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UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE KEY INFLUENCERS AND DRIVERS ON
STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Sunderland for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Dedication

With thanks and love to my family, especially my wife Carley who is forever my support in all I do. Also, my son George who is my motivation in life and brightens our lives every day. He also gave me great relief from the thesis to play with him and his 'red cars' when needed!

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Final thanks to my family for their advice, understanding and patience, especially my parents who have been a constant support to me throughout my life.

Abstract

Background

Higher educational institutions are now, more than ever, operating in a significantly competitive marketplace partly due to increased tuition fees, greater choice for students and increased student demands that are being placed upon the institutions. As a consequence of the changing dynamics within the sector, the effective marketing of the university can be the difference between success and failure. To compliment this marketing perspective, it has been identified that HEI's also need to actively explore the factors that influence student expectations of students within their institution. The rationale for this is that a satisfactory student experience can lead to many benefits for the university, including positive feedback survey scores or increased word of mouth reviews. These can then be used by the institution in their marketing efforts towards attracting prospective new students to the university. However, if the institution does not meet the needs of their students there is an indication in the literature that shows a poor service delivery by the HEI can lead to negative student perceptions of the university experience. This can lead to student dissatisfaction which will be reflected in negative reviews and unhappiness with the institution. Thus, in order for universities to successfully manage their students' expectations they must understand the drivers upon satisfaction of the university experience.

The current context

Therefore, based upon this context the thesis has explored the influences on undergraduate student expectations within the higher education sector and identifies the key drivers upon a satisfactory student experience. These influencers and drivers are further explored through the study which has taken place over a three-year period where it was determined that student perceptions and expectations of their university experience changes as they move through their programme of study. A conceptual framework has been developed to further explore these factors. The framework uses key dimensions from *'Plato's allegory of the cave philosophy'* as a metaphor to explore the student journey holistically from beginning to end, i.e. pre-enrollment to Graduation. The research will show that by understanding the key

influencers on the student experience, HEI's can effectively manage the expectations of their students and ensure a satisfactory student experience is given.

Methodology

The research adopts a pragmatist philosophy and uses a mixed-methods approach comprising of quantitative questionnaire surveys and qualitative semi-structured focus groups of undergraduate students at a UK institution. The data was collected using a longitudinal data collection approach over a three-year period. The research results are analysed using appropriate methods including thematic coding and regression analysis.

Analysis

The results recognised that there is a correlation between student expectations and their satisfaction with the student experience. It was identified that the key factors that impacted upon satisfaction were staff engagement, career opportunities, social interaction and support from lecturers, including feedback received. The findings also identified how student expectations changed over the period of university study. It was found that year 2 was a particularly important year in relation to student satisfaction, whereas in year 3 students placed a greater demand on the 'service received' from the institution, especially in relation to staff engagement.

Contribution to knowledge

Therefore, this research has provided an original contribution to both theory and practice through the development of a conceptual framework into the student experience. The framework developed will be used to bring a unique theoretical contribution of knowledge to the sector. The practical contribution is that the research findings will allow HEI's to manage the student experience and make decisions to efficiently market the institution to prospective students.

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List of Abbreviations

ACIE - Allegory of the Cave in Education

HE – Higher Education

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEI – Higher Education Institution

IBM SPSS - International Business Machine Statistical Package for Social Sciences

NSS – National Study Survey

RO – Research Objective

RQ – Research Question

SLC - Student Loans Company

TEF – Teaching Excellence Framework

WOM – Word of mouth

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

It can be argued that student expectations of their higher education experience is at an all-time high for the sector. This is in part due to the raising of tuition fees, greater choice of institution for students and increased demands on the service offering of institutions (Douglas et al, 2006; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Browne, 2010). As a consequence of these changing industry dynamics, the survival and success of institutions has become important. The result of which is that universities within the sector need to better aware of the factors that influence potential and current students and ensure that they are effectively marketing the institution based upon this. Once these factors are understood then they may become easier to manage for the higher education institution (HEI) and increase the likelihood of creating a satisfactory university experience for their students. Alongside this, increased competition within the market has meant that the availability of information on HEI performance has improved and meant that the expectations of students within the sector has risen (Telford and Masson, 2005; Fredrickson, 2012; Lenton, 2015; Dandridge, 2018). This raises questions regarding how institutions develop suitable mechanisms to manage these changing expectations. HEI's need to ensure they are achieving their objectives in relation to the recruitment and retention of students, and ensuring that they are competitive in the marketplace by attracting students to their institution rather than their competitors. It is also important for the institution to identify and establish the key factors that influence expectations of the student experience received within the university to aid their marketing efforts. Therefore, based upon these factors the thesis research title is; *'An investigation into the key influencers and drivers on student's expectations of their higher education institution'*. With the overarching aim of this thesis to identify a framework for HEI's to understand and manage the expectations of their students and improve their marketing of the university. These will be further explained in section 1.2 of this chapter as well as introducing key questions and objectives that the thesis will answer.

In order to effectively explore the research objectives it was important that the correct research methods were undertaken, after examining the differing philosophical approaches it was deemed that a pragmatist approach was most suitable for this research as it uses the method of data collection that is most appropriate to the research objectives. Based upon this philosophy a mixed methodology was adapted, comprising quantitative questionnaire surveys and qualitative semi-structured focus groups. The data was collected from undergraduate students at a UK institution, in order to explore and understand the influencers on student perceptions and expectations of their university experience. The research was further underpinned through the use of a longitudinal data collection process where the research questions and objectives were tested at each year of study (1st, 2nd and 3rd) to identify how student expectations of the university experience changed over the period of study within the institution.

The research conducted within this thesis identified gaps in the current literature in relation to the management of student expectations in higher education and has therefore developed a framework that can be used by HEI's across the sector to understand and manage student expectations within their institution. The research will also show that by understanding the key influencers on the student experience, universities are in a better position to effectively meet the needs of their students and increase the likelihood of a satisfactory experience within the institution. The concept of the university experience has been widely explored (Douglas et al, 2006; Alves and Raposo, 2010) and key factors which influence the experience defined. These include; the role of academic staff, the student environment created within the university, previous institution experiences of the student and the influence of family and friends amongst others. It is acknowledged that these factors can directly influence the expectations set of the institution as well as establishing a perception of the service experience students will gain within the HEI (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Further literature relating to student expectations showed that there were several differing viewpoints on the subject, however there was general agreement among theorists that understanding of student expectations by HEI's lead to a more conducive environment for student satisfaction (DeShields et al., 2005; Douglas et al., 2006; Hermans et al., 2009; Walker and Palmer, 2011). The higher education marketplace continues to grow

which has led to an increasingly competitive landscape with students' now more than ever being able to 'shop around' for their educational needs (Browne, 2010). Despite the general agreement, identified above, there was still several contradicting perspectives on the topic and no definitive model that allowed institutions to manage the expectations of their students. As such this identified an area of interest for the researcher to further investigate in this thesis, the rationale for this is further explained in section 1.3 of this chapter.

1.1 Research title, overarching aim, questions and objectives

As has been identified a number of gaps in the literature were identified in the literature which formed the basis for exploration of this thesis. From these findings thesis aims, questions and objectives were developed. It was identified that the relationship between institutions and their students throughout their time at the university and post-university is an important consideration for universities (Alves and Raposo, 2006; Browne, 2010). Also by understanding the student perspective in this relationship will enable more effective management and control of student expectations during their time at the university in order to increase the likelihood of a satisfactory student experience (Douglas et al, 2006; Alves and Raposo, 2010). Satisfied students were found to be more likely to positively comment about the HEI and in turn the institution will be able to use this feedback to promote themselves favourable to prospective students (Tomlinson, 2008; Scutter et al., 2011; Lenton, 2015). To allow the researcher to further explore these findings the following research title, overarching aim and research questions, as well as the specific research objectives, were developed for the thesis.

Research title

'An investigation into the key influencers and drivers on students' expectations of their higher education institution'

Overarching research aim

The overarching aim of this thesis is to *identify a framework for higher educational institutions to understand and manage the expectations of their students*. The aim of the framework is to allow universities to understand and effectively manage students' expectations to create a satisfactory student experience within the institution.

Research questions and specific research objectives based on the overarching aim and research title were developed as shown in table 1.1 below.

Key research questions	Specific research objectives	References to research gaps
What are the key drivers upon student choice of HEI and do these influence their perception of the university? (RQ1)	To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction at the institution. (RO1)	Telford and Masson (2005); Longden, 2006; Tomlinson (2008); Sabri, 2011; Scutter et al (2011); Fredrickson (2012); Lenton (2015); Dandridge (2018)
What are the key drivers upon student expectations of university? (RQ2)	To identify the drivers on student expectations and identify the influence upon the university experience. (RO2)	Tierney (1999); Fazey and Fazey (2001); Byrne and Flood (2005); Christie et al. (2006); Brown and Carasso (2013); Woodall et al, (2014)
Do student expectations stay the same during their time at university or change? (RQ3)	To identify if student expectations remain consistent or change over the period of their academic study. (RO3)	Parasuraman et al, (1988); Cronin and Taylor (1992); Keaveney and Young (1997); Alves and Raposo (2006); Douglas et al. (2008)

Table 1.1, Research questions, objectives and key references

1.2 Rationale for conducting this research

When undertaking the early research for the thesis the initial interest was focussed on how HEI's were marketed to prospective students, as the literature search developed the concept of marketization (Jongbloed, 2003; Furedi, 2010; Molesworth et al., 2010; Brown, 2015) within higher education was deemed an area of interest to the researcher. The rationale behind this was that the researchers early career experiences had been in the marketing sector and as such this is where a passion for the subject developed. As the researchers career progressed into the education sector there was an obvious link between the two career paths, for example, does effective marketing practices by the university increase student numbers. However, as the research developed following the literature search, the focus of the study was refined to the notion of what drives student satisfaction within their institution and how this informs student choice of university. Thereby the topics of researcher interest were combined to explore the elements that drive the university experience and related to attracting (marketing to) prospective university students. The rationale for the research is further identified below and is shown to have two key outcomes; the first of which is that an understanding of students' expectations is shown to be a

key driver for HEI's in the current dynamic environment. Universities are ranked by their students through end of year surveys, such as the National Student Survey (NSS), which cover a range of aspects within the institution, including teaching quality and service provision amongst others. These were identified in the literature search as areas of interest to this study.

