Crewe. (BSc SES student)

Lessons are similar to what I expected, but not out of lesson that's when being here at university is disappointing. (BSc CSD student)

Completely dependent on your friends and the environment. (BSc PESP student)

Living in Crewe compared to a big university city/town has taken away some of the expected experience. (BSc SES student)

This possibly indicates an element of stability in the dominant pre-enrolled discourse surrounding the term 'student experience', as a construction based predominantly on students' expectations of their lifestyle and lived experiences, outside the formal university provision of teaching and other services.

## SUMMARY

Despite increasing participation rates and great student diversity, to date there has been little research, outside of the large-scale performative research undertaken by the government and its subsidiary departments (e.g. the NSS), to establish the concept of a university 'student experience', leaving educators still asking the question 'what counts as normal within the student experience?' (Lewis, 2018:27). This is despite enhancing 'student experience' being considered a valuable institutional undertaking, as a result of alterations in the social, economic and political landscape surrounding university enrolment (Buultjens and Robinson, 2011; Douglas et al., 2015; Shah and Richardson, 2016; Universities UK, 2019). As a consequence, the data from this research advocates the need for caution when using the multifaceted term 'student experience' within student-facing documentation, as without a clear explanation of its context, there may be misperception between audiences.

Having established the relatively limited awareness of the term 'student experience' prior to university enrolment, and the social constructions of a university 'student experience' held by sports students, the next section will focus on their constructions of the value and purpose of a university education.

## 5.2 WHY UNIVERSITY?

This section aims to move beyond the sport students' initial thoughts regarding a university 'student experience', as discussed in the first theme, in order to explore some of the social constructions underpinning their decision to study at university.

As discussed within the Literature Review, education is considered fundamental to social and economic development, and the foundation for altering the traditional social stratifications based on class structures in which socio-economic origins determine life chances (Tight, 2009). In post-war UK, education became the favoured pathway for social mobility, through the Education Acts of 1944 (HM Government, 1944) and 1962 (HM Government, 1962), Robbins report (1963), and successive government endorsements, all of which repeatedly testify to Higher Education's capacity to positively influence social change (Department for Education, 2010:4; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014:5).

Consequently, the Higher Education sector has experienced a shift in students' motivations to study, with increased emphasis on future graduate employment objectives (London, 1992; Brinkworth et al., 2013). This observation is echoed within the preliminary questionnaire data, where 63 (68%) of the newly enrolled undergraduate sport students indicated their principal reason for university study was either: (i) degree required for career, (ii) increase future employment, or (iii) increase earning potential (for all percentage responses see Table 13). This viewpoint is consistent with the current neoliberal climate, and the government's promotion of Higher Education as a conduit for personal fiscal gains.

Table 13: Programme responses to question 5 on the preliminary questionnaire: What is your main reason for coming to university (please tick one option)? Data is reported as: number of responses (percentage).

		CSD	PESP	SES	TOTAL
<b>Reasons</b>	To stay within education	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)	4 (4%)
	To gain more knowledge	10 (37%)	5 (28%)	12 (24%)	26 (28%)
	Degree required for career	9 (33%)	11 (61%)	17 (35%)	37 (40%)
	Increase Future Employment	7 (26%)	1 (6%)	16 (33%)	24 (26%)
	Increase earning potential	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	1 (%)	2 (2%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>93</b>

There was however a noteworthy variance in degree required for career response rates at programme level (refer to the third data row in Table 13), where the programme most closely aligned to an established graduate career pathway (the BSc Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy (PESP) programme is closely aligned to a PE teaching career), had a higher response for degree required for career (61%), when compared with the more contemporary career areas in sport: sport science (35%) and sports coaching (33%). Although intriguingly, whilst the majority of the PESP students cited: ‘a degree is required for my chosen career’, none of them indicated a purpose aligned with: ‘career development or enhance skills’ in answer to question 6 (What do you hope to gain from your university experience?), indicating instead that ‘increased knowledge’ in the area was their key expectation.



Figure 11: Word-cloud generated by Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus (Pro Word Cloud add-in) illustrating the themes generated in response to question 6 on the preliminary questionnaire: What do you hope to gain from your university experience? Refer to Appendix 7.4 (page 141) for the raw data use to construct this image.

Further supporting this observation, analysis of the free-text comments allied to question 6 (What do you hope to gain from your university experience?), also constructed a ‘career development’ narrative regarding the purpose of Higher Education engagement. Unsurprisingly (having just enrolled onto a university course that morning), the free text comments associated with this question indicated a collective purpose to university engagement: increase **knowledge**;

**career** development; and gain the **qualification**, alongside two popular other themes: gain **experience** in subject area; and make new **friendships**, thus reinforcing the previous observation, that some sport students enter university with a more nuanced understanding of the opportunity to accrue different forms of *capital*. More personal constructions surrounding the purpose of a university education were acknowledged less frequently, including: ‘more **independence**’, ‘it will be an enjoyable **challenge**’, ‘increase my **salary** potential’, ‘create good **memories**’ and ‘build my **confidence**’. The prominence of these themes has been illustrated using a word-cloud (Figure 11) constructed from the key theme words (bolded above) within the sport students’ free text comments.

Supporting this analysis, and reports within the literature (London, 1992; Brinkworth et al., 2013), these sport students provided accounts that construct a narrative of Higher Education engagement for the purpose of future employment. Indeed, in support of the questionnaire data, the career related purpose to university study appears throughout the interview data, as sport students articulate a clear association between their university studies and their future employment prospects:

...But I don’t know, it’s just to get a qualification isn’t it, to **help my career**. I knew that if I wanted the **highest level of jobs** and to have the best chance of doing well and succeeding, that having a degree would put you in the best chance of doing that [emphasis added] (Harry).

As sport science student Neil puts it: ‘I don’t think you can get many good jobs without a degree’; a view supported by mature sport science student Keith, who refers to social stratification through the conventional class-based system and his understanding of the UK’s altered employment landscape, where traditionally non-graduate occupations now regard the *cultural [institutionalised] capital* of a degree as the benchmark qualification:

And I think now, if you want anything – it’s not even a middle-class job – if you want an upper working-class job you’ve got to have a degree. (Keith)

This is an interesting acknowledgement worthy of further consideration, within the context of a student-funded (through accumulative future debt), marketised and government-promoted Higher Education system, especially for the student cohort participating in this research, who select to study the non-traditional graduate subject of sport. Their entry into the graduate employment market may not be straightforward, given the significant mismatch between the considerable growth

in sports degree provision across the Higher Education sector, and the relatively limited graduate career opportunities in sport (previously noted in section 2.4), as the UK's overcrowded graduate labour market fails to keep pace with the ever-increasing graduate numbers (Brown, 2003; Chevalier and Lindley, 2007; Robertson et al., 2011; Tomlinson, 2012; Weale, 2019).

In order to counteract the challenges of this congested graduate job market, students are now routinely counselled that a degree is not enough. They must amass different forms of *cultural* (e.g. in the embodied state, through confident communication skills), *economic* (e.g. work experience) and *social* (e.g. making new friends thereby creating new social networks) *capital* during their time at university, to ensure their favourable entry position within the employment *field* (Tomlinson, 2008; Clarke, 2018); an inescapable message, according to sport science student Neil:

...university have a strong feeling on that, developing you that way to be employable when you leave here. Tutors are always telling us we need more and to get experience, experience, experience. **I don't think you can miss that message...** (emphasis added) (Neil)

The demands of the marketised university system, with its overabundance of national league tables for various attributes (including: student progression and attainment data and graduate employment indicators published through the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, and the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data) means institutions are now obliged to look beyond their traditional educational role, as an education provider, towards one focused beyond their students' graduation, to their entry in the competitive graduate employment market. Indeed, a University's national standing within the Higher Education market now necessitates metric success in both their students' academic success (monitored through key *cultural [institutionalised] capital* metrics including progression, attainment, and good-honours rates and/or probability of good honours) and their advantageous entry position into post-graduation employment (achieved through the opportunity to accrue valuable employability skills via work experience, internships, and/or volunteer work). As a result, universities encouraged students to think beyond their degree, by participating in the extra-curricular experience opportunities, illustrated on Manchester Metropolitan University's current Careers and Employability webpage:

In today's competitive graduate job market, you will need to be able to demonstrate that you have developed the key skills that employers are looking for. You can develop your employability skills through:

**Your course:** your degree offers the opportunity for you to gain both practical skills in relation to your chosen subject, as well as transferable skills such as teamwork, leadership, and communication skills.

**Work experience:** work experience includes part-time jobs, summer placements, work shadowing and internships.

[emphasis in original] (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019c)

All of which needs to be accomplished, with less state financial support (meaning many students are required to work in order to fund their university studies) and a personal commitment to accumulate on average £36,000 worth of debt through tuition fees and living expenses (House of Commons Library, 2019). The pervasive, neoliberal, university-to-employment narrative encourages students to view these things as 'a price worth paying'. However, as discussed previously in the Literature Review (section 2.4), for the sport students participating in this case study, the state funded endorsement of university engagement as a gateway to economic betterment, is unsubstantiated when the statistical data behind the eye-catching propaganda are scrutinised.

Drawing this second theme to a close, it feels essential to also acknowledge the weighty marketing information available to prospective university students, as the data and narratives presented within these materials may not only influence the here and now with regard to a student's chosen geographical institution, but also their pre-enrolment notions regarding of the value and purpose of their Higher Education engagement. As a result, this section will also consider the resources sport students draw upon when making the decision to study at university, before moving onto the next theme.

Contemporary marketisation of the UK's Higher Education sector has intensified institutional responsiveness to stakeholders, through a greater focus on consumer satisfaction (Richardson et al., 2007; Ingleby, 2015; Burgess et al., 2018). In doing so, institutional rivalry has intensified (i.e. vying for an advantageous position within published league tables) as undergraduate provision is publicly scrutinised through a wealth of internal and external devices, by ever more proactive prospective students and their parents (Moogan et al., 1999; Moogan and Baron, 2003; Simões and Soares, 2010; Burgess et al., 2018).

From traditional resources such as secondary-school teachers, careers offices and printed university prospectuses, to the abundance of online material, prospective university students now have a wealth of information available to them, in order to make an ‘informed’ university decision. According to Which?University (2016) and The Complete University Guide (2020), when selecting which degree programmes to consider, prospective students and their family members take into account: (i) programme content, (ii) overall academic reputation, (iii) graduate employment rates, (iv) quality of academic facilities, and (v) links between the university and employers, as important factors when making their university choices. However, alongside the conventional provision-focused online resources (e.g. university websites, downloadable prospectuses and the HE application website: UCAS), prospective students can also pore over an abundance of online ranking resources, including: UNISTATS and comparison rankings such as: the Complete UK University Guide, the Times Higher Education University Guide, the Guardian University Guide, the Telegraph University Guide, Which? University Guide, as well as the annual student exit survey the National Student [Experience] Survey.

Identifying which of these resources the participating sport students drew upon, when making the decision to study at Manchester Metropolitan University, was accomplished using the raw data obtained from the preliminary questionnaire. Initial examination of the tally data indicated that on average prospective sport students referred to 2-3 resources when considering which university degree to enrol upon (Table 14 provides specific details of the resources used of by these newly enrolled sports students). Not unexpectedly, the most popular source of information was the university’s own websites (for these participating sport students this would have been the website: <http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/cheshire>). Interestingly the students enrolled on the sport science degree appear to make more use of data/metric comparison websites than their sports coaching and physical education peers, whereas the students enrolled on the more vocational programmes (sports coaching and physical education) appear to utilise previously established *social capital* (i.e. their previously established social networks), through recommendations from: teachers, current students and past graduates, more than the sport science students. As whilst rates for recommendations by teachers and past graduates were relatively high for all



three cohorts, just under half of the coaching students (13/27 students) utilised recommendations from current Manchester Metropolitan University students, in comparison with just 3 (17%) of the physical education students and 7 (15%) of the sport science students.

Table 14: Responses to question 11 on the preliminary questionnaire: When considering which university to go to, did you make use of any of the following (tick all that apply to you)?

		CSD	PESP	SES
<b>Reasons</b>	MMU websites	20	13	32
	UNISTATS comparison website	7	4	29
	The Complete University Guide	0	1	21
	Guardian/Telegraph Guides	1	1	2
	National Student Survey data	1	0	3
	Which? University Guide	0	0	2
	School/college Careers Office	10	5	17
	Recommendation - teachers	10	6	16
	Recommendation - current students	13	3	7
	Recommendation - past graduates	6	3	7
	Other	UCAS Parents	Word of mouth	UCAS Local travel details
<b>Total number who responded to question 11</b>		<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>49</b>

Possibly revealing subtle ‘subject group’ distinctions between those more orientated towards vocational sport disciplines (i.e. sports coaching and physical education students) and those aligned within the sciences (i.e. sport science students), in an manner analogous to the ‘social class’ distinctions detected by Bathmaker and colleagues (2013).

## SUMMARY

This section focused on why sport students elect to enter Higher Education (as opposed to, for example, entering the employment following completion of their compulsory education). In doing so, it explored some of the social constructions underpinning sport students’ decision to engage with a university education. In

accordance with post-war policy regarding education as the favoured pathway for social and fiscal betterment (Tight, 2009), the narratives captured within this case study construct a clear purpose for engagement with Higher Education around post-graduation employment and discourses of fiscal betterment. Whilst more personal constructions concerning the value of a university education (i.e. developing independence, building confidence, forming new friendships) were less frequently acknowledged by undergraduate sport students. In addition, examining the participating sport students' use of online marketing tools upheld the notion of a marketised UK Higher Education sector and the importance of national metrics and comparison websites. However, despite significant growth in online marketing tools, the data within this case study draws attention to the substantial impact of recommendations drawn from the sport student's personal pre-enrolment networks (i.e. through their pre-enrolment social network).

Having examined sport students' constructions surrounding the value and purpose of Higher Education, and the marketplace tools available to support their decision to enrol at university, this Findings chapter will now focus on the third theme identified during the thematic analysis: Tuition Fees.

## 5.3 TUITION FEES

As outlined earlier in this thesis, the UK's Higher Education sector has endured a number of substantial fiscal policy alterations, shifting it from an arrangement entirely financed by the taxpayer to one where graduates themselves contribute significantly to the cost of their education (see Table 2, pages 14-18 for historic details of changes up to and including the current loan and repayment scheme). At the time of writing, undergraduates, including the participants in this case study, accumulate personal debt through deferred tuition fees (HM Government, 2004), currently capped at up to £9,250 per year, making England 'one of the costliest places to attend university in the world' (Jones, 2016:277).

Arguments supporting university tuition fees are grounded in human capital theory (Becker, 1993), and the notion of 'a graduate premium' (Chowdry et al., 2010; Jackson, 2018), where the prevailing employment narrative encourages

prospective university students to weigh up the cost-benefit of the self-investment, in order to enhance their future employability and earning capacity:

Graduating with debts of £39,000 sounds daunting, but it may still be **a price worth paying**. On average, graduates earn £12,000 a year more than those without a degree, according to the Office for National Statistics [emphasis added] (Jones, 2013:unpaginated).

Indeed, in agreement with the literature, the sport students' accounts within this case study also indicated a robust employment-investment narrative (O'Loughlin and Szmigin, 2006; Tholen, 2015; Hall et al., 2018), through their acceptance of the need to accumulate (future) debt in order to advance their career prospects through university engagement (illustrated in Figure 12 below).

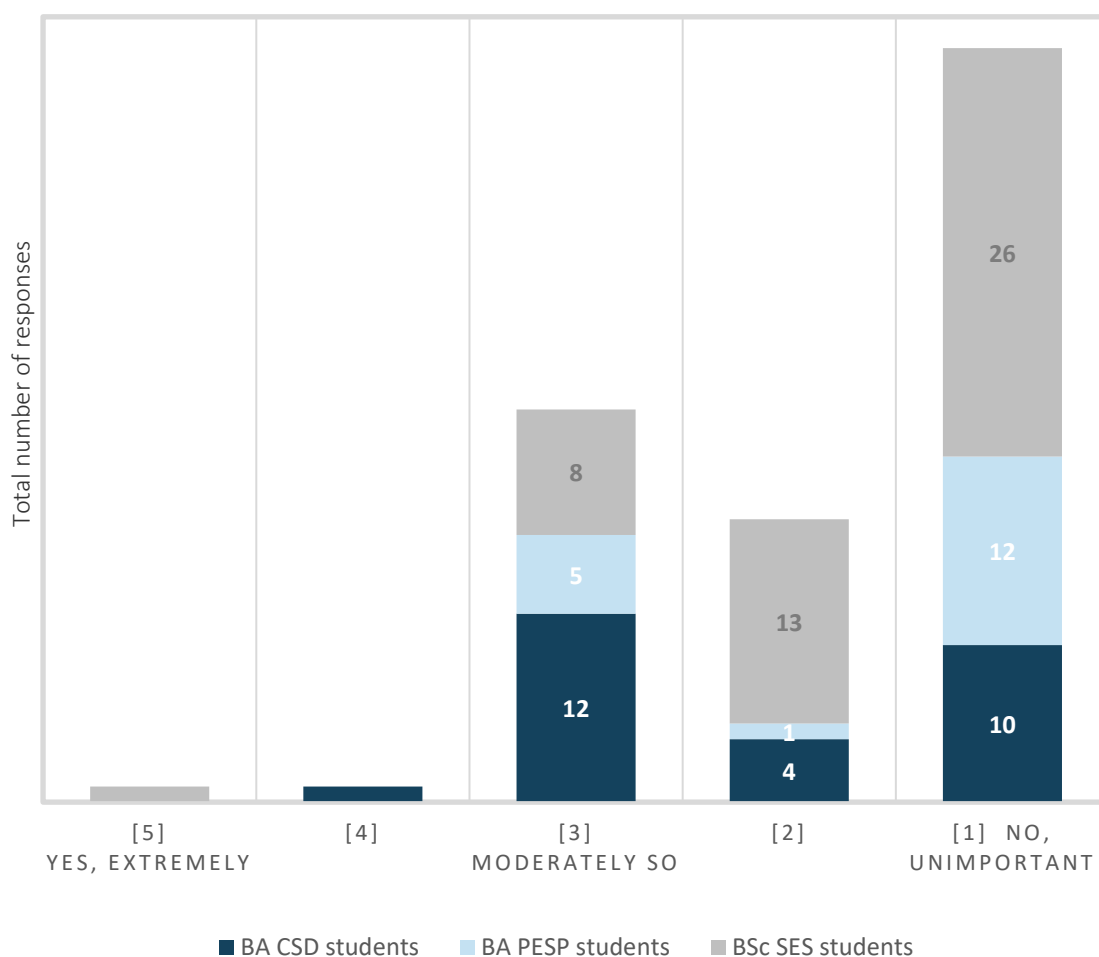


Figure 12: A stacked bar chart illustrating the 5-point attitudinal scale responses to question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire: Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university? Data coded accordingly: no, unimportant = 1; no = 2; moderately so = 3; yes = 4; yes, extremely = 5.

Certainly, despite university tuition fees remaining a dominant topic for public debate (Wakefield, 2015) and mounting evidence regarding the effects of accumulating debt on a young person's decision to remain within education

(Connor et al., 2001; Callender, 2003; Archer et al., 2005; Callender and Jackson, 2005; Voigt, 2007; Yorke and Longden, 2008; Bachan, 2014; Douglas et al., 2015; Jones, 2016), when asked to indicate how paying university tuition fees influenced their decision to go to university, the majority (52%) of 93 sport students surveyed through the preliminary questionnaire indicated that paying tuition fees was unimportant [1] when deciding to continue their studies. Moreover, in contrast to the reported belief that the cost of university tuition fees and the ensuing future debt may deter participation: '[t]he overriding negative perception of going to university, for all of the potential entrants, was its cost' (Connor et al., 2001:19), the preliminary questionnaire data (illustrated in the Figure 12 stacked bar-chart) revealed that only 2 of the 93 participating sport students indicated that tuition fees were more than a moderate [4-5] influence on their decision to study at university, and notably both these sport students were mature students, who had worked prior to university (indicated in free text comments):

I took time out to earn money before coming - don't want massive debts (BSc SES student, age 21-25)

Giving up working to be here means I take the costs very seriously (BSc SES student, age 26-35).

It is however important to acknowledge that the participants in this case study were newly enrolled university sport students and therefore they have, by the nature of their formal enrolment earlier that day, already indicated a belief that the tuition fee debt is worth the educational benefits.

That said, the data collated within this case study supports the observations of Maringe and colleagues (2009) who found little evidence to corroborate the conventional notion that tuition fee debt deterred university participation, in young people approaching the end of their A-Level studies. And whilst previous studies also warned that the social-class issue of debt aversion (Callender and Jackson, 2005:529) may deter students from lower-class backgrounds (Marriott, 2007:500; Voigt, 2007:95), the relatively high proportion of First in Family sport students (65% of the sport students surveyed in the preliminary questionnaire), indicative of lower socio-economic status (Maslen, 2014; University of Edinburgh, 2016; University of Sussex, 2016), suggests that this may not be the case for students studying sport at university. Supporting this observation, the Fisher Freeman Halton Test applied to the data obtained from question 7 on the preliminary

questionnaire (Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university? Data coded accordingly: no, unimportant = 1; no = 2; moderately so = 3; yes = 4; yes, extremely = 5) yielded a value of the test statistic of 3.007, and a p-value of 0.610 suggesting no link between attitude towards tuition fee and First in Family status (a potential indicator of socio-economic status within this surveyed population). Table 15 below presents the sports students' 5-point attitudinal scale responses to question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire for these two student groupings (FiF and HE-I).

Table 15: A crosstabulation of the 5-point attitudinal scale responses to question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire: Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university? Data coded accordingly: no, unimportant = 1; no = 2; moderately so = 3; yes = 4; yes, extremely = 5. Percentage data provided for each group (HE-I and FiF) and for all sport students.

		Influence of university tuition fees					
		no	Moderately-no	Moderately-so	Moderately-yes	Extremely	Total
FiF	HE-I	17 (49%)	8 (23%)	9 (26%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	35 (100%)
	FiF	31 (53%)	9 (16%)	17 (29%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	58 (100%)
Total		48 (52%)	17 (18%)	26 (28%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	93(100%)

These findings suggest that the sports students attitudes are broadly aligned with findings from other studies, indicating that in line with the growing indebtedness reported within the greater UK society (Langley et al., 2019), there appears to be a 'tolerance and normalisation of higher student debt levels' in Irish and UK undergraduate students (O'Loughlin and Szmigin, 2006:340). Indeed, analysis of the free-text comments for question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire (Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university?) indicated a similar buy now, pay later attitude to the first year students surveyed by O'Loughlin and Szmigin (2006):

Future debt doesn't worry me [BSc CSD student]

I'm not worried about paying the money back [BSc PESP student]

I have a lifetime to pay it back [BSc SES student]

This nonchalant outlook towards student tuition fees was also observed within the interview data, where accounts from eight of the eleven sport students interviewed (73%), indicated an unconcerned attitude towards university tuition

fees, predominantly as a result of their constructions related to the UK's current deferred repayment scheme.

No, I don't really think about I'm paying it, because you don't really see that money, so it's not like I have to go and give them the money, or online banking, I have to send to the university. I don't see that money, so I don't really think about it at all, to be honest. It's not really a worry. I know people were, like, oh, this lecture cost me £40, what have I learnt? But I don't think about it, to be honest. I'm not really bothered about the money. (Mark)

I don't pay it. I don't see the money side of it at all. Like, my parents deal with the finances, the loans and stuff. I literally don't even see it. So, I don't know much about that side. (Linda)

Even the accounts from Ben and Harry, the only two male sport students to openly acknowledge the influence of tuition fees on their decision to enrol at university, indicate a level of indifference as a result of their understanding of the financial dimensions of university study:

I don't really mind the paying thing because you only pay it back if you're earning over a certain amount of money. And the chances are you won't even finish the payment because after 30 years it gets abolished, doesn't it? ...so, I'm not bothered. It's not as if you're paying all this money and then they're just going to ask for it all at once at a later date, it will just come out in small payments. I'm not bothered. (Ben)

It's a lot of money to be paying but obviously you don't have to pay back masses of it in one go. Its only small amounts. As long as you can manage that and keep on top of it, and not have to worry about anything else financially, then I don't think it would be as much of an issue as some people think. (Harry)

In agreement with Maringe and colleagues' (2009) case study on prospective university students, the majority of sport students interviewed within this case study (8/11), indicated little concern regarding their future debt accumulation through university tuition fees and living cost loans. For example, for sport science student Bryan the discourse of not directly paying the tuition fees appears to influence his perception of them:

No, I don't really think about I'm paying it, because you don't really see that money, so it's not like I have to go and give them the money or pay online banking. I don't see the money, so I don't really think about it at all to be honest. It's not really a worry (Bryan)

As for sport science student Neil, his indifference appears to emanate from his assessment that the deferred tuition fee debt he is accruing is: 'not like a normal debt, it's not like they can just show up and take your car away or something'.

Accounts from physical education student Mark, and his sport science peer Keith, also construct a narrative of indifference towards tuition fees, however their apathy appears to arise from a belief that the debt would not be paid back unless they had acquired sufficient financial benefits through enhanced future earnings:

...you get told in college that you don't pay it back unless you're earning over twenty-one grand a year, its only £9 a month you pay back...you won't pay twenty-seven grand for a course that you're not going to get a job after. (Mark)

I know the chances of me paying back my loan in full are slim to none, depending on what job I get...I'm not going to complain if I can afford to pay all my student loans back because it means that I'm going to earn a fairly decent wage. So yeah, I don't mind. (Keith)

Reflecting upon the sport students' overall indifference towards their future indebtedness, it is important to acknowledge that this pervasive narrative may be reflective of the gender bias<sup>27</sup> within the cohort, as the case study data suggests greater financial complacency (Scott et al., 2001; Kettley et al., 2008) and risk-taking (Callender, 2003; Bachan, 2014) in the male sport students. Certainly, all the female sport students interviewed indicated some level of concern when asked whether the tuition fees shaped their decision to enrol at university:

Yeah, definitely. I'm a bit of a stresser. It stressed me at first. (Heidi)

Yeah, my dad was kind of... He was really kind of worried about it. (Molly)

For coaching student Linda, this significant financial concern ultimately influenced her institutional selection process:

I wanted to go to the proper Manchester one and stay, but I didn't like the thought of paying all that extra for the course, when the same course was here, only around the corner... (Linda)

Linda decided to stay at home and commute to the Cheshire-based satellite campus of Manchester Metropolitan University, rather than move away from home to enrol on a degree programme at the University of Manchester.

Quantitative analysis of the programme specific data exposed discreet variations between the three undergraduate sports programme cohorts, as university tuition fees were self-reported to have had a greater impact on coaching students, like Linda, (BSc Coaching and Sports Development), in comparison with the physical education (BSc Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy) and sport science (BSc Sport and Exercise Science) students.

As the sport students' 5-point attitudinal data, obtained through question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire (Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university? Data coded accordingly: no, unimportant = 1; no =

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<sup>27</sup> The male/female gender balance of students across the three sports courses is 102/31. Within the preliminary questionnaire sample the male/female gender balance was 68/25 and within the interviews it was 8/3.

2; moderately so = 3; yes = 4; yes, extremely = 5) was ordinal in nature, parametric tests could not be used to compare the responses between the three programme cohorts. Instead, numerical measures of central tendency and variability were obtained using the median response and interquartile range. A Kruskal Wallis test was carried out to compare responses across groups using a significance level of  $\alpha = 5\%$ . In addition, a boxplot (Figure 13 below) was generated to reflect the summary values and overall distribution of scores.

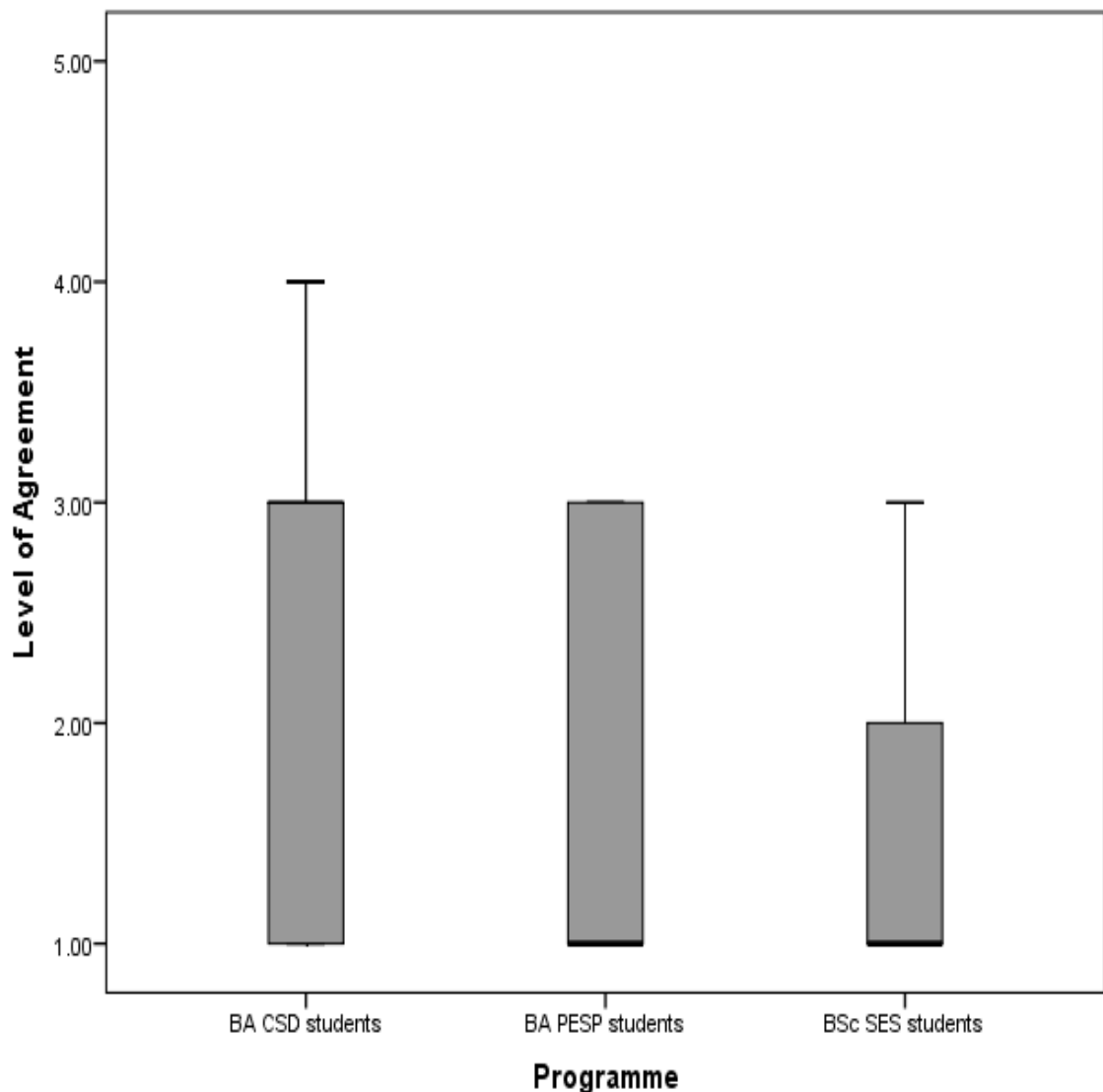


Figure 13 A boxplot of the 5-point attitudinal scale responses to question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire: Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university? Data coded: no, unimportant = 1; no = 2; moderately so = 3; yes = 4; yes, extremely = 5, for the three undergraduate programmes, illustrating less variability in the SES programme. (Notes interpretation of this boxplot: the thicker black lines indicate the medians, whilst the length of the boxes reflect the data's inter-quartile range, and the 'T' tails indicate the maximums and minimums).