The results of these surveys are increasingly used by prospective students of the HEI to make a decision on which university and programme they wish to study (Tauringana, 2016). The surveys are designed to gauge students' satisfaction with their institution's performance and therefore play a key role in setting expectations of performance within the institution. Prospective students of the university use these rankings to make key decisions on whether to apply and study at the institution and as such play an important role in the marketing of the university. It is therefore in the interests of HEI's to be aware of the satisfaction levels of their students in order that these can be effectively managed to ensure approval of their university experience is kept at the highest possible levels. This will also enable the university to make a conscious effort to successfully market themselves to potential students thus providing increased revenue through tuition fees payments. This discussion is again relevant to the research undertaken in this thesis and relates to the initial research focus of this thesis, the marketisation of higher education.

The second outcome for the research is to develop a recognised measurement framework that can be used by HEI's to determine the key factors influencing student expectations. By understanding what expectations students have of the institution then HEI's are better positioned to manage these and as a result aim to provide a positive university experience. Hameed and Amjad, (2011) identify that students are more likely to be more satisfied with a positive university experience. This suggested that there was a need to conduct further analysis of these topics and bring together a holistic method for testing the key drivers of the student experience. The research conducted in this thesis has develop a framework that can be used across the higher education sector to allow HEI's to manage key areas of the student journey through the institution. The framework has addressed the key influences on students' perceptions and expectations at each year of their study.

It was also supported by the experiences of the researcher who, as a lecturer working in the higher education sector, is very familiar with the demands of meeting student expectations. Teaching and appropriate pastoral support needs to be undertaken to ensure students have a positive experience within the institution. The researchers' personal values towards teaching standards also influenced the research topic and further supported the significance of undertaking this research for the thesis.

Thus, in order to answer the research questions, it was decided to base the research upon an institution the researcher was familiar with and had suitable access to. As a result, the institution where the researcher currently works was chosen, this will be discussed further in chapter 4. The study has therefore applied the topics identified in the literature to the institution with the object of answering the research questions and objectives. Added to this, the research allowed for a direct analysis and exploration of the relationship between the institution and their students by exploring these key factors in a practical context. The benefit of analysing the relationship in the context of a contemporary university was to enable the researcher to understand the factors that were important to students in their university environment and define how this impacted upon their higher education experience. Therefore, the benefits of the study to the higher education sector are two-fold 1. to better define the chosen area of study and explore any gaps in the existing literature and 2. use the setting of a contemporary higher education institution to explore the relationship between student expectations of the university and their perceived actual experience gained.

As has been identified, to achieve the research objectives of the thesis a longitudinal mixed methodology approach was undertaken, based upon a pragmatic philosophy that was deemed the most effective and appropriate approach to explore and understand the influencers on undergraduate student expectations. The rationale for undertaking a longitudinal approach to research was to enable data collection to be gathered over the entirety of the students' university programme and gauge how and if their experience changes. Data was collected in two stages, the first stage was a quantitative questionnaire completed by 176 undergraduate students across their 3 year period of study. The questionnaires were distributed to the participants at the start of each academic year. The responses from this data collection were used to

inform the second stage of the data collection, these being qualitative focus groups. In total, three semi-structured qualitative focus groups were undertaken with students who had also undertaken the quantitative questionnaires. The student responses provided further insight into the perceptions and expectations of their university experience and this provided great insight to address the research questions. The longitudinal mixed method approach undertaken therefore proved to be an effective method to enable the researcher to answer the questions and objectives of the thesis, as will be demonstrated throughout the thesis.

1.3 Contribution to knowledge

This thesis has a two-fold contribution to knowledge, firstly to the academic field and secondly how it is practically applied. The *academic* contribution to knowledge is that the relationship between students and their higher education institution will be explored through the developed conceptual framework where key dimensions will be identified and used to explore the significant influences upon students' expectations. By acknowledging what shapes and drives student expectations it has allowed this research to explore and further investigate key concepts in relation to the drivers of student satisfaction. A significant factor of the analysis is that it was undertaken over a three-year longitudinal period of time, resulting in an identification of the key changes in the expectations of students throughout their university experience.

A conceptual framework was developed to explore the student journey holistically from beginning to end, i.e. pre-enrollment to Graduation. The framework used key dimensions from *'Plato's allegory of the cave philosophy'* to investigate and understand the key influencers on the student experience. This will allow HEI's to firstly effectively manage the expectations of their students and ensure a satisfactory student experience is given. Secondly, institutions can use these positive student experiences as a marketing tool for the institution to attract prospective undergraduates. This research therefore has delivered a new and insightful analysis of the longitudinal student journey which is explored from an alternative philosophical viewpoint. The research findings have identified that the university experience is influenced by students' pre-institutional perceptions which inform their expectations within the HEI. It has recognised that a holistic view of the student journey was undertaken to ascertain the influencers upon the university experience. Thus these

findings have contributed new knowledge to the field of study, with the conceptual framework developed suggested to be adapted as good practice in the field of research.

Secondly, there are several *practical* contributions that the research can bring to higher education institutions. The fundamental practical contribution is that the research findings has shown HEI's can effectively manage the student experience within the institution. It has been found that students are now ranking institutions via their performance e.g. through performance surveys such as the National Student Survey. The results of these surveys are used by potential students of the HEI to make a decision on which university and programme they wish to study and cover a range of aspects within the institution, including teaching quality and facilities available. Therefore the importance of providing a satisfactory experience will enable the university to more efficiently market the institution to prospective students. The findings from this thesis will allow practitioners in the field to understand and implement improvements to the student experience within their university and allow for practical application of the findings to positively impact the student. The conceptual framework developed can offer guidance to staff within the university in order that academic and support experiences be improved and effectively contribute to a satisfactory student journey. These satisfactory student experiences can then be used as a marketing tool to position the institution positively to prospective students through their marketing material.

1.4 Summary of chapter

This chapter has presented an overview of the rationale for the research and identified how the research title, aims and objectives will be explored. Section 1.0 introduces the topic of research and gives an overview of student expectations in higher education. Section 1.1 further clarifies the rationale for undertaking the research by identifying the practical and conceptual advantages of the study, including an overview of the methodology to collect data. The research title, overarching aim, questions and objectives are again listed below, for clarity.

(RO1) - To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction at the institution.

(RO2) - To identify the drivers on student expectations and identify the influence upon the university experience.

(RO3) - To identify if student expectations remain consistent or change over the period of their academic study. (RO3)

The final section of the chapter explains the two-fold contribution of the research and identifies its practical and academic implications. The next chapter of the thesis will undertake a critical review of the key literature relating to the key areas of interest in relation to expectations of the student experience. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a deeper understanding of the research title of this thesis.

Chapter Two

Critical Review of Existing Literature

2.0 Introduction

Today's higher education sector is increasingly competitive and ever changing, leading to higher education institutions needing to be adaptable to changing market demands. The increase in the intensity of competition amongst institutions has meant that understanding their students' needs is critical and ensuring they have a satisfactory university experience a key objective for all HEI's. Students now have an ever increased 'power' balance in their relationship with their university (Browne, 2010) which impacts upon pre-enrolment at the institution through to Graduation. Therefore it is vital that HEI's ensure that they effectively manage, and where possible control, student expectations during their time at the university to ensure a satisfactory student experience is given (Alves and Raposo, 2006; Douglas et al, 2006; Alves and Raposo, 2010). By understanding these expectations and perceptions of university study, including how they may change is an essential area of investigation for institutions within the sector. This chapter provides a critical review of the existing literature in relation to the thesis and will explore key themes identified in the research question and objectives. The five key areas of literature were defined as the following:

- Policy context of Higher Education (1990 – 2018)
- Student satisfaction
- Student expectations and perceptions of Higher Education
- Service quality in Higher Education
- The notion of 'students as customers'

The rationale for reviewing these areas are that after an initial literature search into the factors that influence student expectations in their higher education institutions (see appendix 1) they have been deemed by the researcher as the key drivers influencing the research area. Section 2.1 reviews the theories and practices relating to the changing policy context of higher education, looking specifically at the policies from 1990 onwards. Section 2.2 critically assess student satisfaction and

explores key models related to the drivers of satisfaction with higher education. Section 2.3 reviews the literature surrounding student expectations and perceptions in the higher education sector by identifying key influencers upon these. Section 2.4 identifies key characteristics of service quality models and explores their validity in the higher education marketplace. Section 2.5 examines literature and thinking of key authors in a much debated area of the concept of students as customers. Finally, Section 2.6 provides a summary of the chapter and links to chapter Three. Figure 2.1 below shows a visual representation of the topics covered in this literature review to identify the inter-related influencers upon student expectations of their university experience.