Statistical analysis yielded a borderline significant value ( $p=0.052$ ), whilst raw bar-graph data (presented previously in Figure 12, on page 101), alongside



measures of central tendency (median) and the interquartile range (refer to Table 31, in Appendix 7.11 for the data outputs) suggest notable variability between the three degree cohorts in the form of: a greater tendency towards debt concern in the coaching (BA CSD) cohort, and less variability in the concern of sport science (BSc SES) students.

As a snapshot, this variability supports the notion of a 'complex web of inter-related factors' guiding the financial investment in post-compulsory education (Jones, 2016:277). For example: the CSD students' moderate financial concern may be due to constructions associated with the 'graduate-ness' of their prospective career destination. For example: unlike careers in PE teaching and sport science, the National Careers Service (2017) and UCAS (2019c) guidance, does not consider a degree essential for a sports coaching position, supporting the perspective that university tuition fees mandate 'a recalculation of the return-on-investment estimates' (Jones, 2016:277). Indeed, Linda (the only coaching student interviewed), appears to question the cost-benefit of a university degree:

Everyone says, like, **you'll get a good job if you finish uni but it's not always true** is it, because if you start in a job and you've been in it for five years, you've known it longer than someone coming into it straightaway from university. **Even if they've got the qualifications, it doesn't mean they'll get the job.** [emphasis added] (Linda)

Linda's narrative indicates a questioning of the dominant discourse that a university degree will provide her with an advantage in gaining employment over other non-graduate applicants. She appears cynical of this viewpoint, questioning specifically which forms of *capital* are most likely to give her an advantage when seeking employment (i.e. an advantageous position within the competitive employment *field*), and more specifically whether experience in the workplace may surpass the value of the degree qualification alone. What is however unclear from this account, is the nature of meaning-making underpinning this skepticism. For instance: as a commuting university student still in regular contact with longstanding friends from home (who have not gone to university), has Linda's university 'student experience' left her questioning the value of attending university, as she watches her friends accrue differing forms of *capital* through their employment experience (whilst she remains in education), or has Linda's first year experience of university resulted in a questioning of the assumed merits of the university engagement itself (as a route towards an advantageous position within the employment *field*)? Indeed, when assessing the cost-benefit of a

university education several sport students appear to have constructed a narrative associating the financial outlay of a university education, with personal reimbursement through enhanced career opportunities and/or higher salaries.

This quid pro quo assessment was explored by Archer and colleagues (2005:119) and Voigt (2007:105), both of whom asserted that Higher Education may not be a reliable investment for non-traditional students. As sport science student Neil articulates: 'I don't want to pay all that money and then not have a career at the end', signifying a shift from the traditional social constructions associated with a university education, towards a series of contemporary constructions built upon notions of fiscal self-investment and economic gain. Indeed, despite the fact that quantitative analysis of the preliminary questionnaire data offered an account of fiscal indifference towards university tuition fees, thematic analysis of the individual interview data offered a more nuanced data set, revising this nonchalant worldview to some extent, as several accounts construct a personal investment narrative.

The notion of tuition fees as a form of 'personal investment' was echoed within the individual interviews, as sport students referred to the paying of tuition fees as a form of investment in themselves and their future. For some their future referred to the previously discussed, more traditional notions of a university education, including personal growth and life-experiences (e.g. moving away from home and developing their independence), whilst for others the association was clearly constructed through an employment narrative, grounded in an awareness of the importance of accumulating *cultural [institutionalised] capital* (i.e. a degree) in order to position themselves well within their chosen employment *field*. For example, accounts from sport science students Harry and Neil construct a personal investment narrative, clearly associating the financial outlay of university tuition fees with their future employment potential:

Because if you do uni and after that you're guaranteed a place to work, then probably the money is worth it...I did uni, you have to hire me because I paid this money. (Harry).

I don't want to pay all this money and then not have a career. (Neil)

However, the narratives offered by Mark and Garry indicate a focus towards their prospective earnings, as their accounts construct a narrative linking the

acceptance of university tuition fees with the subsequent potential to acquire financial benefits through enhanced earning potential:

I think its value for money because the money you'll potentially be earning after your degree. Because a degree...you're higher up, then you're going to earn more as a wage and salary. (Mark)

And so, with the £9,000 it's a necessary evil, you spend money to make money, that's what they say. (Garry)

Focusing briefly on Garry's perspective above, it is worth acknowledging that the UK's current tuition fee system is not an upfront payment system (as it was between 1998 and 2003, when students were required to pay £1,000 towards their tuition fees at the start of the academic year) and therefore he is not in fact 'spend[ing] money to make money', but accumulating debt in the hope of earning more in the future as a university graduate.

Before summarising this section and moving onto the last of the four emergent themes, I wish to briefly explore the sport students' self-reported constructions connecting the payment of tuition fees with a heightened desire to succeed at university per se, as a number of questionnaire and interview participants provided narratives constructing a motivational function for tuition fee payment.

The preliminary questionnaire data revealed a motivational narrative to the payment of university tuition fees, with 18 of the 93 (19%) respondents indicating that that payment of tuition fees would impact on their impetus to study at university. Of the 18 sport students acknowledging this fiscal stimulus towards scholarship, 12 indicated that paying tuition fees would: 'make me try harder' (10 sport science students and 2 sports coaching students) and whilst a physical education student directly linked the cost of university engagement with his work ethic: 'push me to work harder knowing how much it costs' and a sport science student associated the cost with both an increase in both her work ethic and grade outcome: 'it will make me work harder to get the high grades I want', the remaining 4 sport science students narrated a more cost-outcome outlook on the effect of tuition fees: 'If I don't get a degree, I've wasted my money'. However, interestingly these cost-based motivational constructions may not always translate into a heightened impetus to study. For example: despite articulating a narrative constructing tuition fees as a motivation to study during his individual interview:

I don't mind paying the money but just because of laziness or not pushing myself, it would be stupid not to do well (Ben).

Sport science student Ben's pre-university embodied dispositions (*habitus*) towards studying: 'I hardly did any work at home or at college because I just didn't want to', does not appear to have altered, despite his feelings towards the stupidity of not succeeding at university through 'laziness':

I've not been a full-time student if you know what I mean? ...so you go to everything and then you've got a lot of time off to do uni work. But I just missed that part out, the work bit... (Ben)

Nevertheless, Ben appears able to reflect on his meagre work ethic at university: 'if this was a job, I probably would have been fired or something', possibly indicating contrasting understandings and/or misconceptions regarding the work ethic required to participate 'full-time' as a university student or as an employee (within the competitive *field* of work).

Intriguingly, two sport students' accounts indicated that the constructed link between the payment of tuition fees and motivation to study could be used as some form of selection process for university participation. For Mark, the transactional relationship between paying tuition fees and going to university is a valued one, as it necessitates a clear goal or purpose for participation in a university education:

...if it was free, then maybe people would be just, like, oh I don't know what to do at the moment, I'll just go to university because it's free. So it might be a selection policy that way if they make sure people actually know what they want to do, or at least have an idea what they want to do, instead of just going, oh, it's just there, let's go and see what happens, sort of thing. So I think, I don't know, they [tuition fees] might be a good thing because then maybe like select people that come in. Because it costs so much money, people want to make sure they want to go to university before they come... (Mark)

Whilst a more authoritarian account was articulated by sport science student, Molly, whose experiences at college appear to have encouraged a fiscal-based desire to regulate exactly who should and should not be able to access Higher Education:

But I think it's a fair compromise to pay to come. And it stops, like, everyone and anyone getting in, and all that. From college when everyone could get in and there was like, some that didn't actually want to be there that were just messing around, just because they didn't want a job. (Molly)

Despite, broadly similar fiscal constructions to many of their peers (with regard to a conceivable motivational facet of paying tuition fees), these two sport students

re-count the construction from a different perspective, advocating the notion of tuition fees as a monetary deterrent, in order to 'stop all that coming through to university, it's just for the people that want to be here' (Molly). Only those students able to demonstrate their appreciation for **the value** university engagement (though appropriate classroom behaviour, attendance, etc.) would be willing to pay for the opportunity to attend university.

## SUMMARY

Whilst sport students' constructions relating to the payment of university tuition fees and the deferred repayment, did not appreciably influence the decision to go to university, the variable nature of the sport students' constructions (including those allied to personal investment, and/or the cost-benefit calculations broad associated the with graduate premium discourse) support the concept of a 'complex web of inter-related factors' that guide financial investment in post-compulsory education (Jones, 2016:277). For example, whilst both the quantitative and qualitative data analysis indicated an indifference towards the accumulation of future debt through tuition fees, non-parametric statistical analysis draws attention to subtle variability in debt concern between the three degree programme cohorts, with a greater tendency towards debt concern reported within the coaching students. Possibly as a result of employment constructions associated with the 'graduate-ness' of their prospective career destination as coaching students calculate the 'return-on-investment' associated with university engagement (Jones, 2016:277).

Having explored the impact of tuition fees on sport students' decision to study at university, the final section of this Findings chapter will focus on a different influence on constructions associated with university participation: family educational histories.

## 5.4 FAMILIAL INFLUENCES

This fourth section focuses on the final emergent theme and RQ3: Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students' constructions regarding

the value and purpose of university? In doing so it draws upon the participants' narratives in order to form an insight into the constructions of sport students whose family educational histories do not include Higher Education study. Opening with a very brief reminder of Bourdieu's *thinking tools* and interplay between *habitus*, *capital*, *field*, and *practice*, this fourth section is then further divided into two subsections. The first subsection draws upon the case study data in order to provide an insight into the social constructions underpinning university enrolment for First in Family sport students (i.e. those whose immediate family members have not attended a university or obtained a degree), whilst the second subsection considers the impact of a year at university on the sport students themselves.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Bourdieu's *theory of practice* (1977) offers the concepts of *field*, *capital*, *habitus*, and *practice* as analytical tools to enlighten our understanding of the interactions between the individual, collective and society. Drawing upon the data obtained through thematic analysis of the interview scripts, Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Wacquant, 1989:50) form a framework through which the qualitative and quantitative data may be interlaced in order to better understand the sport students' constructions concerning the value and purpose of Higher Education. According to Bourdieu (1986), *capital* is not distributed equally across the different social *fields*. Consequently, the first year sport students participating in this case study entered university with differing unconscious and embodied dispositions (*habitus*) and variable quantities of forms of *capital* allied to future academic success at university, some of which may originate from their family's post-compulsory educational history. According to Abrahams and Ingram (2013) universities are situated within relatively high social *fields*, and therefore those students who originate from comparably positioned *fields* (potentially as a result of graduate parents) are more likely to possess *habitus* and *capital* attuned to the university *field*, through primary socialisation.

## 5.4.1 FIRST IN FAMILY (FIF) INFLUENCES

Despite growth in university participation, the government remains concerned about enrolment and success rates amongst certain underrepresented socio-economic groups. As discussed in the Literature Review, one such group is the

First in Family<sup>28</sup> (FiF) students, whose family members (i.e. parents and/or siblings) have not attended Higher Education and/or obtained a university degree.

Identifying this student group within the UK Higher Education system can be notoriously difficult as university admissions data frequently defaults to traditional socio-economic demographics (i.e. centred on race, ethnicity and, family economic status). To further complicate this taxonomy, a number of definitions exist globally within the literature, as some authors consider parental status only (Billson and Terry, 1982; Ishitani, 2006; Engle, 2007; Grayson, 2011; Spiegler and Bednarek, 2013; Center for Student Opportunity, 2014), whilst others consider the education level of all immediate family members, including: parents and siblings (Luzecy et al., 2017; O'Shea et al., 2017; O'Shea et al., 2018).

Because of the similarities between the UK and Australian Higher Education systems, and the extensive research undertaken by O'Shea and colleagues, their concise definition of a 'First in Family' student was adopted for this case study:

[A] first-in-family student is defined as no one in the immediate family of origin, including siblings or parents, having previously attended a higher education institution or having completed a university degree. (O'Shea, 2015b:vii)

The application of this definition gave rise to the following sport student classifications: 58 of the 93 (62%) preliminary questionnaire respondents, and 5 of the 11 (45%) interviewees were classified as First in Family (FiF) sport students whilst, the remainder, whose familial educational portfolio included Higher Education (at the siblings and/or parent level), were classed as: Higher Education – Informed (HE-I) sport students. For a more detailed breakdown of this classification data, please refer to Table 23 and Table 24 in Appendix 7.10 for more information concerning the participant particulars, and Figure 16 and Figure 17 in Appendix 7.13 for cohort specific attainment data.

Significantly from the perspective of this case study, whilst First in Family students are now recognised as non-traditional university students, current literature indicates that social constructions concerning the value and purpose of university are influenced by prior family engagement with post-compulsory education (Wilks and Wilson, 2012). Certainly, for some of the sport students in

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<sup>28</sup> Some researchers opt for the term 'First Generation' rather than First in Family. Within this thesis the term First in Family (FiF) is employed, in accordance with the substantive work of O'Shea and colleagues (2014; 2017; 2018)

this case study, like Peter, whose parents and two older sisters had all graduated prior to his enrolment, his desire to study at university was imbued within his taken-for-granted family histories:

Everyone has been, and I've always wanted to go...it's always been the pathway in our family.  
(Peter [HE-I])

As Grayson (2011) notes: 'when it comes to Higher Education, the acorn falls close to the oak', an observation supported by the account of fellow HE-I sport science student Heidi who, like Peter, also appeared compelled to study at university, through the intergenerational value placed upon university engagement, as her parents and older siblings were all university graduates:

Yes, it wasn't a matter of if I'm going, I knew I wanted to do it. My parents have been, and my brother and sister so they just encouraged me to go too. (Heidi [HE-I])

However, for those without prior familial exposure to Higher Education, university enrolment did not always appear to be the natural choice. For some sport students, university felt unattainable in comparison with post-school employment:

I was determined not to go. I was determined to get a job... I didn't think I could do it. I was set on the fact that **I wouldn't be accepted, and I just couldn't do it**. So I were getting a job. [emphasis added]. (Linda [FiF])

Yet, viewing those with or without a familial experience in university education as possessing resolute and opposing predispositions towards university engagement, did not appear to always hold true. For example, in spite of his HE-I status (through his older brother's graduation from a similar post-92 university), Garry did not consider Higher Education to be the established pathway with his family:

One of my cousins studied photography at uni, and that was the only person to have gone to university before me and my brother out of the family. So yeah, no one else in our family really ever...someone was going to do an Open University degree but then that didn't work out. So yeah, **it's not really been a family passed down thing**, it's just I fancied going really [emphasis added]. (Garry [HE-I])

Whilst interestingly, mature HE-I sport student Keith's perspective appeared to have shifted from an intellectual pursuit, steeped in academic prowess and status, to a present-day view that university is merely the next step taken after school:

...it's a generational thing when my brother went to university and I held him in massive esteem. I was, like, wow you're doing something academic. (Keith [HE-I])



Indeed, unlike his brother's scholarly activities in the 1990s, Keith considers university 'a rite of passage now' for all school/college leavers; a modern outlook espoused by FiF sport student Neil; whose construction of university is as an in-vogue thing to do:

...its almost become fashionable, like you do A levels, then go to Leeds Uni, whether its Beckett or any of them. You just go... (Neil - FiF)

Certainly, within the cohort of sport students interviewed for this case study, having a family background in Higher Education did appear to impart a predilection towards university study per se (i.e. regardless of its constructed value and purpose), as reported within the literature. As Gale and Parker (2015:85) observed in their Bourdieusien review of student educational aspirations: student narratives towards post-compulsory education reflect family histories, as '[t]he logic is: what has been will be'.

As a result of this initial observation, it was important to delve further into sport students' constructions underpinning individual decisions to study at university. Thus exploring whether FiF and HE-I sport students constructed similar notions regarding the value and purpose to Higher Education, or whether they were nuanced as a result of their differing familial exposures to Higher Education. According to Bourdieu, students enter the university *field* (conceptualised as a site of struggle) with their own bespoke set of attitudes, perceptions and dispositions, a *habitus* cultivated through their lived experiences and interactions with the social world (i.e. interactions within other *fields*, such as the overlapping fields of education and religion through attendance at a faith school). However, an initial tally of the preliminary questionnaire data (reported as cross tabulation see Table 16), indicated no difference in constructions regarding the purpose of university study, between FiF sport students and those with previous familial exposure to Higher Education (HE-I sport students), an observation supported through further quantitative statistical analysis of the preliminary questionnaire data. Although, as will be discussed later in this section a more nuanced insight into the potential influence of the collective familial *habitus* becomes apparent through analysis of the interview data.

Table 16: A cross tabulation of previous family exposure to Higher Education (FiF or HE-I) and sport students' self-reported reasons for university study, obtained from question 5 on the preliminary questionnaire: What is your main reason for coming to university (please tick one option)?

		[1] To stay within education	[2] To gain more knowledge	[3] Degree required for career	[4] Increase future employment	[5] Earning potential	Total
Group	HE-I	1 (3%)	12 (34%)	13 (37%)	9 (26%)	0 (0%)	35 (38%)
	FiF	3 (5%)	14 (24%)	24 (41%)	15 (26%)	2 (3%)	58 (62%)
Total		4 (4%)	26 (28%)	37 (40%)	24 (26%)	2 (2%)	93 (100%)

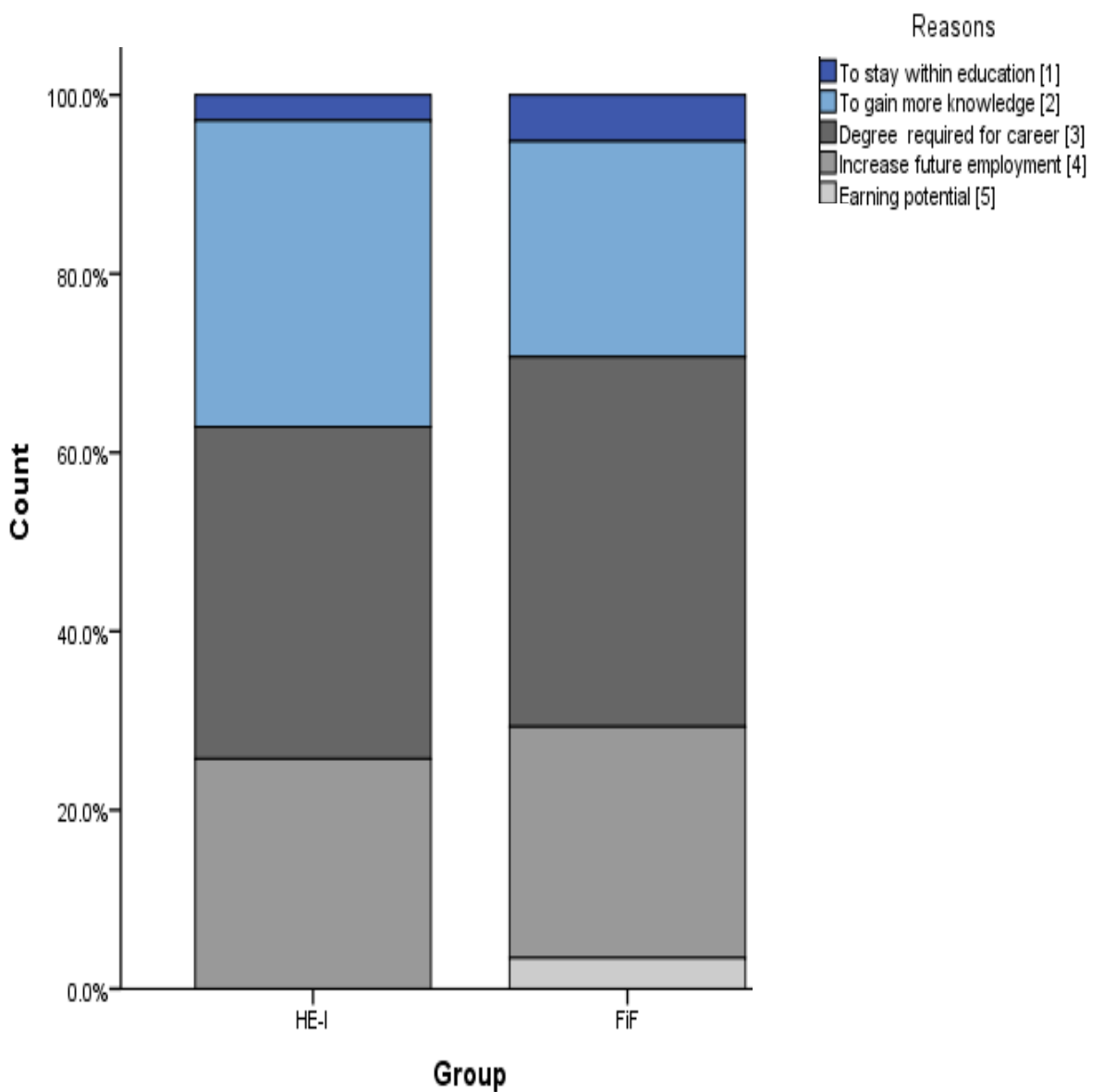


Figure 14: A stacked bar chart illustrating the FiF and HE-I responses to question 5 on the preliminary questionnaire: What is your main reason for coming to university (please tick one option)?

To explore the preliminary questionnaire data further, a Fisher Freeman Halton Test was applied (as this test considers the sparse nature of some of the cells), in order to search for associations between the five categorical variables (previously categorised in Table 16) as [1]-[2]-[3]-[4]-[5]). This non-parametric test yielded a value of the test statistic as 2.21 with a p-value of 0.766, indicating little evidence of a link between FiF status and the purpose for attending university. As a sensitivity check, the student responses [3]-[5] were combined into a 'career purpose' group and [1]-[2] into an 'educational purpose' one, and a standard Chi-Squared test applied to assess relationships between the two categorical variables. The null hypothesis of the Chi-Square test is that no relationship exists between the categorical variables (i.e. [3]-[5] career; [1]-[2] education) for the two population groups (i.e. FiF and HE-I), in other words they are independent of each other. This test generated a p-value of 0.434, again suggesting little evidence of an association between the purpose of university study and the two sport student groups (the statistical outputs for this statistical test are available for the reader in Tables 25-31 of Appendix 7.11, on pages 153 - 155).

To support the reader, a stacked graph has also been plotted (Figure 14 overleaf). This graphical representation presents the quantitative data using similar colours to the data reported in Table 16 above. In doing so the graph illustrates the sport students' responses to question 5 on the preliminary questionnaire (What is your main reason for coming to university (please tick one option)?) in relation to: an **educational** or **career** purpose to university engagement. Supporting the quantitative data analysis results, initial analysis of the free text comments attached to question 6 on the preliminary questionnaire (What do you hope to gain from your university experience?) constructed a similar narrative regarding the key purpose of university for sport students. Four prevailing themes regarding the key purpose of university study were identified: career development (i.e. [3]-[4]); increase knowledge in area [2]; increase experience in subject area; and to enhance skills. On the other hand, only a handful of sport students constructed a narrative connecting Higher Education engagement with more personal motives, such as: 'more independence', 'it will be an enjoyable challenge', 'to develop myself physically and mentally', 'meet new people / new friends', 'good memories' and 'a sense of accomplishment'. The prominence of these four themes and the

more personal constructions noted in the sport student responses are illustrated in the word-cloud in Figure 15, below.



Figure 15: Word-clouds generated by Microsoft Office 365 ProPlus (Pro Word Cloud add-in) illustrating the themes generated in response to question 6 on the preliminary questionnaire: What do you hope to gain from your university experience?

As would be expected when enrolling on an educational course, gaining knowledge was one of the most prevalent themes (data reported as: count [percentage] for each population), for both sport student groups (38 [66%] FiF sport students; 17 [49%] HE-I sport students), whilst the more personal insights surrounding the purpose of a university education were only occasionally acknowledged, for example: challenge (2 [3%] FiF sport students; 3 [9%] HE-I sport students), independence (1 [2%] FiF sport student; 7 [20%] HE-I sport students), memories (0 [0%] FiF sport students; 4 [11%] HE-I sport students), confidence (2 [3%] FiF sport students; 0 [0%] HE-I sport students). However, further examination of the free text responses to question 6, appeared to indicate discreet variations in the constructions of the purpose of university engagement between the two sport student groups (to assist the reader, the numeric data is reported below as: count [percentage] for each population).

Interestingly, both student groups narrated a similar desire to ‘establish new friendships at university’ [14 [24%] FiF sport students, 8 [23%] HE-I sport students) and ‘experience a challenge’ [4 [7%] FiF sport students, 3 [9%] HE-I sport students), however other personal narratives including: ‘becoming more independent’ (1 [2%] FiF sport student, 7 [20%] HE-I sport students), and ‘creating life memories’ (0 [0%] FiF sport students, 4 [11%] HE-I sport students) were reported more frequently by those with a familial experience in Higher

Education. This signifies potentially different social constructions surrounding the value and purpose of university between the two student groups, with the HE-I students more readily able to value university engagement beyond the sole acquisition of a degree. However, when focussing specifically on narratives aligned to post-university employability, the desire to ‘enhance future salary potential’ was only reported by First in Family sport students (6 [10%] FiF sport students, 0 [0%] HE-I sport students), possibly suggesting that the difference between the two students groups is not a lack of awareness or valuation of the other forms of capital on offer through university study, but a difference in which forms of capital are valued. FiF students appear to value forms of *capital* more closely aligned with the state narrative aligning university engagement with employability and enhanced future salary, whilst the HE-I sport students appear to subscribe more readily to the ritualised social construction of university, where tertiary study is valued beyond the acquisition of *cultural [institutionalised] capital* (and its link to *economic capital* through future employment), to forms of *social* and *cultural capital* associated with preparing the individual for life per se, and the natural progression beyond university to living independently of the family. An observation also noted by Abrahams and Ingrams (2013), who described a traditional, middle-class construction of university, where the collective familial *habitus* imbued with the traditional, middle-class, ritualised notion of a university experience.

Likewise, narratives gathered during the eleven individual interviews also appeared to hint at discreet differences regarding which forms of *capital* were most valued by FiF and HE-I sport students. Crucially, while the interview data revealed a collective narrative focussed on employment among all participants, data from those with generational histories in Higher Education (HE-I students) indicated a more extensive valuation of the different forms of capital on offer (beyond the degree and its translation into *economic capital*) through engagement with Higher Education. For example: supporting the observation that student constructions relating to the value and purpose of university appear to reflect their familial *cultural* and *social capital* (Wilks and Wilson, 2012), and the presence or absence of a familial experience in Higher Education (O'Shea et al., 2017), may have predisposed sport science student Ben to construct the purpose of university as a means of achieving clearly defined career goals, and as such

he may be unable to recognise the other, more nuanced benefits a university education may confer (O'Shea et al., 2018):

At college I was dead set against it because if **I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, what's the point in going** [emphasis added]? (Ben [FiF])

In doing so Ben appears to have constructed a value and purpose for university founded on gaining an additional qualification (i.e. the acquisition of the *cultural [institutionalise] capital*) in order to improve his future employment prospects (i.e. his *economic capital*):

...I didn't want to finish college and then go straight into any nine to five job or something, I wanted to get a qualification, to hopefully get into something I always wanted to do full time after it. (Ben [FiF])

In contrast, for fellow sport science student Molly (HE-I), the influence of her collective familial *habitus* (imbued with traditional notions of a university experience) may have encouraged a construction of university focused on valuing university beyond its *cultural [institutionalise] capital* ('more than just a degree'), in order to take account of the lived experience: 'broaden[ing] my horizons' and 'getting to know people, networking, stuff like that'. A social construction regarding the purpose of university, reiterated by another HE-I sport science student, Peter:

I was literally just wanting to explore the student lifestyle, also meeting people from all over - it's good to know people's different backgrounds. (Peter [HE-I])

A worldview supported by her fellow HE-I sport science students Heidi and Bryan, who also narrate broader constructions of the value and purpose of university to include different forms of *capital* beyond the *cultural capital* of the degree qualification and other non-employment specific reasons. For Heidi, university engagement also provided an opportunity to move away from home, a lifestyle choice inculcated through the collective familial *habitus* of parents' university histories:

Because I think, I always thought that if you're not living in accommodation by your own when you're at uni, you're not having the student life properly. So you just have to leave home and see how...both **my parents did that**. So they moved to my current hometown and **they were, like, no, you have to go** [emphasis added]. (Heidi [HE-I])

Likewise, Bryan's familial experience in Higher Education may have encouraged a construction of the value and purpose of university engagement, as an

opportunity for personal development, including improving his independence through the act of moving away from home:

Obviously, there's stuff that you kind of want to reach, like obviously you want to end up with a good degree. And then I think...I don't really think about it now but when I think about it now, there's a lot of growing up that you do at university. So I think that's part of it, all that sort of stuff, and actually getting you ready for the real world, like living away from your parents, obviously that comfort blanket's gone, sort of thing. And you're kind of thrown in the deep end, sort of thing. Like, I didn't know anyone coming to this university, so I had no friends, all that sort of stuff. (Bryan [HE-I])

Indeed, for Bryan, university appears to be an important steppingstone and opportunity for him to get 'ready for the real world', supporting my earlier offering of a ritualised university *habitus* among the HE-I sport students, where university is valued beyond the mere acquisition of a degree, as a 'transitional life experience', akin to the class-based observations of Bathmaker and colleagues (2013), who noted greater active self-awareness regarding the acquisition of 'personal *capital*' (Brown et al, 2011: 65) among middle-class undergraduate students (i.e. those most likely to be HE-I sport students within this case study).

## 5.4.2 IMPACT OF UNIVERSITY

State interventions have transformed the UK's compulsory education, increasing the school leaving age to 18, and replacing the traditional model of moving directly from school into the labour market, with one that promotes self-funded engagement with the Higher Education sector before entering employment through the 'knowledge economy' (Holmwood, 2014; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014). Yet, despite significant growth in the Higher Education sector and greater student diversification, notions of the typical 'student experience' remain affiliated with traditional middle-class values of personal growth (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Reay et al., 2010; Ingram and Waller, 2015): encouraging non-traditional undergraduate students to embrace the 'middle-class way' of experiencing university (for example, the traditional notion of moving away from home rather than commuting to university) (Jessica Abrahams and Ingram, 2013:1).