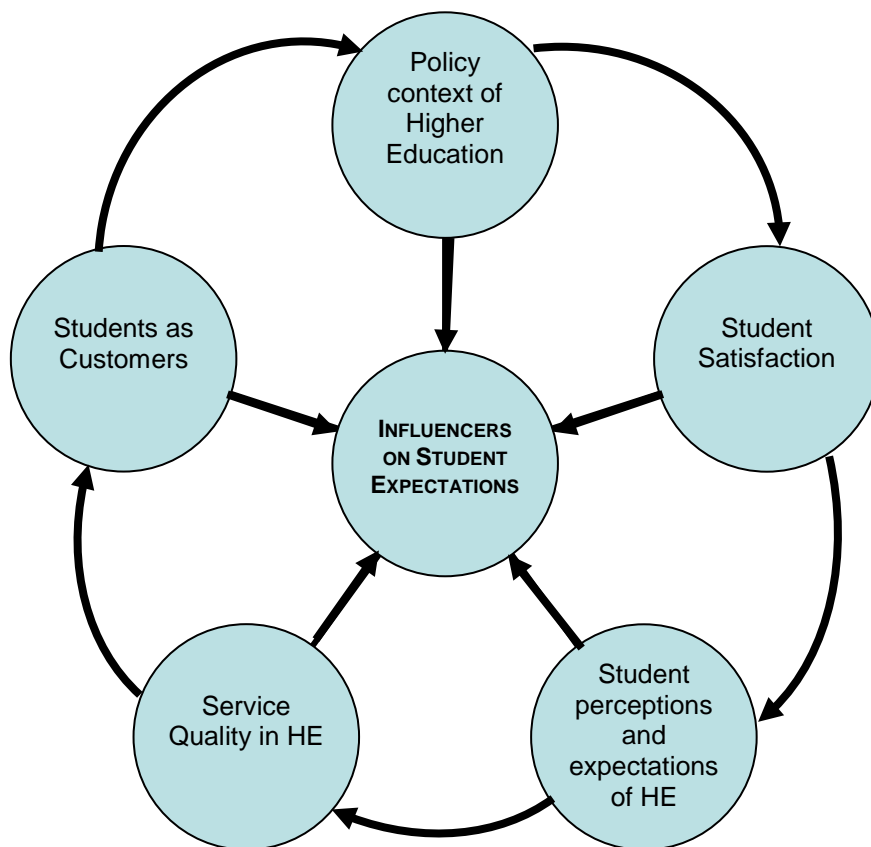


Figure 2.1, Visual representation of the literature review to establish the inter-related 'influencers on student expectations

2.1 Policy context of Higher Education

This section explores the education system to identify the changes that have taken place over the decades. As the higher education marketplace develops and expands globally it is important to understand how relevant policy has informed these changes within the sector. When examining the policies of higher education there have been some dramatic developments in relation to service provision for HEI's to manage as well as financial implications for students. A historical background will identify implications for the industry, higher education providers and students will be provided. There has been a flux of change within the higher education sector dating back to the early 1960's where the finance has moved from government funded to students paying a proportion or all of their own fees. Authors argue that there is an ongoing challenge between the need by government to reduce their own financial outlay whilst the demand for university places has increased. This push has led to HEI's having greater influence on the fees they charge after the Browne Report (2010) and now students undertake their university tuition fees as a 'tax' after Graduation rather than a short-term loan.

Some researchers recognise that student decision-making is influenced strongly by the families' economic status and the choice of institution (Hossler and Stage, 1992; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Han, 2014). Denny and Flannery (2017) identified that the economic background of students impacts upon the sensitivity of the participants to increases in tuition fees and their ability to engage with university study. However, others argue that there is not a clear relationship between level of tuition fees and student enrolment (Neill, 2009; Wilkins, 2013). Clearly there is a debate around the actual impact of the increased tuition fees and the impact upon the student application process. When introducing increased fees the government have marketed the view that students should view their tuition fees as an investment for the future, as graduates often achieve an earnings premium compared to those who have not attend a higher education institution. A counter argument to this view is delivered by Callender and Jackson (2008) who state that students from lower-economic families are more likely to perceive the costs of higher education as a debt rather than an investment for the future. Table 2.1 below identifies significant policy changes since 1990 and the impact upon tuition fees that are relevant to the research of this thesis.

Report / White Paper	Year Introduced	Key Impact on marketplace	Tuition Fee
Further Education Act	1992	Act granted university status to 48 polytechnics, (44 in England). Creation of HE funding bodies.	£0, government funded
Dearing Report	1997	Recommendation to remove cap on university places and bring greater finance to the sector.	£0, government funded
First Tuition Fees	1998	Following Dearing's report, universities introduced first tuition fees and Government cut grants.	£1,000
Higher Education Act	2004	Upfront tuition fees abolished, new variable fees introduced with HEI's deciding on what to charge.	Up to £3,000
Browne Report	2010	Recommendations to remove the £3,000 cap on fees, HEI's to decide on fee. Government to cover fees and be repaid by student's once salary reaches £21,000.	Up to £3,000
Government white paper - Students at the Heart of the System	2011	The paper focused on the implications upon the student experience following the Browne Report. Greater choice and availability to study at a HEI was identified as an important factor.	Up to £3,000
New tuition fees introduced	2012	Browne Report recommendations come into effect and tuition fees increase significantly.	Up to £9,000

Table 2.1, A historical overview of the changes in the UK educational sector since 1990

The subsequent discussion gives further detail to the policies and changes to the tuition fees in the higher education marketplace as identified above. **The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act** gave university status to 48 polytechnics, institutions across the United Kingdom. For information, this includes the institution which the research for this thesis has been undertaken. The purpose of this reclassification was to increase the number of students being classified as a higher education student, although those enrolling did not actual increase (Greenaway and Haynes, 2003). The Act also looked at the funding associated with higher education and established a set of bodies to fund higher education in England, this was known as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), with similar bodies set up across the United Kingdom. In spite of this it was still acknowledged that the arrangement of grants and loans available was not sufficient with many students identified as being economically poor (Barr and Crawford, 1998). In response to the

UK Government undertook a further review and commissioned the **Dearing Report 1997**, undertaken by Sir Ronald Dearing. The report recommend to the UK Government that it should implement a long-term strategic plan aimed at offering a solution to the increased demand for higher education places. It also recommended that the cap on full-time undergraduate places should be lifted over the subsequent two - three year period (Dearing, 1997). Dearing's Report gave a total of 93 recommendations with a key focus being that students would start to contribute to their academic studies through the introduction of tuition fees. An initial fee of £1,000 (rising to £1,200) was introduced in 1998 (Greenaway and Haynes, 2003). The purpose of this was to ensure Governments received a contribution from students in order that some finance was received and could be reinvested in other areas. An additional recommendation of the report was that student grants were stopped and maintenance loans given to all students (Barr and Crawford, 1998; Dearden et al, 2008).

By 2004 participation in higher education had risen to around 40%. Despite this significant increase the Government identified there was still a low number of 'economically poor' participants entering higher education. They therefore looked at further ways to improve upon the Dearing report and recommendations. This led to the **Higher Education Act 2004**, where upfront tuition fees were scrapped and instead a postponed fee was introduced. The new fee increased from the £1,200 fee, set by the Dearing Report, to a new tuition fee of up to £3,000. The key change here was that the institutions themselves were able to decide the amount to charge their students (Dearden et al., 2008). There was no exemption from the new fees with repayment to be made in the same way as the maintenance loans, but pivotally deferred until the earnings of graduating students reached over £15,000. By 2009, there were again calls for a review of the funding in the higher education sector and student finance resulting in the **The Browne Review, 2010**. Chaired by Lord Browne, the report was assigned to evaluate and identify recommendations relating to future fees, policy and financial support for undergraduate and postgraduate students' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010). The report explored three key areas, the first of which was that demand was exceeding supply in the higher education sector and therefore these was an identification of the need to increase higher education participation. In addition, it was recognised that under-

represented and low-income students were not always given the opportunity to attend the higher standing 'red brick' universities. The second area identified was in regards to an improvement in the quality standards of the quality provision offered by the HEI's. The report showed that graduating students often lacked the attributes and skills which employers wanted and as such institutions needed to enhance the facilities and services offered to the students to ensure a satisfactory 'student experience' is given. This is a key focus of this thesis and as such will be further explored later in this chapter and through the data collection and analysis.

The final area of the report focussed on the need to create a 'sustainable system of higher education funding'. It was identified that since the introduction of tuition fees in the Higher Education Act (2004) the income for institutions had increased but the Government was still spending large amounts on financial support for students, thus it was identified that the higher education was heavily reliant upon Government funding. Browne (2010) identified how the prevalent conception of student experience is caught between two policy imperatives that have long been in tension: higher education as a competitive marketplace and provider of skills for industry; and as a facilitator of social mobility. The review identifies student choice as an apparatus for changing the higher education system with Browne (2010) stating student choice was the most important force for re-shaping higher education. We want to put students at the heart of the system. Students are best placed to make the judgement about what they want to get from participating in higher education (Browne, 2010). Thus, the relationship between the student and the institution would be a fundamental part of the changes and that student choice should drive up the quality of higher education within the marketplace.

In 2010, the recommendations of the report were released and proposed removing the cap on university tuition fees and creating a competitive higher education marketplace by allowing institutions to choose the tuition fees they charge. No fees would be charged to the student up front with the Government covering the cost of the fees until a time where the graduate can repay the debt. Higher earning graduates would pay back more than lower earning graduates, with no fee being repaid until a minimum salary of £21,000 is reached (Browne, 2010). The purpose of this was to increase the number of student places across the sector and allow

institutions who feel able to expand and grow their provision. Interestingly, the Review also identified that more than half of current and prospective students see the rate of satisfaction with the standard of teaching as a useful factor in making their decisions about entering higher education (Mangan et al., 2010). This is particularly relevant to the research of this thesis which is looking to explore the factors and influencers upon students in higher education. Following the publication of the Browne Report (2010), the UK Government issued a white paper that gave further detail to the suggested changes within the higher education section and increased tuition fees. A key focus of the *students at the heart of the system white paper* was the focus on the student experience where it was identified that greater information should be provided by the HEI's to current and prospective students to ensure that they are fully informed about the performance of their institution. This includes the quality of teaching, course satisfaction and wider services available to the student (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011).

2.1.1 Policy implications on the student experience

After identifying the key policies in the marketplace, it is important to apply this to the aim of this thesis and explore the relationship to the student experience. In order to understand how 'the student experience' gained currency in UK policy discourse, it is worth examining the higher education sector as a whole. Perhaps the best benchmark for this is the National Student Survey (NSS) results and data from the destinations of leavers from higher education survey. The NSS encompasses a set of practices that have been central in defining what is meant by 'the student experience' and sustaining the conversation within institutions (Sabri, 2013). It has become the main measurement tool of the 'student experience' having been undertaken annually to almost all higher education students in the United Kingdom since 2005. The NSS has become a recognised method, for both HEI's and students, to compare performance of institutions. The NSS is also a key driver to the Browne Review and the ethos of student choice as a driver of change in higher education. Thus it can be argued that universities being reviewed on their performance and benchmarks, such as the NSS results, can influence students' choice of their prospective institution and increases competition in the marketplace. As Browne (2010) states higher education institutions, it is argued, need competition to give them an incentive to improve students' experience. Having defined the policy

implications for HEI's and established that these changes have impacted directly upon student choice and given rise to improved student experience, the following section of the chapter will look at the concept of student satisfaction to establish the drivers impacting upon universities.

2.2 Student satisfaction

The key aim of this thesis is to define the influences upon student expectations and experience within their higher education institute, in order to do this it is important to firstly define and understand the concept of student satisfaction. The rationale for this is that satisfaction and experience are fundamentally linked (DeShields et al., 2005; Douglas et al., 2006) and thus have significant implications for this research. When undertaking research into the subject of student satisfaction in the higher education sector there are numerous viewpoints introduced by differing authors but what is not disputed is the important role it plays in the sector. Hermans et al., (2009) explains that student satisfaction is one of the important concepts that has gained wider acceptance in higher education. The satisfaction of students with their educational experience is now considered to be similar to customer satisfaction within services (Appleton-Knapp and Krentler, 2006). Literature on the topic has explored various definitions associated with key terms relating to satisfaction, these include; experience or quality of service, expectations, perceived value and consequent evaluation of service (Alves and Raposo, 2010). These terms are particularly relevant to this study as they relate to the overall aim and questions of this research, this will be further explored in the methodology chapter of this thesis. Satisfaction is a state felt by a person who has experienced performance or an outcome that fulfils their expectations (Krentler and Grundnitski, 2004). It can also be seen that satisfaction is defined as a consumer's post purchase evaluation of the overall service experience received. The reaction of their needs, desires and expectations of the service experience to clarify if they have been met or bettered (Almanza et al., 1994). Other researchers identify that satisfaction is a judgment of a specific service encounter (Bolton and Drew, 1991b; Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

When exploring the subject in relation to students, authors have defined the topic differently and as such there are a range of definitions on the subject of student satisfaction and the impact upon the student experience (Athiyaman 1997; Wiers-

Jenssen et al., 2002; Forrester, 2006; Walker and Palmer, 2011). It can therefore be argued that there is no clear consensus on the topic in relation to higher education (Marzo et al., 2005). Student satisfaction can be described as a short-term attitude based on an evaluation of a student's educational experience (Elliott and Healy, 2001). Student satisfaction refers to the favourability of a student's subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with their education (Oliver, 1989; Elliott and Shin, 2002). Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) separated the factors influencing student satisfaction into two categories; institutional factors and personal factors. Institutional factors include quality of communication, usefulness and speed of the lecturer's feedback as well as the clarity of tutors' expectations to the student. Other key factors identified included; the teaching style of the instructor, research intentions of the HEI and the size of teaching groups (Dana et al., 2001; Krentler and Grundnitski, 2004). This highlights the importance of HEI's understanding the key factors relating to the drivers of creating a satisfactory experience for their students in order to satisfy their needs where possible. This understanding can assist universities in developing a marketing orientated attitude towards their cultural environment to ensure students value their offerings (Ng and Forbes, 2009).

Student satisfaction is influenced by several factors but essential relates to a) direct experience and b) expectation of the experience (Athiyaman, 1997; DeShields, 2005). The student learning experience is intrinsically linked to students' satisfaction which consists of a combination of academic and social aspects based on what students encounter in their university environment (Douglas et al, 2006). Therefore there is an argument by some authors (Hill, 1995; Tan and Kek 2004; Voss, 2007) that the notion of service quality in higher education is now becoming a fundamental consideration of higher education institutions and is considered one of the largest determinants of student satisfaction. Service received can play a key role in determining a positive or negative student learning experience and as mentioned earlier will be a key element of attracting new students as well as retaining and satisfying current students at the institution. Service quality in higher education will be discussed further in section 2.5 of this chapter. Sojkin et al. (2012) determined that a key influence upon determining satisfaction on a programme was seen to be social conditions of the institution. These included wider facilities such as sport

facilities, canteens and coffee shops, parking facilities and quality of accommodation. Thus, it is recognised that superior facilities that support student learning and engagement with the institution is likely to lead to increased student satisfaction (Yeo and Li, 2012). Drew and Work (1998) support this thinking and state that other determiners of student satisfaction include wider support amenities such as library offerings, career support and counselling services. Whereas Sevier (1996) states that student satisfaction is linked to the individuals overall experience, that is a product of the students' academic, social and physical experiences within the institution. These opinions show that classifying the exact nature of customer satisfaction can be a difficult challenge for HEI's. Although most now agree that it is better to be ahead of the curve and aim to satisfy students (where possible) to ensure they remain 'committed' to the institution rather than not make these efforts and suffer dissatisfaction, potentially leading to student complaints or them leaving the university (Patterson et al, 1997; Bolton et al, 2000; Elliott and Healy, 2001).

Student satisfaction is explained as the judgment of a specific service encounter and can vary dependent upon the encounter (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Han and Ryu, 2009). Abdullah (2006) identified that within the higher education context, major factors of student satisfaction included academic and non-academic aspects. The teaching ability of the lecturer and their interaction with students can lead to student satisfaction (Bitner and Zeithaml, 1996). Kuh and Hu (2001) supported this thinking and stated that student satisfaction is significantly influenced by effective interaction between student and institution. Xiao and Wilkins (2015) found that factors of student satisfaction include service quality measurements such as faculty performance, staff performance and classroom environment. Supporters of this view include Brochado (2009) who identified five dimensions that have a higher association with student satisfaction and future behaviours towards the institution. Those being; non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation impacts, program issues impacts and access impacts. By understanding and managing these aspects / impacts it can be argued that the HEI is in a stronger position to manage student satisfaction expectations within the institution and their own outward facing appearance i.e. how they are perceived. Theorists have identified that one of the most prominent determiners of loyalty is customer satisfaction (Douglas et al., 2008;

Alves and Raposo, 2010; Ryu et al., 2012). Athiyaman (1997) also established a positive link between the significance of customer satisfaction on loyalty.

When relating the theory to higher education there are clear examples of the correlation between university performance and student satisfaction (Beerli Palacio et al., 2002; Helgesen and Nettet, 2007; Arif et al., 2013). Therefore, this indicates that there is a direct relationship between student satisfaction and student loyalty and thus can be seen as a significant consideration for universities. Institutional image is also considered to have a positive influence on customer loyalty, as identified in the conceptual model of student satisfaction in Higher Education, (Alves and Raposo, 2006). The image of a service provider can be acknowledged to have a strong influence on the loyalty of customers due to it being the initial point of interest in the business to show satisfaction (Wang et al., 2010). Hu et al. (2009) take the concept of the HEI's image and identify that customer satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on corporate image. This is supported by Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) who state that satisfaction with service performance affects the students' image assessment of the university (Helgesen and Nettet, 2007). Furthermore, some authors (Beerli Palacio, 2002; Yang et al., 2004; Brown et al., 2009) argue that the institutional image is directly related to student satisfaction, as when they are satisfied, their attitudes toward the university improves.

This is a key point in relation to this thesis as by assessing the drivers upon the expectations of students, the HEI will be better able to ensure satisfaction is achieved. The relevance of these findings to this thesis is that by identifying the influencers of student satisfaction the research will be able to determine key factors that drive student expectations. It has been discussed that factors including service received and the influencers on the student learning experience play a key role in attracting, retaining and satisfying students (Remedios and Lieberman, 2008). However, the student learning experience in higher education is described by Ng and Forbes (2009) as emergent, unstructured, interactive and uncertain and as a result requires joint collaboration by students and institutions to play an instrumental role in achieving the desired outcomes of both parties. The next section of this chapter will further explore student satisfaction through analysis of appropriate models.

2.2.1 Models of student satisfaction

There are various models that explore student satisfaction, of which the main focus is upon the drivers and influencers that impact upon the institutions service provision and the impact it has on student satisfaction. Relevant models in relation to the thesis title *'an investigation into the key influencers and drivers on student's expectations of their higher education institution'* have been explored below and discussion given to how these impact upon student satisfaction within the institution.

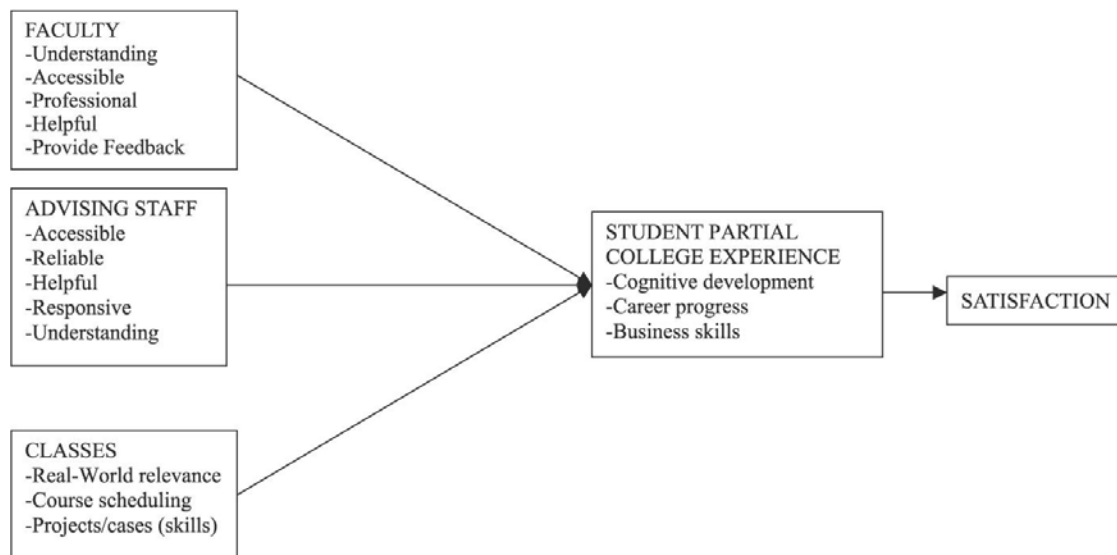


Figure 2.2, The student satisfaction and retention model, Keaveney and Young, (1997)