Consequently, when students transition into the competitive *field* of Higher Education, significant aspects of their life alter (for example, independent living and shopping/cooking for themselves, managing their own time, budgeting) and

for those inculcated with familial histories of a university experience (HE-I), their university informed *habitus* appears to encourage them to recognise and value these changes as an opportunity for personal development, alongside the degree qualification itself. Whilst, FiF sport students appear to more readily align their university engagement with discourses of fiscal betterment through a greater focus on the *economic capital* associated within a degree in their future employment *field*, possibly failing to recognise and/or value the opportunity to accumulate other forms of *social* and *cultural capital*, offered through engagement with a university system (O'Shea et al., 2018).

However, despite their different pre-university *habitus*, nine months on from enrolment there is evidence of similar alterations in the attributes of both student groups (FiF and HE-I). Indeed, in line with Bourdieu's account of *habitus*, as a malleable set of attributes, dispositions, and embodied modus (i.e. ways 'of standing, speaking, walking and thereby feeling and thinking'), altered and adapted through new experiences (Bourdieu, 1990:70), when asked the final interview question Has university [...so far] changed you...?, all interviewed participants, regardless of their family's educational background, reported that the first year at university had had an impact on them, adjusting their dispositions and/or *practices* in a variety of ways.

For some sport students like Garry and Linda, their accounts appear to indicate unconscious adjustments to their *habitus*, through embodied changes to their vocabulary, noted by others rather than themselves:

'Yeah, my Mum...she says my vocabulary's got better', (Garry [HE-I])

Like, all my friends now call me posh...I use better words. Like, I use university words...  
(Linda [FiF])

Whilst, Peter indicated a conscious awareness of his newly acquired and embodied vocabulary:

I think the way I speak is not the same anymore...before it was more like, I don't know, typical high school kind of talk, if you get me. But it's more adulty-y now. (Peter [HE-I])

Moving beyond *habitus*, the use of Bourdieu's *thinking tools* as a supporting analytical framework ensures the interplay between the individual (i.e. the sport student and their *capital* and *habitus*), the social *field* they are interacting with (i.e. in this case study, the competitive university *field*), and their *practices* are also



considered. For example, this interplay between *thinking tools* can be detected in the accounts provided by Linda and Peter, who report that the subtle adjustments to their pre-university *habitus* have had an impact on their *practices*, including organisational skills, time management and the ability to work independently:

I deal with things a lot differently. I just want to get my work done. If I get handed an assignment, I'll start it straightaway. Because I feel like you can only really pass university if you're organised. Because if you're leaving things to the last minute, then there's just no hope. (Linda [FiF])

I think in terms of managing workload because you have to manage your life, your uni life and social life. Because there's, like, three important things in life really, your family, your friends and work, and you've got to learn to balance all of them. Because if you focus too much of one or the other, one will fail, and you'll take a consequence from it. (Peter [HE-I])

Whilst, Harry's self-reported narrative around confidence levels, provides an important insight into how he has constructed the value of his university experience.

Well, even though I still am an anxious person about other people, big places, scary things, but I feel like I've become a lot more comfortable and confident. Because you have to make a change when you're put in a situation like that where you don't know people, because you can't just think you can get through university on your own because you can't. You need to have some sort of network with people. (Harry [FiF])

And despite the fact that this research was not able to ascertain whether these self-reported changes actually occurred, nine-months on from enrolment all the interview narratives consistently indicated an appreciation for 'non-academic' constructions around value and purpose of a university education. For example, in the previous quote, Harry reveals an appreciation of his university experience, through his reported improvement in confidence and the narrated value for the *social capital* acquired through 'some sort of network with people'. In a similar manner, the narrative from FiF student Neil (below), offers an insight into his thoughts regarding the benefits of his first year university experience, including an awareness of the positive impact of an altered maturity on his ability to accrue different forms of *capital* through engagement with experience opportunities (in this case volunteering as a student representative):

Yeah, definitely. I think I've grown up more. I thought I was grown up coming here but then obviously just living away and seeing how other people act, I definitely think I've grown up a lot. I think, like, taking the roles, like this year when I did student rep stuff, I don't think I would have taken that on a year ago. (Neil [FiF])

Of particular relevance to RQ3 (Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?), a

sport student's FiF status and the prevailing discourse constructing an more employability focused purpose to university study, did not appear to hinder adjustments to their *habitus* and *practice*, as a result of their encounters within the new *field* of Higher Education. In all instances the interviewed sport students describe how their university experience had (consciously or unconsciously) changed, possibly indicating adjustments to their *habitus* and/or *practice*, as a result of their first year at university.

Using Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *practice* as an analytical framework within this doctoral research has allowed an appreciation of these conscious and unconscious adjustments. According to Abrahams and Ingram (2013) working-class students are able to internalise the structures of the university *field* and modify their *habitus* accordingly. Through a 'chameleon *habitus*' (2013:10) these working-class students accept the legitimacy of each social location and become able to move more readily between these social *fields* through their understanding of the rules of each. Therefore if we acknowledge the demographic connectivity between students' race, ethnic, socio-economic and FiF status (i.e. recent UK demographic data indicates that first generation students are also likely to be classified as non-traditional university students through the customary ethnic and/or economic classifications (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2018; Department for Education, 2019; Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019a)) then Abrahams and Ingram's notion of a 'chameleon *habitus*' may go some way to explaining how the FiF sport students appear able to unintentionally (i.e. their initial constructions of university did not foster a broad valuing of the forms of *capital* available through university engagement) revise the flexibility of their *habitus* experientially (i.e. through their experience within the university *field*), to include an adaptability towards previously unfamiliar *practices*; potentially, altering future social interactions and their graduate employment potential.

## SUMMARY

Whilst attempting to understand sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of Higher Education, data from this case study appears to indicate discreet notional variations in the narratives underpinning these constructions, possibly as a result of the narratives and discourses they draw upon. In doing so,

HE-I sport students appeared to construct a narrative encompassing wider notions regarding value and purpose to Higher Education (providing a broader appreciation for the forms of *capital* on offer through university engagement) in comparison with their FiF peers, who appeared to focus more readily on the forms of *capital* most clearly associated with the pervasive, fiscal (through greater salaries) and employment narrative surrounding university engagement.

To-date the majority of FiF literature has a legitimate tendency to view these students as 'disadvantaged', however the interview data examined within this case study reveals the potential for an alternative outlook. As despite the subtle differences between the FiF and HE-I sport students, in terms of their pre-enrolment constructions around the value and purpose of university engagement, the FiF sport students' self-reported reflexive, conscious or unconscious adjustments to their pre-university *habitus* and *practices* in the same manner as those with familial histories rooted in Higher Education.

Having considered the four emergent themes identified through the quantitative and qualitative analysis of this case study data, the final chapter of this thesis will reflect upon the case study journey itself, its key findings, and their possible implications for the Higher Education sector.

# 6 CONCLUSION

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'Always pass on what you have learned'. (Lucas, 1983)

This final chapter serves three important purposes. Firstly, it is an opportunity for me to reflect upon the key findings of this case study, and their possible implications for the wider Higher Education sector. Secondly, the chapter provides a chance for me to look to the future and provide my thoughts regarding the research potential in this area, and thirdly, it offers space for me to reflect upon the significance of this doctoral journey.

In the first section of this chapter, I draw on the literature review and my own findings with the aim of presenting my contribution to our understanding of the university 'student experience' and the social constructions underpinning undergraduate sport students' decisions study at university.

## 6.1 CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Whilst the case study reported within this doctoral research is specifically located in a sports department of a post-92 university, located in the north of England, its findings resonate more widely. Issues surrounding the value and purpose of a university student experience, and the social constructions that underpin the decision to study within the Higher Education sector, despite a saturated, graduate job market are not just relevant within the UK and European countries, but beyond. The effect of family histories and the dominant discourse associated with Higher Education engagement as a prerequisite to successful employment and social mobility, are global concerns. Through the study's three research questions, I provide a summary of the contribution of this research to our current understanding.

**RQ1: How is the concept of a 'student experience' constructed by newly enrolled undergraduate sport students?**

As outlined in the Literature Review the notion of 'student experience' is a contemporary one, with origins in the commodification and marketisation of

Higher Education. However, defining student experience is notoriously difficult, as descriptions vary greatly depending on the context. For prospective students, the term may refer to a new learning experience and its associated change in lifestyle, whilst universities often use the term when referring to their provision quality.

Data from this study confirmed this disparity. The majority of first year sport students (in both the questionnaires and interviews) were not aware of the term 'student experience', and those that did associated it with the somewhat traditional, hedonistic characteristics of a student life style: 'parties and lots of socialising with other students' (BSc CSD student [FiF]), as opposed to the university's educational provision. Only very occasionally did a sport student make a link between the term and the university provision on offer:

How students explore their surroundings, the learning and a lot is on offer in the course i.e. events, PT jobs, workshops. (BSc CSD student [HE-I])

As a result, the data from this study would recommend the need for caution when using a multidimensional term such as 'student experience' within its student-facing documentation, as without a clear explanation of its meaning, there may be misinterpretations between audiences.

**RQ2: What influenced newly enrolled undergraduate sport students' decision to enrol at university?** Understanding why sport students choose to study at university is of legitimate interest. Especially considering the individual investment now required and the current saturation in the graduate job market, meaning that not all those who graduate will achieve the employment aspirations they enter with. With regard to RQ2, a number of factors appear to influence the decision to enrol at university. For some the decision reflects family expectation and/or a personal desire to attend, however for the majority there were substantial employment related motivations, indicating a clear association between university and heightened employment prospects (Tholen, 2015). This is a view encouraged by successive governments, who promote Higher Education as a key pathway to employment success (Department for Education, 2017), despite repeated concerns regarding an overcrowded graduate job market (Brown, 2003; Chevalier and Lindley, 2007; Robertson et al., 2011; Tomlinson, 2012; Weale, 2019). However, despite the current concerns regarding high university tuition

fees and a lack of 'market' within the sector (i.e. most universities have opted to charge the highest tuition fees available), paying tuition fees did not appear to significantly influence these sport students' decision to go to university. Indeed, in a manner similar to other UK undergraduate students, these sport students appear comfortable accumulating debt (through the current deferred repayment scheme) in order to finance their future career potential (O'Loughlin and Szmigin, 2006; Hall et al., 2018).

In addition, the data from this case study confirms the importance of national metrics in the university student recruitment cycle. Examination of the preliminary questionnaire data indicated that on average prospective sport students referred to 2-3 resources when considering which university degree to enrol upon (Table 14 provided details of these resources). Not unexpectedly, the most popular resource was the university's own website (for these participating sport students this would have been the website: <http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/cheshire>). However, intriguingly, sport students also appear to draw upon their *social capital* (i.e. their existing network of teachers, current and ex-students, etc.) when deciding which university to attend. This is a noteworthy marketplace observation, as current demographic data indicates a sustained reduction in the number of eighteen-year olds available for university recruitment, as a result of a the low UK birth rates at the start of the millennium (Office for National Statistics, 2018).

**RQ3: Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?** First in Family (FiF) students are now recognised as non-traditional university students. As a contribution to our appreciation of this cohort's position within the UK's Higher Education system, this case study attempted to understand the complex relationship between sport students' understandings regarding the value and purpose of university, and the social conditions in which they have been constructed. In doing so, this research noted the influence of familial education history on prospective sport students' social constructions towards university.

A family background in Higher Education appears to impart a broader awareness of, and value for, the opportunities available to amass empowering forms of *capital* other than the *cultural [institutionalised] capital* of a degree itself. Whilst,

FiF sport students, potentially unschooled in the value of these other forms of *capital*, appear to place more emphasis on the *cultural [institutionalised] capital* accrued through a university degree, in order to improve their employment and earning potential; a potentially disadvantageous disposition focused more readily on the forms of *capital* most clearly associated with discourses of betterment, also observed in Australian FiF students (O'Shea et al., 2018).

However, whilst the majority of First Generation or First in Family literature has a legitimate tendency to view these students as 'disadvantaged', the data within this thesis reveal a slightly more optimistic outlook, as despite their initial familial educational inexperience, the FiF sport students appeared able to demonstrate reflexive *habitus* adaptations in the same manner as those with familial histories rooted in Higher Education. And so, whilst HE-I sport students may have initially fashioned a broader social construction surrounding value and purpose to university study, FiF sport students appear able to heuristically develop an appreciation for the new aspects of their *habitus*, acquired through university engagement, and the positive impact they have on their *practices*.

In a similar manner to the working-class students studied by Bathmaker et al. (2013:10) this observation may go some way to supporting the belief that university engagement may encourage a beneficial 'chameleon *habitus*', where FiF students become more able to accept the legitimacy of certain dispositions, forms of *capital* and *practices* within a social *field*, and as a consequence are more able to move seamlessly between these *fields* as a result of their university experience. A social skill that may be advantageous to them within all aspects of their life.

## 6.2 LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Within the UK's marketised Higher Education system, widening participation policies are designed to have had an emancipatory role in levelling the employment market (i.e. as minority groups, such as the FiF students within this study, become able to access university more readily). However, the state endorsement of high tuition fees (through the withdrawal of public funding over recent decades) and a saturated graduate employment market may help to

maintain the advantage certain socio-economic groups have enjoyed (through for example, the mere ease with which the financial burden of a university education can be subsumed). Despite the state sponsored growth in the Higher Education sector and greater student diversification, notions of the typical undergraduate experience remain affiliated with the middle-class discourse (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Reay et al., 2010; Ingram and Waller, 2015), encouraging non-traditional students to embrace the 'middle-class way' of studying at university (Abrahams and Ingram, 2013:1).

Significantly, despite mounting evidence indicating that progression, attainment and completion rates were often lower for students without a family background in Higher Education experience (even when the other more widely reported socio-economic characteristics are taken into account) (Nunez and Carroll, 1998), Manchester Metropolitan University did not formally recognise the importance of its First-Generation / First in Family students (employing the definition: no parent or guardian with a Higher Education qualification) until 2019, when its 'Access and Participation Plan' (2019:3-4), acknowledged that just over 50% of full-time UK undergraduate students were First Generation (the term opted for by the university). In doing so (and most notably from the specific context of this case study and especially RQ3), this university document acknowledged for the first time, the important socioeconomic links between one of the UK's conventional WP classifications (LPNs) discussed within Chapter 3, and the students of interest within this research (First in Family students), indicating that: '[a]nalysis shows that first generation students are more likely to be from Low Participation Neighbourhoods' (2019:3). Consequently, the 'Access and Participation Plan' emphasised (for the first time) the importance of focusing support towards this 'new' non-traditional student group.

Looking to my future research strategy, I wish to continue my focus upon First in Family sport students (a significant student population both within the topic area of sport and in recognised widening participation universities, such as the location of this research: Manchester Metropolitan University), as the literature reviewed within this thesis (for example: Lohfink and Paulsen, 2005; Wilcox et al., 2005; Reay, 2006; Luzecky et al., 2011; King et al., 2013; Talebi et al., 2013; King et al., 2015; May et al., 2016; O'Shea et al., 2017; O'Shea et al., 2018) indicates that students from this familial background find adjusting to university and



graduate employment more problematic than all other students groupings (see Figure 16 and Figure 17 in Appendix 7.13 for cohort specific FiF and HE-I attainment data). In doing so I would like to explore further Abrahams and Ingram's (2013:10) notion of a working-class 'chameleon *habitus*', as a result of the appreciable overlap between our two non-traditional university students: working-class students and FiF students; exploring whether the changeable *habitus* Abrahams and Ingram refer to, is available to FiF students and ultimately whether this ability to move seamlessly between social *fields* may become advantageous to them following graduation.

## 6.3 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities. (Rowling, 1998:214)

Within this final section of the thesis, I wish to specifically focus on the personal aspect of this doctoral research journey. In doing so I will consider to what extent my original dispositions (i.e. as a sport scientist, academic, and applied practitioner) swayed my initial methodological choices and how this significant undertaking has provided a unique opportunity to glimpse a different 'worldview' to the one I have inhabited for the last 40 years (Creswell, 2014:6).

Foregrounding this reflection, it is important to acknowledge the key driver behind this research: to explore the sport students' thoughts regarding university study, as part of a professional doctorate, administered by my institution. I will now specifically consider the effectiveness of key aspects of my research design, namely the data collection tools (questionnaires and interviews) and use of Bourdieu's thinking tools as analytical framework to interpret the sport student accounts.

### 6.3.1 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Reflecting upon my use of questionnaires and interviews as data collection tools, I am aware that my recent appreciation for the socially constructed world has allowed me to appreciate the advantages, disadvantages, strengths, and limitations of these tools within educational research.

**Questionnaires:** were used at two distinct points in the academic year. Reflecting specifically on my use of these data collection tools, I now recognise that their inclusion was partially to appease the anxious, sport scientist in me, and my inherent desire to amass data for statistical analysis. In reality, whilst the questionnaires were useful for answering RQ1 & RQ2, and providing indicators of a *collective habitus* (for an example please refer back to the discreet variations in tuition fee concerns, identified in the three undergraduate programmes, discussed on pages 107-109), I now accept that they were blunt tools unable to consistently draw out the rich details, in the form of the lived experiences and/or the nuanced outlooks of the writer. Bourdieu himself used questionnaires to construct and investigate social spaces (Ruanet et al., 2000), however he was reluctant to use conventional statistical techniques:

The particular relations between a dependent variable (such as political opinion) and so-called independent variables such as sex, age and religion, or even educational level, income and occupation tend to mask the complete system of relationships which constitutes the true principle of **the strength and form of the effect registered** in any particular correlation. [emphasis added] (Bourdieu, 2010:97)

Upon reflection, the data obtained using my questionnaires supports Bourdieu's observation; as they identified possible relationships between familial educational histories, but not 'the strength and form of the effect registered'. The interviews on the other hand, were able to provide an unexpected richness to my data.

**Interviews:** were conducted with a small group of self-selected participants. In comparison with the questionnaires, my experience using interviews for the first time was enlightening. The Participants' willingness to narrate their lived histories, before and during their time at university, provided a multi-layered insight into the experiences of undergraduate sport students in my department. The practice of interpreting interview data is a complex one, as Bourdieu reflects through a collection of interviews captured in: *The Weight of The World* (1999). Interviewing requires a cautious and self-reflective approach, in order to appreciate the symbolic power differential between interviewer and interviewee, and the potential for interviewee self-censorship (for example, 1999:616). With the aim of 'reduce[ing] as much as possible the symbolic violence exerted through that relationship', Bourdieu describes a method of 'active and methodical listening', to create an interview that is neither *laissez-faire* nor interventionistic, through:

...a total availability to the person being questioned, submission to the singularity of a particular life history - which can lead, by a kind of more or less controlled imitation, to

adopting the interviewee's language, views, feelings, and thoughts - with methodical construction, founded on the knowledge of the objective conditions common to an entire social category. (1999:609)

Aware of the symbolic power differential between myself and the participants I tried wherever possible to use Bourdieu's advice as a guide to my conduct (for example: where appropriate, I tried to carefully echo/reflect the participant's vocabulary choices and use of contemporary terminology, in order to not appear overly academic, verbose or orotund).

## 6.3.2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The decision to search for an analytical resource to support my research was taken after I had completed the initial analysis of my questionnaire data, when I became acutely aware that my deductive tendencies (born out of my innate professional disposition as a scientist) had stifled my ability to explore the social constructions behind the data I had collected (both in terms of the manner in which the questionnaires were designed and their subsequent analysis). Therefore, in order to challenge these deductive tendencies and importantly my somewhat muted data analysis, an appropriate theoretical resource was sought.

In seeking this resource, the 'thinking tools' offered by Pierre Bourdieu (Wacquant, 1989:50) were identified as the most applicable. Moreover, as a sport scientist, unaccustomed to social constructionism the formulaic nature of Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' offered an attractive, heuristic account of social orderliness, its structures and regularities. Furthermore, they had been drawn upon successfully by a number of researchers interested in Higher Education, including those also interested in the social issues considered within this case study: widening participation (Archer et al., 2005; Reay et al., 2010); first in family university students (Luzecy et al., 2011; O'Shea, 2016) and graduate employability (Abrahams, 2017; Clark and Zukas, 2013; Glaesser and Cooper, 2014).

However, it goes without saying that working with Bourdieu as an analytical resource, was really tough going; a challenge recognised by his collaborators, including Wacquant who conceded that Bourdieu's work '...continues to befuddle many of his Anglo-American readers...' (Wacquant in Calhoun et al., 1993:237). Indeed, to the uninitiated, his writing style can feel unnecessarily complicated and

therefore without the help of authors more able to understand translations of his writings (including: Grenfell, 2009; Murphy, 2013; Atkinson, 2016; Thatcher et al., 2016), I would have been utterly lost.

From the perspective of this doctoral research, Bourdieu's (1986) formulated *thinking tools: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice* served as a framework to deconstruct sport students' narratives concerning university, and more specifically through RQ3 (Do family histories in Higher Education influence sport students' constructions regarding the value and purpose of university?), how Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* may aid the understanding of the potential of familial educational histories to influence sport students' constructions around the value and purpose of studying at university. In addition, applying Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *practice* provided a framework with which I could begin to appreciate any conscious and unconscious adjustment in *habitus* and *practice* as a result of the sport students' experiences within the new social location of a university. Coupled with the work of Bathmaker and colleagues (2013), these tools offered the notion that reflexive *habitus* becomes emergent through the sport students' university experience.

In concluding this reflection on my analytical resource, it is important to consider how the research might have been different, had Bourdieu been embedded in the research design itself. Drawing upon numerous authors who have successfully contributed to our understanding of Higher Education using the works of Bourdieu, I am now able to appreciate the significant drawbacks to my initial case study design (theoretical hindsight is a wonderful thing). In doing so, I can appreciate the significance of swapping the rigidity of questionnaires for more a narrative inquiry approach which would have provided the space to gather different information through a variety of methods including small group discussions, blogs, social media forums and interviews. Furthermore, allowing Bourdieu's theories of social reproduction to permeate and influence my research design may have encouraged me to dig deeper into the students' pre-university *habitus* (including gathering more detailed information on their pre-university life experiences, family background, and parents/siblings educational experiences) and their individual and/or collective awareness (or valuation) of the different forms of *capital* in order to confirm or challenge the hypothesised overlap between FiF students and working class students.

## 6.4 AFTER THOUGHT...

'Finally, in conclusion let me say just this...' (Sellers, 1958),

In August 2012, my university offered me the opportunity to study a partially-funded doctorate. Having recently taken responsibility within my department for student experience, attainment, and pastoral care, I endeavoured to use this opportunity both as professional development and as an avenue to better support current and future sport students. In doing so, I foresaw a relatively straightforward positivist and practical doctoral journey in which I generated a hypothesis, collected relevant data, analysed said data and then drew systematic, logical and generalisable conclusions from this analysis that could be usefully applied undergraduate sport students.

Little did I know that this doctoral experience would send me on an uneasy journey into the unfamiliar world of the social sciences, with its paradigmatic discourses on ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Eight years on I leave this encounter with a newfound cynicism for the UK's Higher Education sector and its proclaimed role in social mobility. As a result, I intend to combine the understandings afforded me through this scholarly enquiry with my previous research experience, in order to investigate how we can improve the graduate prospects of first-in-family sport students, despite the tacit changes to the rules of the game.



# 7 APPENDICES

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Additional material has been provided for the reader in this appendices chapter, the specific location of items can be found in Table 17 below.

Table 17: The thesis appendices and their locations.

	Page
7.1 Questionnaire Schedule	137
7.2 Preliminary Questionnaire	138
7.3 Follow-up Questionnaire	140
7.4 Word-cloud Data	142
7.5 Participant Information Sheet (PIS)	143
7.6 Interview Consent Form (ICF)	145
7.7 Interview Schedule	146
7.8 Interview Guide	147
7.9 Interview Transcript	149
7.10 Participant Details	149
7.11 Statistical Data	152
7.12 Raw Data	156
7.13 Degree attainment data	158

# 7.1 QUESTIONNAIRE SCHEDULE

## Preliminary Questionnaire

The **preliminary questionnaire** was completed during the 'Welcome to MMU' session with the students' Programme Leader.

Table 18: Preliminary questionnaire schedule

Date	Programme	Males	Females
Monday 21 <sup>st</sup> September 2015 at 9am	B.A. (Hons.) Coaching & Sports Development	23	4
Monday 21 <sup>st</sup> September 2015 at 10am	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	31	17
Monday 21 <sup>st</sup> September 2015 at 11am	B.A. (Hons.) Physical Education & Sports Pedagogy	14	4
		68	25

## Follow-up Questionnaire

The **follow-up questionnaire** was completed during the first week of the summer term (with 5 teaching weeks remaining of the university calendar).

Table 19: Follow-up questionnaire schedule

Date	Programme	Males	Females
Monday 18 <sup>th</sup> April 2016 at 10am	B.A. (Hons.) Coaching & Sports Development	23	9
Wednesday 20 <sup>th</sup> April 2016 at 9am	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	33	13
Wednesday 20 <sup>th</sup> April 2016 at 10am	B.A. (Hons.) Physical Education & Sports Pedagogy	15	3
		71	25





**8. THE MEDIA OFTEN PORTRAYS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AS 'CUSTOMERS' BECAUSE OF TUITION FEES.**

Do you think paying tuition fees will change how you view your university education (in comparison to school/college)?  Yes  No

Please explain your answer...

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**9. WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL BE THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FOR YOU AT UNIVERSITY?**

Please provide as much detail as you can...

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**10. HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE TERM 'STUDENT EXPERIENCE' WITHIN A UNIVERSITY CONTEXT?**

No  Yes

If yes, please provide brief details...

---

---

---

**11. WHEN CONSIDERING WHICH UNIVERSITY TO GO TO, DID YOU MAKE USE OF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING (TICK ALL THAT APPLY TO YOU)?**

- |                                                                       |                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The UK university rankings website           | <input type="checkbox"/> National Student Survey data [available online] |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Complete University Guide website        | <input type="checkbox"/> Which? University Guide website                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian/Telegraph University Guide websites | <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendations from teachers                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MMU and/or MMU Cheshire websites             | <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendations from current students           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School/college Careers Office                | <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendations from past graduates             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                 |                                                                          |

**12. WOULD YOU CONSIDER BEING A PARTICIPANT IN FUTURE RESEARCH INTO UNDERGRADUATE EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES HERE AT MMU?**

Yes  No

If yes, please provide your student number, so that you may be contacted in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

*Clare*

# 7.3 FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

To aid analysis, each degree programme had a specific colour for the questionnaire text, the text colours were B.A. (Hons.) Coaching & Sports Development, B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science, and B.A. (Hons.) Physical Education & Sports Pedagogy. Below is an example of the Preliminary Questionnaire for the B.A. (Hons.) Coaching & Sports Development.



## YOUR 1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR AT MMU...



Understanding expectations and experiences of university students is very important. This questionnaire is designed to help better understand the undergraduate university experience at MMU. All answers will be handled with the strictest of confidence, in accordance with the university's ethical procedures and the current Data Protection Act.

### 1. YOUR GENDER

- Female  
 Male

### 2. YOUR AGE

- 18-19    20-21    26-35  
 19-20    21-25    +35

### 3. YOUR PREVIOUS EDUCATION

- School 6<sup>th</sup> Form    College  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. ARE YOU ENJOYING UNIVERSITY SO FAR?

- Yes, extremely so...         moderately so...         no, not really...

If possible, please provide details...

### 3. WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FOR YOU AT UNIVERSITY SO FAR?

Please provide as much detail as you can...

### 4. REFERRING TO ABOVE, WERE YOU EXPECTING THIS TO BE SUCH A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE?

- No    Yes

Please provide brief details...

### 5. FOCUSING SPECIFICALLY ON THE TAUGHT ASPECTS OF UNIVERSITY, IS IT AS YOU EXPECTED?

- No    Yes

Please provide brief details...

### 6. FOCUSING SPECIFICALLY ON THE TAUGHT ASPECTS OF UNIVERSITY, ARE THERE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN YOUR SCHOOL/COLLEGE EXPERIENCE AND YOUR EXPERIENCE AT UNIVERSITY SO FAR?

- No    Yes

Please provide brief details...

### 7. DO YOU THINK THERE IS A DIFFERENT STYLE OF TEACHING AT UNIVERSITY?

- Yes, extremely so...         moderately so...         no, not really...

If, so how does it compare with your school/college experience?

**8. HAVE YOU FOUND A NEED FOR MORE INDEPENDENT STUDY AT UNIVERSITY?**

---

---

Yes, extremely so...	<input type="checkbox"/>	moderately so...	<input type="checkbox"/>	no, not really...	<input type="checkbox"/>
----------------------	--------------------------	------------------	--------------------------	-------------------	--------------------------

If possible, please provide details...

---

---

**9. HAVE YOU FOUND IT EASY TO APPROACH YOUR LECTURERS FOR SUPPORT?**

---

---

Yes, extremely so...	<input type="checkbox"/>	moderately so...	<input type="checkbox"/>	no, not really...	<input type="checkbox"/>
----------------------	--------------------------	------------------	--------------------------	-------------------	--------------------------

How has this compare with your school/college experience?

---

---

**10. NOW FOCUSING SPECIFICALLY ON ASSESSMENTS, WHAT ARE YOUR EXPERIENCES SO FAR?**

---

---

Please provide as much detail as you can...

---

---

**11. CONTINUING TO FOCUS ON ASSESSMENTS: WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT FROM YOUR FEEDBACK?**

---

---

Please provide as much detail as you can...

---

---

**12. FOCUSING SPECIFICALLY ON THE TERM 'STUDENT EXPERIENCE'...**

---

---

Had you heard of the term 'Student Experience' before coming to university? Yes No

*If yes...* having now studied at university, has your understanding/view of this term changed? Yes No

*If no...* having studied at university, have you now heard of the term? Yes No

Please any provide information you think may be useful, for example: How has your view changed, what changed your view of this term...?

---

---

**13. THE MEDIA OFTEN PORTRAYS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AS 'CUSTOMERS' BECAUSE OF TUITION FEES.**

---

---

(A) Before you started at MMU, did you think paying tuition fees would change how you viewed university education? Yes No

(B) After experiencing 2 terms at MMU, has your university experience changed how you view paying tuition fees? Yes No

Please explain your answer...