The Keaveney and Young (1997) student satisfaction and retention model, see figure 2.2, explores the key variables that impact upon the university experience in higher education in relation to student satisfaction. The model explores the key drivers on the student's experience in their institute based upon connection with the institution, staff assistance, the university environment and interactions in the classroom (DeShields et al., 2005). If the students have a positive university experience, they are likely to be more satisfied compared to the students' negative college experiences (Hameed and Amjad, 2011). The model comprises three dimensions to test the student experience, they being; 1. Faculty performance – how is this positively/negatively related to the student's university experience. 2. Advising Staff performance - how do staff within the institution positively/negatively relate to the student's university experience. 3. Classes – how are these positively/negatively

related to the student's higher education experience. The framework identifies factors that will contribute directly upon the student experience within the university and define the positive/negative impact upon student's satisfaction. The framework therefore shows that there is a correlation between the internal performance of the institution and the satisfaction of the student based upon the management by the HEI of 'controllable' factors. It can be defined that these factors relate mainly due to the performance of the institutions staff (academic and non-academic) and thus this is a key finding from this model in relation to this thesis. The criticism that can be attached to the model is that it predominately focusses upon the internal institutional factors, specifically performance of staff, but lacks an application to the external factors that influence student satisfaction. As a result it can be argued that there are some fundamental gaps in the model that require further exploration in relation to variables that could influence students' perceived satisfaction/dissatisfaction within the HEI (e.g. social influences, previous experiences, family etc). The framework also lacks any reference to the service provided by the institution and the impact this has upon the experience of students within the university. To further define the notion of student satisfaction within a higher education institution, the Alves and Raposo (2006) conceptual model of student satisfaction in Higher Education will be explored in figure 2.3 below.

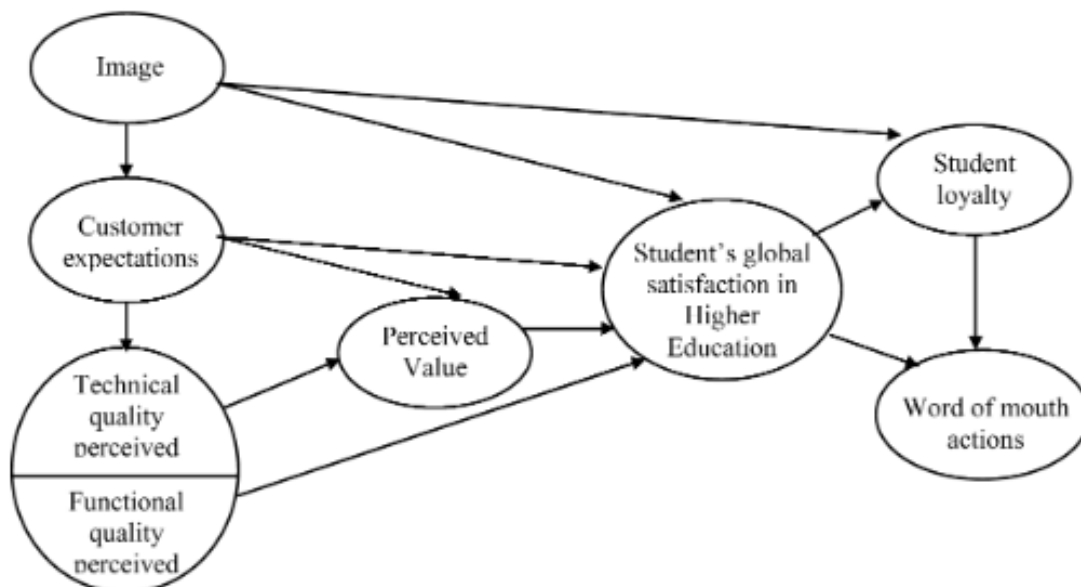


Figure 2.3, Conceptual model of student satisfaction in Higher Education, Alves and Raposo, (2006)

The conceptual model of student satisfaction in higher education developed by Alves and Raposo (2006) identifies the elements that determine student satisfaction as being expectations, the university's image perceived by the student, quality perceived both technical and functional of the education service to give the students perceived value of the institution. Thus this model identifies that there is a link between service quality and student satisfaction (Harvey and Knight, 1996; Ford et al, 1999; Oldfield and Baron, 2000). Also identified is the notion of student expectations of their educational experience and the influence it has upon their satisfaction and the image of the institution. It is identified these elements contribute to student loyalty and word of mouth as the positive benefits of satisfaction. It is acknowledged that this can lead to increased student loyalty to ensure that retention and achievements statistics are met by the university and may contribute to an increased institutional ranking i.e. NSS survey or other performance review methods (see section 2.3.3 for further discussion). It is seen that word of mouth can act as an effective recruitment tool for the university and help the institution recruit new students for subsequent academic years or indeed return themselves for further education (Mavondo et al., 2004). This model has introduced the concept of student expectations, and perceptions and the influence they have upon satisfaction with the university experience.

This is a key consideration for this research and as such these findings will be further investigated in the review of the literature and subsequent pilot interviews. The notion of value within the educational experience is also introduced in this model and identifies that this is an influencer upon the satisfaction of students at the institution. This is an interesting perspective and informs the notion of service quality in education which was identified as a weakness in the Alves and Raposo (2006) model. Criticisms of this model could be in relation to the lack of clarity relating to drivers upon student perceptions to define what the influencers on these perceptions are. Another limitation that could be seen in the model is that the focus on the post-university experience is solely on student loyalty and the benefits for the institution rather than a student focus i.e. what are their drivers and does this impact upon the expectations they have of the institution? As identified above value of the student experience has been introduced within the model but there is a gap of knowledge in relation to what drives this and how the notion of quality within the educational

experience is defined. Therefore these gaps in the model have been identified for further discussion and analysis when developing the conceptual framework for this thesis.

Douglas et al., (2008) introduce their conceptual model of student satisfaction within their higher education experience, figure 2.4 below. This recognises the elements of service quality within a HEI that could lead to loyalty behaviours from student within the institution. This differs from previous models identified in this research as the sole focus is placed upon the service aspect of student satisfaction.

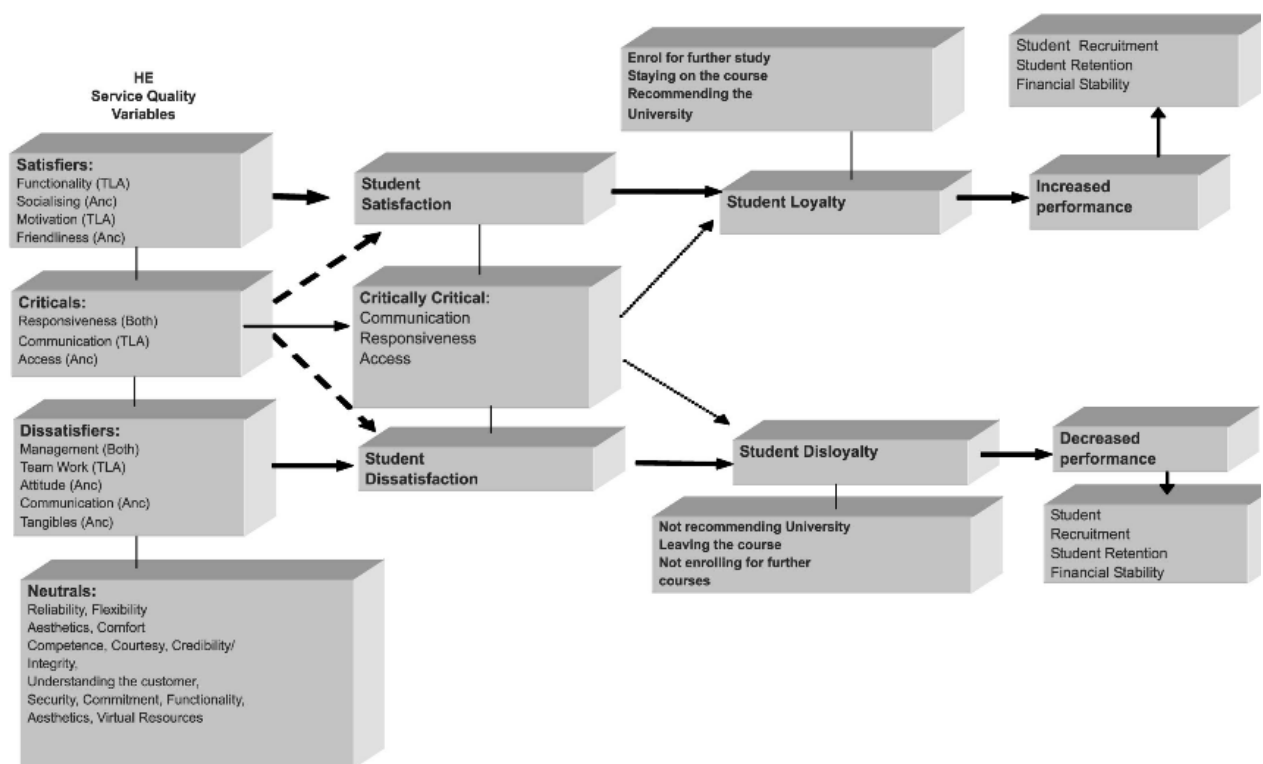


Figure 2.4, Conceptual model of student satisfaction with their higher education experience, Douglas et al., (2008)

The model identifies factors that contribute to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction upon the student experience and how this leads to student loyalty behaviours and the influence this has on student performance. The model identifies that ‘responsiveness’ and ‘communication’ are critical areas in relation to teaching, learning and assessment within the student experience. This supports the findings of the Keaveney and Young, (1997) model which identified the influence of staff on the student experience. This identifies that there is a positive or negative influence

upon the loyalty behaviours of the students that derive from the service levels provided by the institution. There can be similarities drawn here to the Alves and Raposo, (2006) model (figure 2.3) where the result of student satisfaction is associated with a positive or negative university loyalty. Douglas et al.'s 2008 model also introduces the concept of student as customers, this is a significant consideration for this research and is a topic often linked to the notion of service quality. Therefore how this is understood by the institution can lead to effective management of the satisfiers/dis-satisfiers upon the university experience. The model identifies that successfully managing these will lead to positive implications for the HEI. These are identified as being in terms of positive financial implications through the retention of students. Other benefits were identified in terms of increased student recruitment and positive recommendations for the institution. Thus the alternate response for a negative experience identifies that if students are not satisfied then they are more likely to leave the HEI which equates to a financial loss for the HEI in lost tuition fees.

There can be some criticisms attached to the model in that it is built heavily around service quality and how satisfaction is taken from this but fails to explore wider institutional factors that may also impact upon student satisfaction of the institution (non-service). Thus there is a need to further explore this area and identify the drivers of service upon the university experience, this will be further discussed in section 2.5 of this chapter. Another criticism is that the conceptual model does not identify the influence of pre-university service experiences and how these influence perceptions and expectations of the university. This was a weakness also identified in the previous models and therefore enhances the need for this research to explore and define these pre-university influencers. Finally as with the Alves and Raposo, (2006) model, the post-university analysis is focused on the institution rather than the student. It is therefore argued that when managing student expectations there are clear objectives by institutions to gain advantages from managing the satisfaction of the student experience. However the models do not identify how students will benefit from their university experience, how this influences their expectations of the service received, or understand the rationale for undertaking a higher education programme. Therefore this is a further area that this research will look to explore further via the data collection process of the thesis. It has been identified that there

are differing drivers to student satisfaction in higher education through comparison of the student satisfaction models developed by Keaveney and Young, (1997), Alves and Raposo (2006) and Douglas et al., (2008). The significant differences between these models show that there are a number of drivers upon student satisfaction within the HEI. The key areas identified related to how these factors are managed by the institution to ensure satisfaction amongst their students. The benefits of satisfied students are multiple and include improved retention, positive recruitment and a healthier financial situation for the HEI. Limitations of the models related to a lack of focus on pre-institutional influences on student perceptions and expectations, greater clarity on the drivers of expectations throughout the university experience, institutional rather than student focus on post-university experiences and research was limited to a specific timeframe and did not explore the student journey on a longitudinal basis, i.e. do the influencers on their satisfaction change over their time at the institution. Table 2.2 below identifies the key findings of each conceptual model and identifies gaps in the research for further exploration in this thesis.

Model	Key Findings	Identified Significant Gaps
Student satisfaction and retention model, (Keaveney and Young, 1997)	Three dimensions to test the student experience. 1. Faculty performance 2. Advising Staff performance 3. Classroom experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No identification of external influences on satisfaction • Not explored on a longitudinal basis • No identification of social influence within the institution • Lack of focus on post-institutional experience
Conceptual model of student satisfaction in Higher Education, (Alves and Raposo, 2006)	<u>Drivers on student satisfaction.</u> 1. Image of institution 2. Customer (student) expectations 3. Perceived quality 4. Identification of impact of satisfied students' on institutional loyalty • Identifies a relationship between satisfaction and student expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity relating to drivers upon student perceptions • Post-university focus is solely on student loyalty • Notion of quality to be further defined • Not explored on a longitudinal basis
Conceptual model of student satisfaction with their higher education experience, (Douglas et al., 2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of service quality variables that satisfy / dissatisfy within HE. • Explores the link between service quality and student satisfaction • Identifies how student loyalty influences student performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No identification on pre-university experiences / perceptions • Limited discussion on wider institutional influencers upon satisfaction e.g. non-service • Post-university analysis is focused on institution rather than student • Not explored on a longitudinal basis

Table 2.2, Review of student satisfaction models and identification of significant gaps

2.2.2 Assessing student satisfaction

Following analysis of some key models that influence satisfaction with the university experience it is deemed appropriate to identify methods of measurement in relation to the satisfaction of students within their chosen HEI. It is now widely accepted within the higher education sector that external institutes are used to draw together the views from students on their institutions performance. The most commonly accepted of these is the National Student Survey, which gathers opinions from their students about their time at their university (www.thestudentsurvey.com, 2018). The survey is undertaken by students at all UK publicly funded universities to collect satisfaction data (Williams, 2002). The data collected asks the student about their time at the institution, encompassing the whole university experience from the classroom to the campus facilities and interactions with staff and peers (Elliott and Shin, 2002). Rowley (2003) explored the rationale for collating student data on satisfaction, these include; evidence of satisfaction for the student learning experience, reflection upon their learning experience and importantly allowing the HEI to benchmark their performance against other institutions within the sector. By understanding these factors, it allows the institution to classify areas of strengths and weakness for the university in order that they can further improve the experience of their students. As identified in the student satisfaction models, there is an increasing emphasis placed upon defining the 'quality' of service given by the institution to their students and how this influences satisfaction. Harvey (2003) outlines five main reasons for HEI's to acknowledge student satisfaction; commitment to take student views seriously, recognition that the student learning experience is pivotal in learning, provision of procedures and processes for quality improvement, guidance for strategic management decisions and benchmarking. Therefore the ability to measure these factors through surveys, such as the NSS, and look to improve the quality of the experience that students receive.

Gibbs (2010) defined key measurements tools should focus on student engagement, class size, and quality and quantity of feedback. There can often be a contrast with the students' view of their experience and their ratings of key aspects of satisfaction with their university experience may vary widely to the HEI depending upon their own expectations of the service received (SurrIDGE 2009). It was identified that students' response to more specific questions such as promptness of feedback are more

reliable and thus the NSS (or similar surveys) can highlight areas where students are or are not satisfied for further exploration (Gibbs, 2010). However, Fielding et al., (2010) states that these measures on their own should not be seen as tantamount to the quality of the educational experience and identifies that institutions should combine the NSS results with their own internal measures of student satisfaction and service quality (Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2007). Ultimately the monitoring of the institutions performance allows for an understanding of key aspects of the student experience in order to improve the quality of service offered to the university's students. The prime reason for institutions collecting students' satisfaction data tends to be for identifying improvements to the quality of teaching and learning alongside the ability to advise potential students about positive experiences within the HEI (Williams and Brennan, 2003). Having established the drivers of student satisfaction, the following section of this chapter will look to further explore the factors influencing students' expectations and perceptions of their higher education institution.

2.3 Student expectations and perceptions of Higher Education

When exploring the landscape of a higher education student, it can be seen to differ from years gone by where the student group followed a more traditional path into their chosen institution. The current student marketplace comprises of not only the younger students direct from college/6th form but also students classed as mature (19 years and over) who come from a gap year out of education or full-time employment. There is also a wider mix of those classed as 'working class', with more women and part-time students embarking on higher education study, as impacted upon by the Browne Report (2010). These students are more conscious of their 'rights' and are more demanding in terms of service delivery from the institution (Mavondo and Zaman, 2000; Wright and O'Neill, 2002; Tomlinson, 2017). Therefore identifying what students expect from their institution has become of ever increasing importance to universities. Issues affecting the perception of the institution, such as students' pre-entry views and expectations of quality (Kandiko and Mawer, 2015) are also important to explore and analyse to understand the holistic picture relating to the student experience. For the purpose of this research expectations and perceptions have been discussed separately to produce a comparative measure of how these influence the student experience although it is acknowledged that there

will be some cross-over in discussions. The Cambridge dictionary define the terms 'expectation' and 'perception' as the following; *expectation* – the feeling of expecting something to happen; *perception* – a belief or opinion, often held by many people and based on how things seem. Although these are basic terminology it allows for an effective starting point for further exploration of the terms in relation to the higher education marketplace.

2.3.1 The theories of student expectations in Higher Education

Analysis of student expectations is an important consideration for HEI's (Hill, 1995; Sander et al., 2000). Students' when first entering the higher education environment can often have unrealistic expectations of their expected university experience. As such the better understanding institutions have of these then the better position they can be in order effectively manage these in order that they are at a realistic level. For example, informing their students through communication to them in regards to realistic expectations from their staff, support services and any other area of the institution they feel appropriate. Hill (1995) identifies that student expectations in academic characteristics of their higher education provision, such as quality of teaching and methods, have remained relatively stable over time. As such it is a case of informing and educating students of this in order that they are as aware as possible of institutional behaviours. Studies (Rodie and Kleine, 2000) have demonstrated the positive impact of managing expectations and identifying key variables such as participation, role clarity, and motivation to participate in the student experience (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2000). It has been acknowledged that the perceived quality of the service given is related to student expectations and the value of the service, thus supporting the importance of clarifying expectations of students in higher education (Telford and Masson, 2005).

Thus it can be seen that there is a relationship between students' expectations and their satisfaction and as such it is important to explore this relationship further. Lenton (2015) identifies key factors that can be used to predict some key influencers on student satisfaction, these include influence of student expectation, institution reputation, student activity, perception of quality, and value as the predictors of student satisfaction. The concept of value in relation to expectations is a prominent one, students are now paying tuition fees of over £9,000 to study at university and

thus it is inevitable that students will ask questions related to what they will receive for this output. Fredrickson (2012) also found perceived value as a key factor to satisfaction, as well as quality, image of institution and expectations as positive contributors to satisfaction in higher education. Therefore when entering higher education, students will have expectations about their university experience in relation to key aspects for them, such the role of the lecturer in terms of contact time and feedback as well as the level of their own commitment to the programme (Jackson et al., 2000). Nilsen (2009) further adds that students will not be motivated to work hard in their studies until they believe the end outcome will be of value to them, thus the motivation to succeed is the benefits they gain from the institution. Student expected value is seen as an important factor that the university can influence through their decisions made towards their learners (Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2002).