---

---

**14. WOULD YOU CONSIDER TAKING PART IN AN INTERVIEW TO EXPLORE YOUR EXPERIENCES FURTHER?**

---

---

Yes  No

If yes, please provide your student number, so that you I may contact you in the future. \_\_\_\_\_

---

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Clare



# 7.5 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

## Information Sheet



**Name:** Clare Pheasey

**Course:** Ed.D.

**Building:** Valentine 0-05

**Department:** Education / Exercise and Sport Science,  
Manchester Metropolitan University

**Tel:** 0161 247 5656

**Email:** c.pheasey@mmu.ac.uk

### **'Another brick in the wall? Evolving notions of undergraduate experience and satisfaction, and their [re]positioning within UK Higher Education.'**

*I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.*

#### **Description of research:**

*This research aims to investigate the evolving notions of student experience and satisfaction and their [re]positioning within the post-1992 higher education context in the UK. Questionnaires, small focus group discussions and interviews will be used to capture university staff and students' expectations and experiences, in order to understand the changing pedagogical relationship between tutor and student.*

*We cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from the study will help to increase our understanding of university student experiences in the new marketised, UK higher education environment.*

**Data collection interview/focus group discussions:** *The interviews/focus group discussions will be conducted orally and will be recorded for future analysis> The interviewee will not be sent the questions in advance?*

**What will the questions be about?** *Questions will relate to the pedagogical relationship between student and tutor and will explore their expectations and experiences in a UK university.*

**How will the interview/focus group discussions data be used in the research?** *Interview/focus group data will be transcribed and the coded for themed analysis.*

**Will the interview/focus group discussions be archived for future use?** *Yes*

**Will the participants be anonymised?** *Yes*

*If you wish to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason; this will not affect the standard of care you receive. If you do withdraw from the study we will destroy all your identifiable data/ tape-recorded interviews, but we will use the data collected up to your withdrawal.*

**Consent Form** (Both the investigator and participant should retain a copy of this form)

**Name of Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principal Investigator:** Clare Pheasey \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Title:** 'Another brick in the wall? Evolving notions of undergraduate experience and satisfaction, and their [re]positioning within UK Higher Education.

**Ethics Committee Approval Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Statement**

I have read the participant information sheet for this study and understand what is involved in taking part. Any questions I have about the study, or my participation in it, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I do not have to take part and that I may decide to withdraw from the study at any point without giving a reason. Any concerns I have raised regarding this study have been answered and I understand that any further concerns that arise during the time of the study will be addressed by the investigator. I therefore agree to participate in the study.

It has been made clear to me that, should I feel that my rights are being infringed or that my interests are otherwise being ignored, neglected or denied, I should inform the Registrar and Clerk to the Board of Governors, Head of Governance and Secretariat Team, Manchester Metropolitan University, All Saints Building, All Saints, Manchester, M15 6BH, Tel: 0161 247 1390. who will undertake to investigate my complaint.

Signed (Participant)  Date

Signed (Investigator)  Date

**Who do I contact if I feel my rights have been violated?** Registrar & Clerk to the Board of Governors  
Head of Governance and Secretariat Team, Manchester Metropolitan University, All Saints Building, All Saints  
Manchester, M15 6BH. Tel: 0161 247 1390.

# 7.6 INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM



Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University

Clare Pheasey  
Department of Exercise and Sport Science  
Valentine Building 0-05  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Tel: 0161 247 5656

## Consent Form

**Title of Project:** 'Another brick in the wall?' Evolving notions of undergraduate experience and satisfaction, and their repositioning within UK Higher Education.

**Name of Researcher:** Clare Pheasey

**Participant Identification Code for this project:**

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have understood the information provided to me regarding for the *Investigating first year (Level 4) student experience at MMU* project and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the interview procedure.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason to the named researcher.
3. I understand that my responses will be sound recorded and used for analysis for this research project.
4. I give/do not give permission for my interview recording to be archived as part of this research project, making it available to future researchers.
5. I understand that my responses will remain anonymous.
6. I agree to take part in the above research project.
7. I understand that at my request a transcript of my interview can be made available to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## 7.7 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

In total I conducted eleven interviews with 1<sup>st</sup> years sport students enrolled on my department's three single honours programmes (see Table 20 below).

Table 20: Interviewee undergraduate degree programme details.

Undergraduate programme	Males	Females
B.A. (Hons.) Coaching & Sports Development	0	1
B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	7	2
B.A. (Hons.) Physical Education & Sports Pedagogy	1	0
	8	3

Interviews were scheduled during the final two weeks of the 2015-16 academic year and took place in the same meeting room, at a time convenient to the sport student. As outlined in Table 21, 5 of the 11 (45%) interviewees were categorised as FiF (O'Shea, 2015b:vii), whilst, those with a familial educational portfolio that includes Higher Education, were categorised: Higher Education – Informed (HE-I). In addition, to protect participants' identities pseudonyms were used within this thesis.

Table 21: Interview schedule, Higher Education experience category (First-in-Family = FiF, Higher Education-Informed = HE-I) and assigned pseudonym.

Date	Undergraduate programme	Category	Sex	Pseudonym
9 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 2pm	B.A. (Hons.) PE & Sports Pedagogy	FiF	Male	Mark
11 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 11.30am	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	HE-I	Male	Garry
16 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 9am	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	HE-I	Male	Peter
16 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 11am	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	FiF	Male	Neil
16 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 1pm	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	FiF	Male	Ben
16 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 3pm	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	HE-I	Female	Heidi
18 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 9.30am	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	FiF	Male	Harry
19 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 11.30am	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	HE-I	Male	Keith
20 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 9.30am	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	HE-I	Female	Molly
20 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 12.30pm	B.Sc. (Hons.) Sport & Exercise Science	HE-I	Male	Bryan
20 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 - 3pm	B.A. (Hons.) Coaching & Sports Development	FiF	Female	Linda



## 7.8 INTERVIEW GUIDE

INVITE EACH PARTICIPANT TO TALK ABOUT THEIR PREVIOUS EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY. EXPLORE EXPERIENCES AND HOW THEY LED THEM TO UNIVERSITY...

1. To start with, could you tell me a little about your educational journey (i.e. prompt for information on school/college/A-Levels/BTEC etc.)
2. Has anyone in your family been to university?
  - a. If so, who...?
3. When did you decide you wanted to go to university?
  - a. ...explore why...why MMU...?
  - b. ...explore commuting, living here...?

PROBE THEIR MMU EXPERIENCE: Tell me about your experience as a student here at MMU

1. How have you found the transition between school/college and university?
2. How does a university education differ from school and college?
3. How have you found key aspects of university life...?
  - a. Engaging with the learning...?
  - b. Working independently...?
  - c. Juggling being a full-time student with other aspects of your life...?
  - d. Making ends meet financially
  - e. ...explore why...?
4. TEACHING: What do you think of the teaching on your course?
  - a. Have you found it easy to approach staff for help?
  - b. How would you describe your relationship with your tutors?
  - c. NSS<sup>29</sup>: Are staff good at explaining things...?
  - d. NSS: Do they make the subject interesting...?
  - e. NSS: Have you found the course intellectually stimulating...?
5. FEEDBACK: Have you received any feedback on your work?
  - a. NSS: Have the comments on your work been helpful...?
  - b. How have you used your feedback?
  - c. ...explore why...?

---

<sup>29</sup>It was agreed that alongside questions specifically aligned to the case study aims, a small number of questions associated with my day-to-day role as Principal Lecturer for Student Experience could also be included (to assist with one of my department's targets: to drive up NSS scores). As a result, a small number of questions were added use the National Student [Satisfaction] Survey (NSS) questions as a guide (for clarity these questions were assigned the acronym: NSS – see Figure 5).

## PROBE THEIR EXPECTATIONS OF A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

1. What do you want to get out of your university experience?
2. Were you anxious about university study before you started the course?
  - a. If so, why...?
3. What do think have been and will be the greatest challenges for you at university?
  - b. ...explore, expectations, study demands, etc....

## EXPLORE VIEWS ON TUITION FEES AND THE NOTION OF STUDENTS AS 'CUSTOMERS' WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SETTING

1. Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university?
  - a. If so, how...?
2. How do you feel about paying for your university education?
3. The media often portrays university students as 'customers' because of fees.
  - b. Has paying tuition fees changed how you view your university education?
4. Do you see yourself as a customer...?
  - c. ...explore, value for money, expectations, etc....

## EXPLORE NOTIONS OF 'STUDENT EXPERIENCE'

1. Have you heard of the term 'student experience' within a university context?
  - a. If so, had you heard of the term before entering university?
2. What does the term 'student experience' mean to you?

## EXAMINE VIEWS REGARDING THEIR EMPLOYABILITY AFTER UNIVERSITY

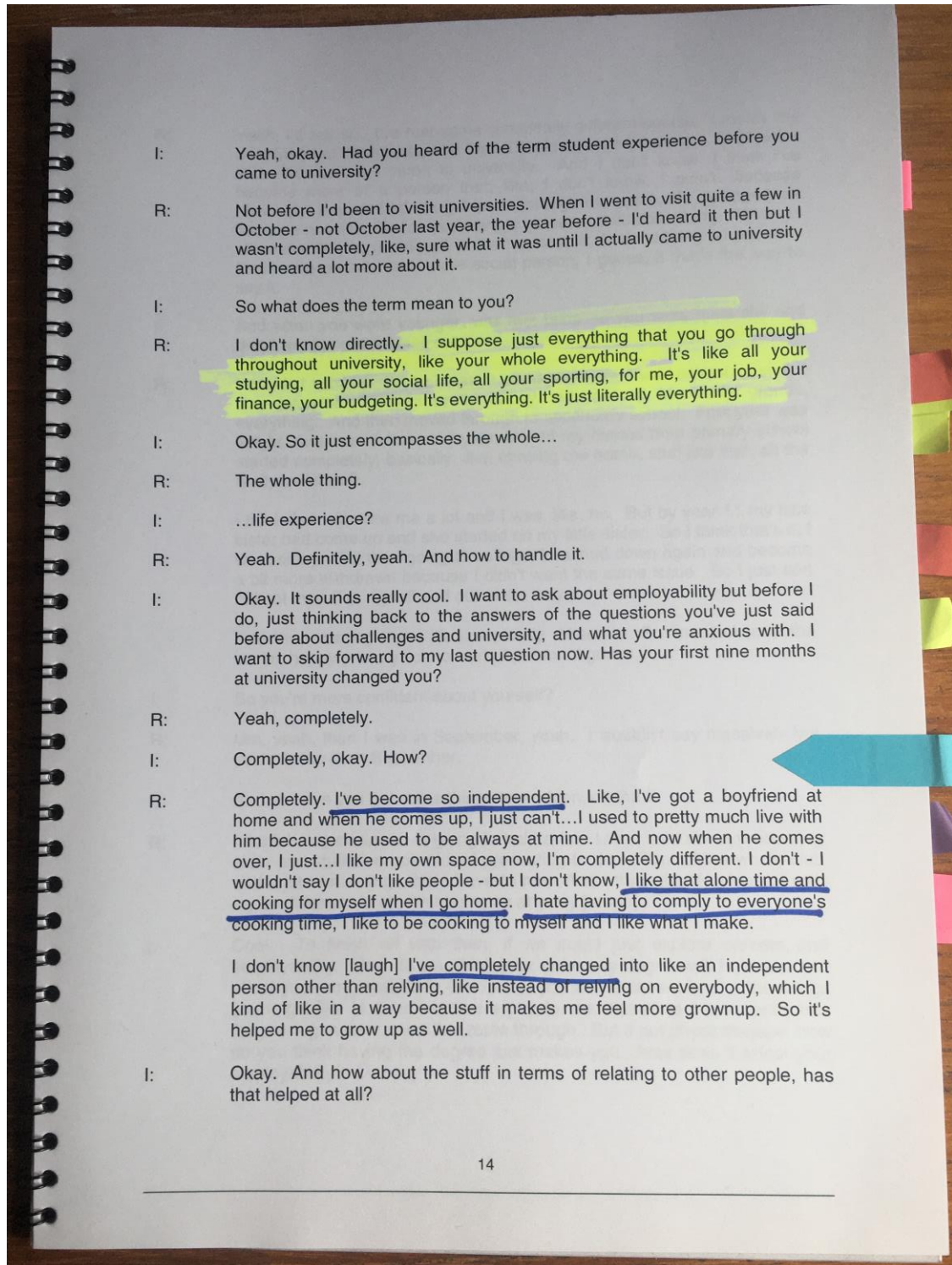
1. How do you think a university degree will affect your employability prospects?
  - a. ...explore why...?
2. Does your course include employability elements?
  - a. If so, how do you rate these in comparison with the core subject matter?
  - b. Have you engaged with these units in the same way as core subjects?
  - c. ...explore why...?

## SO FAR...

1. Has university [...so far] changed you...?

## 7.9 INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

A page taken from one of the individual interview transcripts, demonstrating the layout and conventions used to transcribe the data.



## 7.10 PARTICIPANT DETAILS

As sport students entering university for the first time, the participants within this study possess a kaleidoscope of cultural and educational experiences, in conjunction with a diverse array of *capitals* and *habitus*. Participant demographics are reported in Table 22 below.

Table 22: Participant demographic data.

	Gender distribution	Age range (years)	Previous educational experience
<b>Preliminary questionnaire</b> (93 participants)	<b>CSD students:</b> Male - 23 and Female - 4 <b>PESP students:</b> Male - 14 and Female - 4 <b>SES students:</b> Male - 31 and Female - 17	18-19 = 62 [66.6%] 19-20 = 18 [19.4%] 20-21 = 5 [5.4%] 21-25 = 3 [3.2%] 26-35 = 4 [4.3%] >36 = 1 [1.1%]	6 <sup>th</sup> Form = 33 [35%] College = 59 [63%] Other = 1 [1%]
<b>Follow-up questionnaire</b> (96 participants)	<b>CSD students:</b> Male - 23 and Female - 9 <b>PESP students:</b> Male - 15 and Female - 3 <b>SES students:</b> Male - 33 and Female - 13	18-19 = 44 [45.8%] 19-20 = 16 [16.6%] 20-21 = 23 [23.9%] 21-25 = 9 [9.4%] 26-35 = 3 [3.1%] >36 = 1 [1.1%]	6 <sup>th</sup> Form = 37 [39%] College = 58 [63%] Other = 1 [1%]
<b>Interview</b> (11 participants)	<b>CSD students:</b> Male - 0 and Female - 1 <b>PESP students:</b> Male - 1 and Female - 0 <b>SES students:</b> Male - 7 and Female - 2	18-19 = 5 [45.5%] 19-20 = 1 [9.1%] 20-21 = 4 [36.4%] 21-25 = 0 [0.0%] 26-35 = 0 [0.0%] >36 = 1 [9.1%]	6 <sup>th</sup> Form = 3 [27.3%] College = 7 [63.6%] Other = 1 [9.1%]

Beyond the demographics reported above, family Higher Education experience was of paramount importance to this doctoral research. Prior familial experience is reported in Table 23 overleaf.

Table 23: Responses to: Has anyone in your family been to university... and if so, who? Using the O'Shea and colleagues' (2017) definition five sport students were identified as first in family (FiF) and six as Higher Education-Informed (HE-I).

<b>Number of sport students</b>	<b>11 Interviewees (100%)</b>
First in Family (FiF) to attend university	5 (46%)
Sport students with graduate parents	2 (18%)
Sport students with graduate parents and siblings	2 (18%)
Sport students with graduate siblings	2 (18%)
Sport students with a graduate spouse	1 (9%)

Whilst the exact location of the previous family experience in Higher Education is presented within Table 24 below.

Table 24: In response to question 4 on the preliminary questionnaire: Does anyone in your family have a university degree (tick all that apply): 57 sport students (61%) were classified as first in family (FiF) according to O'Shea and colleagues' (2015b:vii): [A] first-in-family student is defined as no one in the immediate family of origin, including siblings or parents, having previously attended a higher education institution or having completed a university degree. Note: rows indicate the 'immediate family' criteria and 36 as were classified as HE-I.