Many studies have examined student expectations within higher education (Bates. 2004; Gedye et al., 2004; Longden, 2006; Crisp et al., 2009). Marshall and Linder (2005) analysed students' expectations of teaching in HEI's and defined that a range of differing expectations exist. These are in relation to their teaching expectations from these learners which included; creating understanding of the subject studied, developing intellectual independence and critical thinking among others. These findings show there is a mixed understanding among students of their expectations and understandings of the role of the institution in their studies. Therefore, it is important to ensure clear information is given to students regarding these issues prior to them attending the institution in order to provide a clear and consistent message to managing perceptions of the students when they arrive at the university. This highlights the significance of identifying what are the student perceptions of higher education to wider discussions of this research and as a result will be discussed further in section 2.4.2 of this thesis. The discussion thus far has identified some key differences in the expectations of students and their university experience, there is also some key differences in the understanding of the role of the institution and teaching. An area identified for further exploration is that of the inconsistency between students' own expectations and their actual university experiences. The importance of investigating student expectations in relation to the changing tuition fees is also highlighted as a key influence for this thesis. Ramsden

(2013) discusses the issue of students having expectations which are too demanding and as a result unmanageable for the HEI this is often a result of the information students receive prior to joining university as it can often be misleading or inaccurate.

Sources of information prior to university usually encompass institutional prospectuses and other marketing material, therefore it can be argued that maintenance of this information to ensure accuracy is the responsibility of the HEI to guarantee an accurate reflection of what the potential student can expect when they join the university. This is especially important in the current context of the recent changes on consumer law and the need for HEI's to comply with the accuracy of information given to their students (Busby, 2018). Several universities have made misleading claims about their performance leading to inaccurate information for prospective students to make decisions about the institution. Other studies have examined if there is a mismatch between student expectations and experiences using gap analysis (Awang and Ismail, 2010). Yooyen et al. (2011) further explored the expectations and experiences of tutors and students in university and found that perceptual gaps between the two influenced evaluation of the outcomes (i.e. satisfaction or dissatisfaction) of both. Therefore clarity of these perception gaps need to be managed by the institution to ensure clear understanding for all involved and to ensure expectations can be better managed. As mentioned earlier, the influence of perception will be discussed further in section 2.3.2 of this chapter. Managing students' expectations in relation to their prospective higher education experiences is therefore paramount in ensuring that they are fully informed and prepared for the differing experiences they encounter at university. This is particularly true when relating expectations to the students' financial investment in their university experience, for example expectations may be increased by the heightened tuition fees they pay. It is argued by some that there is now a real challenge for HEI's to ensure that the service offerings must improve or face losing students to rival institutions (Wilkins et al., 2013), fail to match student expectations of support and contact time (Bates and Kay, 2013) and students' realities of their universities experiences (Pennell, 2005; Jones, 2010; Ramsden, 2013) will be negative. This has raised the concept of 'the student as customer' (Kamvounias, 1999; Pitman, 2000; Douglas et al., 2006; Svensson and Wood, 2007) where by

institutions are encouraged to apply the same service standards to customers as would a retail outlet to their customers. Many argue against this approach (Sirvanci, 1996; Desai et al., 2001; Hussey and Smith, 2010) and therefore the topic will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (section 2.5).

Another consideration when exploring student expectations is in relation to their personal motivators for studying a higher education programme and how this influences their expectations of the institution. Extrinsic motivations, such as career opportunities upon Graduation and intrinsic motivators such as academic reasons i.e. programme /subject challenge, are often seen as key factors in students' motivation to go to university. Rawson (2000) identifies that an important outcome of the higher education process for the great majority of participants is the achievement of a recognised qualification. De Lange and Mavondo (2004) state that some students are motivated by the notion of intellectual growth as opposed to directing linking to financial reward through career advancement. Other motivations relate to the influence of parents, social factors and occupational motives (Byrne and Flood, 2005; Christie et al., 2006; Gibney et al., 2011). Further research recognises that the initial motivator for participation in higher education has a direct influence upon how students subsequently behave at university (Gibney et al., 2011).

The notion of students' preparedness for entering higher education in relation to the learning environment they will enter and the impact this has on their behaviour when at the institution (Heikkilä and Lonka, 2006). Briggs et al. (2012) identifies that the student transition from college can bring challenges for the university and that appropriate relationships need to be developed for students to settle into university life and ultimately succeed as higher education learners. Authors identify the contrast that students experience, in terms of the learning environment, between secondary/further education and higher education (Christie et al., 2006; Gibney et al., 2011). The teaching environment in further education differs to the higher education atmosphere as it tends to be highly supportive and structured in comparison to higher education. This differential in environment can impact upon the expectations of students when arriving at their HEI. Thus when looking at key factors, such as the importance of autonomous and independent learning (Gibney et al., 2011) may be very different to previous educational experiences. Students

therefore may have a lack of understanding of the nature of university experience upon arrival and the institution will need to clarify these as early as possible in the experience or potentially suffer negative consequences in terms of student satisfaction. It can be argued that students arrive at university possessing high confidence in their academic and personal skills and thus expect to perform well and play an active role in university life (Christie et al., 2006). Students' high confidence in their academic and personal skills can have different impacts upon their expectations. On the positive side, it can allow students to show positive attitudes towards their university experience (Fazey and Fazey, 2001). The negative of this is that it could lead to a limitation of students need to acquire new skills due to being 'spoon-fed' information in the further education environment (Gibney et al., 2011). In truth there is likely to be a mix of both approaches by students due to the variety of their experiences prior to joining the institution. This discussion in this section has evidenced the rationale for this thesis and demonstrates that HEI's need to ascertain and more importantly understand how their students view the institution and how they are motivated to succeed. Given the differences in views between what classifies as student expectations within their higher education experience, this study will undertake its own research into the expectations and experiences of undergraduate students with the aim of clarifying the concept further. Table 2.3 below summarises discussion covered in this section and highlights the key drivers on student expectation within the higher education sector.

Expectation Driver	Driver Overview	Theorists
Expectations of institution	Focus on teaching standards, availability of staff as well as wider supporting staff services.	Marshall and Linder (2005); Telford and Masson (2005); Longden, 2006; Lenton (2015)
Expectation of value	How students value the service they receive from the HEI, impact of increased tuition fees on their expectations of value.	Jackson et al. (2000); Nilsen (2009); Fredrickson (2012); Dandridge (2018)
Personal motivators	Individual influencers on each student, these included internal and external motivators such as personal achievement and family influence.	Fazey and Fazey (2001); Byrne and Flood (2005); Christie et al., (2006)
Previous experiences	How past experiences have positively or negatively impacted upon the student expectations of their HEI.	Hill (1995); Sander et al. (2000); Heikkilä and Lonka (2006); Briggs et al. (2012)

Table 2.3, Review of key literature in relation to the drivers of student expectations

2.3.2 The theories of student perception in Higher Education

The routes and guidance of students into higher education are highly influential in shaping their perceptions of the university. One of the key influencers upon student perceptions of their higher education experience is seen to be from close family member and friends. Strong ties between members of a family or group were perceived as being influential in the choice of university (Broekemier and Seshadri, 2000). This is supported by Johnston (2010) who identified that family and friends are among the top-rated sources of guidance in university choice. Indeed, parents have been identified as the primary influence on students' university choice decisions. Hossler and Stage (1992) found that both parental expectation and parental encouragement were related to the likelihood of their child attending a higher educational institution. This indicates that parents' expectations exercised the strongest influence on prospective university students' predispositions toward studying a higher education programme. Others who have a strong influence on the decision making process of students are those who are not in a student's family, but can still be considered members of their primary reference group (Johnston, 2010). This is often linked to a close personal acquaintance or regular interaction and thus can be seen as potential opinion leader to student decisions. Opinion leaders are often people who have some position, expertise, or first-hand knowledge that makes them particularly important sources of relevant and credible information (Flynn et al., 1996). For the purpose of this research these individuals can be seen to be staff at the students' current university, careers advisors or recruitment staff at the prospective HEI. Hodkinson et al (1996) refer to the concept of 'pragmatic rational choice'; the idea that decisions around participation at university are largely informed by what they perceive to be achievable and the options that are related to prior learning experiences. This therefore supports the discussion around influence of other reference groups as they will have a strong ability to shape student views, and give them motivation to succeed at their chosen HEI. How students appraise the 'value' of higher education and their view of previous experiences, alongside the perception of future learning experiences at their chosen institution are key concerns for HEI's and thus will be further tested in this thesis.

As well as understanding who influences student decisions to study at university, it is also important to identify what they are looking for in an institution, e.g. this could be

academic reputation however this is not important for all students (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013; Nadelson et al., 2013). The perception of many students is that university study can improve or even guarantee employment after Graduation. Indeed research by Tomlinson (2008), found that 'higher education credentials were seen as positional goods and a key dimension of future employability'. This could be seen to support the view that a university degree will enable a greater number of benefits compared to those who do not attend university i.e. work-related, economic, and social. Thus the notion of students viewing higher education as an 'investment' for future successes, even if that belief does not have any direct or immediate assurance employment is valid. For students who had a limited sense of how they might be able to apply their university experiences to the job market, they still had a sense that university will 'lead to something' upon Graduation (Tomlinson, 2017). Scutter et al (2011) underpin this view and found that employability aspirations, not necessarily were seen as the key reason students choose to go to university. This suggests that improving career aspirations were a key driver for enrolling onto a higher education qualification. These perceptions of expected employment add to the notion of perceived value (Sabri, 2011) i.e. what are students receiving for the tuition fees paid. Dandridge (2018) identified that students place value on their university experience and rate teaching standards, quality of feedback, good learning resources and securing a good graduate job as the most important factors to them. How the institution interprets these findings and applies them will ultimately impact upon their ability of offering their students a fulfilling higher education experience.