<b>Number of sport students</b>	<b>All responses = 93 (100%)</b>
Sport students with graduate parents only	20 (22%)
Sport students with graduate parents and siblings	7 (8%)
Sport students with graduate siblings only	13 (14%)
Sport students with a graduate spouse only	1 (1%)

## 7.11 STATISTICAL DATA

Table 25: A summary outlining all statistical methods used.

Statistical Method	Nature of Analysis	Research Null Hypothesis to be tested	Comments
<b>Fisher Freeman Halton Test</b>	Test of Association for Categorical Data	No association exists between FiF and university.	Test is more appropriate when sparse table is observed in the contingency tables. Does not rely on the assumption that the expected frequencies are larger than 5 which is assumed in the conventional Chi-Square approach (see pages 102 and 117 for examples of the test application and overleaf for the output data).
<b>Chi-Squared</b>	Test of Association for categorical data	No association exists between the two categorical variables (for example: FiF status and reason to study at university)	Standard test applied when assumptions met (see page 117 for an example of the test application and overleaf for the output data).
<b>Krusk-Wallis Test</b>	Quantitative comparison	No significant difference exists in the ordinal questionnaire scores across family groups.	Outcome data is ordinal rather than continuous so nonparametric test adopted (see Figure 12 for an example of the test application).
<b>Stacked Bar Plots</b>	Graphical Summary		Descriptive summary of the data. Provides relative decomposition of the attitudinal scale by programme (see Figure 12 for an example of graphical summary).
<b>Box Charts</b>	Graphical Summary		Method for graphically depicting groups of numerical data through their quartiles. The spacings between the different parts of the <b>box</b> indicate the degree of dispersion (spread) and skewness in the data and show outliers. Thus we can infer which groups give more <i>consistent</i> answers by inspecting the interquartile range which is marker of variability (see Figure 13 on page 106 for an example of graphical summary).

## Reasons to attend university data (discussed on pages 93-100):

Fisher Freeman Halton Test was applied to investigate the association between the categorical variables, as this test takes into account the sparse nature of some of the cells.

Table 26: This yielded a value of the test statistic as 2.21 with a p-value of 0.766 (bolded), suggesting little evidence of an association between the categorical variables of first in family (FiF) and HE-I, and reasons to attend university

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	2.382 <sup>a</sup>	4	.666	.696		
Likelihood Ratio	3.062	4	.548	.651		
<b>Fisher's Exact Test</b>	<b>2.009</b>			<b>.766</b>		
Linear-by-Linear Association	.430 <sup>b</sup>	1	.512	.552	.296	.077
N of Valid Cases	93					

a. 4 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .75.

b. The standardized statistic is .656.

Table 27: Contingency table of first in family (FiF) and career motivation.

		Money/Employment		Total
		Education	Career	
FiF	HE-I	13	22	35
	FiF	17	41	58
Total		30	63	93

Table 28: Test of Association between first in family (FiF) and attitude. This yielded a value of the test statistic of 3.007, p-value of 0.610 (bolded) suggesting no link between the categorical variables of FiF and HE-I, and attitude towards tuition fees

Fisher's Freeman Halton Exact Test	3.007			<b>.610</b>
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The McNemar's test was applied to assess changes in attitude towards fee and experience.

Table 29: Association of change in attitude to fees from starting university to completing first year .

### Before \* After Crosstabulation

		After		Total
		1.00	2.00	
Before	1.00	17	17	34
	2.00	17	45	62
Total		34	62	96

### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
McNemar Test		1.000 <sup>a</sup>
N of Valid Cases	96	

a. Binomial distribution used.

Table 30: Association of change in 'Student Experience' from starting university to completing first year

### Before\_exp \* After\_exp Crosstabulation

		After_exp		Total
		1.00	2.00	
Before_exp	1.00	21	34	55
	2.00	23	18	41
Total		44	52	96

### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
McNemar Test		.185 <sup>a</sup>
N of Valid Cases	96	



**Debt aversion data (discussed on pages 100-109):**

Kruskal Wallis Test was applied to test the variability between cohort responses to question 7 on the preliminary questionnaire: Did paying university tuition fees influence your decision to go to university? Data coded accordingly: no, unimportant = 1; no = 2; moderately so = 3; yes = 4; yes, extremely = 5, for the three undergraduate programmes.

Table 31: Percentiles of attitude towards university fees across programmes. Interquartile Ranges are 2, 2, 1 respectively for CSD, PESP and SES, indicating less variation in the SES cohort.

**Percentiles**

Programme	5	10	25	50	75	90	95
CSD	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.6000
PESP	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	3.0000	3.0000	.
SES	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	2.0000	3.0000	3.0000
			Lower Quartile	Median	Upper		

Table 32: Results of Krusk Wallis Test. Result is borderline significant, as p-value close to the  $\alpha=0.05$  set for significance.

**Test Statistics<sup>a,b</sup>**

VAR00017	
Chi-Square	5.906
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	<b>.052</b>

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Programme

# 7.12 RAW DATA

Table 33: Responses to question 8 on the initial questionnaire: The media often portrays university students as 'customers' because of tuition fees, the sport students were asked: Do you think paying tuition fees will change how you view your university education (in comparison to school/college)? Students were asked to indicate their response using yes or no, and to explain their answer. Reoccurring themes (uncoded in black):

		Debt concern	Provision quality	Personal investment	Impetus to study	Payment Irrelevance
		All responses 93 (100%)	CSD 27 (100%)	PESP 18 (100%)	SES 48 (100%)	
	Yes	37 (40%)	10 (37%)	6 (33%)	21 (44%)	
			<p>Worrying about all the debt will make it harder to give 100% at uni</p> <p>High standard expected</p> <p>Level of education will be good</p> <p>Expect a good level of teaching</p> <p>I'm paying, so I want the best experience</p> <p>Make me want to work harder</p> <p>More determined to achieve a higher grade</p> <p>Push me further knowing how much its cost</p> <p>Don't want to have wasted my money</p> <p>If I don't get my degree I will have wasted my money</p> <p>As I'm paying I want to get the best out of it</p>	<p>High standard expected</p> <p>Level of education will be good</p> <p>Expect a good level of teaching</p> <p>Will make me work harder to get the grades I want</p> <p>Shows how much the education and knowledge is worth</p>	<p>Makes it difficult for many to come to uni</p> <p>Expecting a quality experience</p> <p>Expect a good level of teaching</p> <p>It will be more professional</p> <p>Higher expectations of the teaching than at college</p> <p>Expect a higher standard of teaching and equipment</p> <p>Expect more in terms of teaching and facilities</p> <p>Make me try harder, Put 100% effort in</p> <p>More focused on my learning</p> <p>Can't waste my time here</p> <p>Work hard to get the grades I want</p> <p>Will make me keep my head down and work hard</p> <p>Feel like I need to take it more seriously than college</p> <p>If I don't turn up and work hard it's on me</p> <p>Makes it more important</p> <p>College was free, so I didn't really value it</p> <p>Everyone will have a more positive attitude towards learning</p> <p>Fees must be paid back, so you have to value it</p> <p>Need to make the most of the experience</p> <p>I view uni as a place where you can't afford to fail</p> <p>Education should be free</p> <p>Education should be affordable</p> <p>Feels wrong that we have to pay</p> <p>University acknowledge I'm paying</p> <p>The qualification is very important for my career</p>	

		17 (63%)	12 (67%)	27 (56%)
<b>No</b>	56 (60%)	Enhance my career	Set me up for my future career	Worried at first about the debt, but now I'm here its ok
		Paying for something beneficial for my career	Helps with my future employment	Concerned, as I will leave 30K in debt before I start working
		I will judge based on my experience	More pressure to succeed for some, but if you try hard at everything it shouldn't change anything	Cost of living change my view of living at uni compared to being supported by parents
		No real affect	High standard of teaching expected	View this as a major commitment into myself
		Expect to pay	Doesn't change my view of university	Need it for my career
		Fees not a problem	No, I'm just here for the education	No, it's what I need for my chosen career
		Good payment scheme	Paying is completely acceptable	Always viewed as major commitment
		Paying for something I enjoy	Costs a lot but there's support and help available	Don't bother me
		Fees are not to high considering what's involved	I will not let money effect what I do	Doesn't bother me
		Costs a lot but there's support and help available	Its education, university is just more important	Costs will be covered
				Understand there is a cost
				Repayment scheme is fair
				Repayment won't be difficult
				Not important to worry about the money
				There should be a sacrifice for good education so its ok
				Qualification (degree) is priceless
				Qualification is very important
				No, a degree is very important
	All responses 93 (100%)	CSD 27 (100%)	PESP 18 (100%)	SES 48 (100%)

## 7.13 DEGREE ATTAINMENT DATA

Key data from the Department of Exercise and Sport Science's report degree attainment by student characteristics<sup>30</sup>. In total 556 sport students graduated from Dept. ESS between 2014/15 and 2018/19. Descriptive diagnostics indicated that entry qualification, ethnicity, and gender correlate with good degree attainment. The department data illustrated in Figure 16 below, indicates that that: academic (A' level), white, female sport students have consistently performed better than BAME, vocational male peers over the last 5 years.

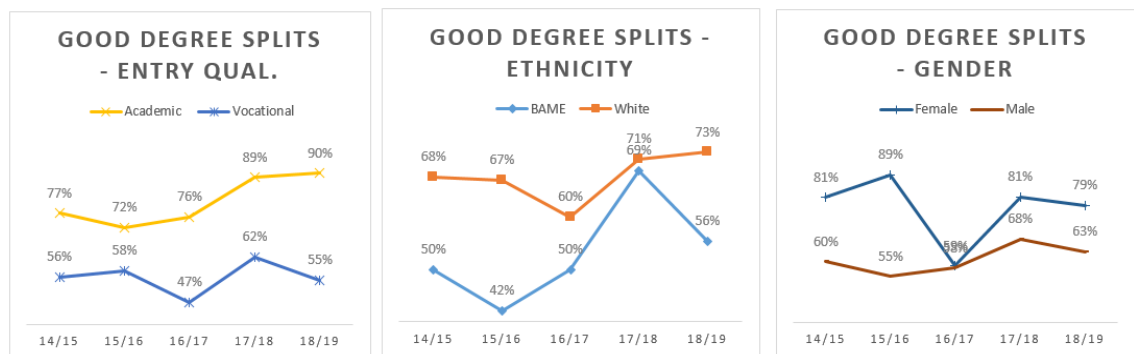


Figure 16: Department of Exercise and Sport Science degree attainment data by student characteristics: entry qualification (Vocational/Academic), ethnicity (BAME/White), and gender (Male/Female).

A breakdown of the 2017-18 attainment data by undergraduate sport degree programme is illustrated in Figure 17 below.

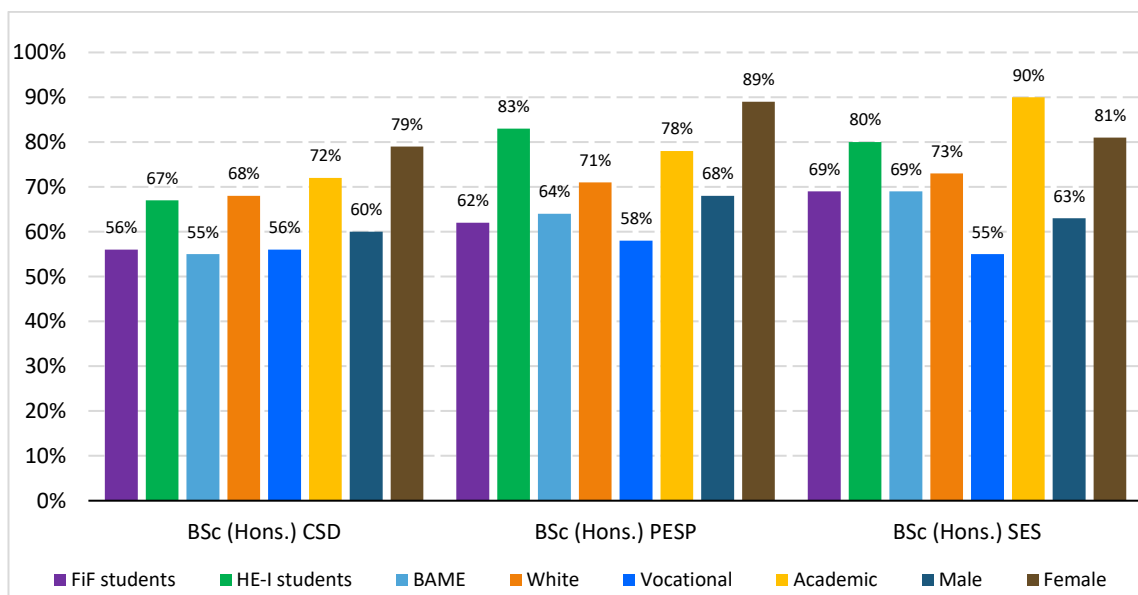






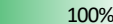



























Figure 17: 2017-18 undergraduate degree attainment data by student characteristics: family educational status (FIF/HE-I), ethnicity (BAME/White), entry qualification (Vocational/Academic), and gender (Male/Female). Note: Academic (i.e. A-Levels, Scottish Highers, International Baccalaureate) and Vocational (i.e. BTEC, NVQ or Access course),

<sup>30</sup> For this cohort, commuting was not viewed as possible predictor of good degree, as only 7 students identified themselves as commuters (through central university data collection measures).

A logistic regression analysis was run to look at the impact of gender, disability, ethnicity, first generation, entry qualification, age (young/mature), and socio-economic status (POLAR3) on good degree attainment. Findings suggest that the strongest predictor of good degree is entry qualification and gender, followed by ethnicity. However, the impact of ethnicity was non-significant on a 95% confidence interval ( $p = 0.159$ ). The impacts of other variables were small and non-significant. In contrast, the impact of socio-economic status was small but significant. Below Table 34 illustrates the predicted probability of getting a good honours degree based on key student characteristics, available for analysis.

Table 34: The predicted probability of getting a good honours degree based on key student characteristics (Male/Female; BAME/White; Vocational/Academic and Low socio-economic status / High socio-economic status)

Gender	Ethnicity	Entry Quals	SES	Success	Failure	Total	p-Obs	p-Pred
Male	BAME	Vocational	Low SES	11	13	24	 46%	 34%
Male	BAME	Vocational	High SES	10	19	29	 34%	 41%
Male	White	Vocational	Low SES	40	49	89	 45%	 48%
Female	BAME	Vocational	Low SES	4	0	4	 100%	 54%
Male	White	Vocational	High SES	59	44	103	 57%	 56%
Female	BAME	Vocational	High SES	3	1	4	 75%	 61%
Male	BAME	Academic	Low SES	4	3	7	 57%	 63%
Female	White	Vocational	Low SES	19	14	33	 58%	 68%
Male	BAME	Academic	High SES	9	6	15	 60%	 69%
Female	White	Vocational	High SES	28	8	36	 78%	 74%
Male	White	Academic	Low SES	24	7	31	 77%	 75%
Female	BAME	Academic	Low SES	2	0	2	 100%	 79%
Male	White	Academic	High SES	71	16	87	 82%	 80%
Female	BAME	Academic	High SES	4	3	7	 57%	 83%
Female	White	Academic	Low SES	20	2	22	 91%	 87%
Female	White	Academic	High SES	28	3	31	 90%	 90%

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# 2012

All you really need to know for the moment is that the universe is a lot more complicated than you might think, even if you start from a position of thinking it's pretty damn complicated in the first place.

— Douglas Adams (1995:723)

# 2020

To be able to see and describe the world as it is, you have to be ready to be always dealing with things that are complicated, confused, impure, uncertain, all of which runs counter to the usual idea of intellectual rigour.

— Pierre Bourdieu (1991:259)