Student perceptions are likely to be reinforced by the growing marketisation and changing financial landscape of higher education (Naidoo, 2003; Brown and Carasso, 2013). Inevitably, this highly competitive marketplace has led to institutions having to adapt their marketing strategies and has, in some quarters, led to some theorists defining students as customers or as products with the academics being the service providers (Tierney, 1999; Bowden, 2011; Woodall et al, 2014), a new definition that has not been without criticism and resistance (Svensson and Wood, 2007). In this sense, Barrett (1996) explains that HEI's must adopt and welcome a marketing focus towards their recruitment of students. These comments show that the marketisation of higher education is becoming ever more apparent and as such can be regarded as a business like any other with institutions now becoming aware

of the implications of service provision to their students/customers. This concept will be discussed further in section 2.4 of this literature review.

When exploring a student's journey through their HEI, it is widely accepted that the first year of study is viewed as critical in ensuring that students engage with their programme of study and are successful in achievement (Trotter and Roberts, 2006). Byrne and Flood (2005) explored the perceptions of students at the beginning of their higher education studies and identified that those with positive preceding academic performance related to a confident progression to their HEI. As such the opposite was true and students with a poorer previous academic performance when first joining the institution tended to have lower academic ability and confidence in their ability to perform. Therefore it is important that when new students join a HEI they are academically prepared for the programme of study. Institutions need to make decisions on minimum entry requirements for their programmes as well as offering comprehensive induction sessions for students starting on new programmes (Boyd et al, 2006). Barnes et al (2010) argues that being 'ready' for higher education study as it is defined by some universities does not always relate to the actual set of skills students require to be successful in their studies. Conley and McGaughy (2012) define that perceptive strategies and ability to transition their prior knowledge and skills to learn at their own preference are more meaningful contributors to readiness for study. Thus how 'prepared' students are upon entering higher education for their chosen institutions academic standards and expectations mean that some are often unprepared and as a result could arrive with unrealistic perceptions and expectations regarding their academic abilities (Mah and Ifenthaler, 2018). Therefore an understanding of these drivers in relation to the preparedness and perceptions are important factors in determining student performance. To manage these potential issues with academic performance and to aid the perception students have of their abilities, HEI's need to ensure that the quality of teaching and staff support given, as well as the university's systems, are appropriate to help manage the student transition into the institution (Hill et al, 2003).

Studies have been found that the quality of classroom teaching, lecturer engagement and amount of feedback given directly influences student satisfaction (Sander et al.,

2000). Present-day students are increasingly more aware of their interactions with their chosen institution by placing greater focus on the teaching standards delivered, opportunities for further engagement within the university and when they choose to participate in their higher education studies – in essence acting as ‘customers’ (Petruzzellis et al., 2006). In terms of teaching standards, it is identified that lecturers play an important role in the university experience and should be seen to put the ‘student first’ in terms of their support, knowledge entertainment and enthusiasm (Delucchi, 2000; Davison and Price, 2009). In the increasingly competitive higher education sector it is recognised that the quality of teaching is a key consideration for students joining the institution. For example the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), introduced by the Government, assess teaching standards in higher education and requires institutions to be ranked by gold, silver or bronze status (Office for Students, 2018). A strong performance in such a ranking will allow the institution to create and manage appropriate perceptions of their university for prospective students. Ultimately HEI’s are now seen as a service provider to their students and as in all service organisations, the quality delivered is important to attract and retain customers (students). Service quality may be considered to exist when a customer’s perception of a service and how it was performed exceeds their expectations; it represents an individual’s attitude gained from long-term evaluation (Parasuraman et al, 1988). Table 2.4 below summarises the discussion covered in this section and highlights the key influencers on student perceptions within the higher education sector.

Perception	Influencer Overview	Theorists
University increases employability	There was a consensus that attending a HEI will guarantee / greatly increase the likelihood of gaining employment upon Graduation.	Tomlinson (2008); Sabri, 2011; Scutter et al (2011); Tomlinson (2017);
Students are fully prepared for higher education	There is a range of views on student ‘preparedness’ for HE, influencers were identified as previous institution, skills developed, support given and prior achievement as important factors.	Hill et al, (2003); Boyd et al, 2006; Barnes et al (2010); Mah and Ifenthaler (2018)
Service expectations have increased	The competitive higher education marketplace has led to increased demand from students meaning HEI’s need to offer an improved service to their learners.	Parasuraman et al, (1988); Tierney (1999); Brown and Carasso (2013); Woodall et al, (2014)

Table 2.4, Review of key literature in relation to the influencers on student perception

The following section will explore the notion of service quality in higher education and the impact this has on the relationship between students and their institution of study.

2.4 Service quality

The concept of service quality has been debated by many authors over several decades where they have offered differing views on how to define and measure service (Lewis and Booms, 1983; Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Westbrook and Peterson, 1998; Carman, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Teas, 1993). The measurement of service quality in higher education has also been a subject of extensive discussion (Abdullah, 2006; De Jager and Gbadamosi, 2013; Ehsan et al, 2015) with no definitive definition been agreed. This will be explored later in the chapter, section 2.4.3. These researchers have identified two schools of thought: (i) *disconfirmation paradigm* based on a perceptual view of service quality (ii) *performance based paradigm*, the model of perceptions minus expectations view of service quality. *Disconfirmation paradigm* proposes that dissatisfaction arises when service expectations are not met (Cassidy-Smith et al, 2004), consumers evaluate service quality by comparing expectations against the service they receive, meaning therefore that service quality is a measurement of service level against expectations (Lewis and Booms, 1983; Gronroos, 1984). Consequently it is important for organisations offering a service experience to ensure that customer expectations are met on a regular basis. Parasuraman et al. (1985) identify that service quality is derived from the comparison between a consumers expectations for service performance versus the actual performance of service quality received. They further acknowledge perceived service quality is viewed as the level of discrepancy between consumers' perceptions and their expectations. Parasuraman et al. (1988) introduce the SERVQUAL model that explores customer expectations of service quality against their evaluations of the performance of the service. This model will be further explored in section 2.4.1 of this chapter. *Performance based paradigm* identifies an alternate view with Cronin and Taylor (1992) suggesting that performance-based measures better reflect long-term service quality attitudes. This is supported by Babakus and Boller (1992) who agree that the use of performance-based measures of service quality perform better than that of gap analysis explored by Parasuraman et al. (1988).

Cronin and Taylor (1992) further suggest that assessing customer perception is enough for evaluating service quality and state that also measuring customer expectations is unnecessary in service quality research. The concept of performance based measurement approach which discards customer expectations and instead uses the performance component alone (Jain and Gupta, 2004). The research therefore has suggested that there is a relationship between consumer satisfaction and service quality although with some differing thoughts on the exact nature of these relationships (Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Cronin and Taylor, 1992). The key differences identified by the authors is in relation to the two concepts, service quality is often seen as a longer-term overall evaluation of an experience whereas consumer satisfaction has been described as an individual transactional experience. Therefore this is an area for further investigation in this research and as such will be explored as part of the data collection process, explained further in chapter 4. The aim of the research will be to analyse if the service provision offered by a HEI relates to consumer satisfaction in higher education.

Various researchers have identified that there is a tangible difference between perception and expectation when conceptualising service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Bolton and Drew, 1991a; Parasuraman et al., 1991). Parasuraman et al. (1994) identify that the measurement of service quality is related to what a customer *should* expect, whereas measuring satisfaction is about what a customer *would* expect. To clarify these differences, the term 'expectation' in relation to the service quality literature differs from the notion of customer (student) satisfaction in the literature (as explored in section 2.2). In particular, it explains expectations as being seen as predictions made by consumers in relation to what they expect to happen in their transactions or interactions for the higher education sector. In comparison, the service quality literature defines expectations as the desires of consumers, i.e. what they feel a service provider should offer rather than would offer (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Parasuraman et al. (1988) further state that service quality results from the comparison of perceptions with expectations, this is supported by Bolton and Drew (1991a) who considered the gap between performance and consumer expectations, defining this as a key factor in determining overall service quality. Further stating

that how customers assess the overall service quality of an experience is directly affected by their perceptions of the performance level of the experience. Expectations based on experience norms are key to defining service level experience, that is to say what consumers expect from a service provider based upon their previous experiences with that, or similar, service organisations (Woodruff et al, 1983). Therefore a further consideration for this research is to identify the influence of student perceptions in the setting of expectations of their higher education experience.

2.4.1 Service quality models

There are a range of models relating to service quality, including some that are related to service in relation to performance and satisfaction. Table 2.5 identifies the key services models that have relevance to the research title of this thesis and identify how service quality influences customer performance. This can therefore be related to this research as an understanding of service quality is key to ascertain the key influences upon student perceptions and expectations of their higher education institution.

Relevant Model	Theorist / Year	Key drivers
Service Quality Model (SERVQUAL)	Parasuraman et al. (1988)	<u>5 service quality gaps:</u> 1. Customer expectation and Management perception gap 2. Management perception and service specifications gaps 3. Service specifications and service delivery gaps 4. Service delivery and external communication gaps 5. Customers' perception of service and customer expectation gaps <u>5 service dimensions</u> - Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy and Tangibility
Performance only model (SERVPERF)	Cronin and Taylor (1992)	Based on SERVQUAL framework identifies service quality as a form of consumer attitude, based on: 1. Service performance 2. Customer expectation
Service quality, customer value and customer satisfaction model	Oh (1999)	1. Actual price 2. Perceived price 3. Perceived service quality 4. Perceived value 5. Customer satisfaction 6. Purchase intention 7. Word of mouth

Table 2.5, Review of key models of service quality models

The models identified above will be further discussed in the following section of the chapter. One of the most recognisable service quality models identified in the literature search was the SERVQUAL model (see figure 2.5 below), which is identified as a multi-item scale developed to assess customer perceptions of service quality in service and retail businesses (Parasuraman et. al., 1988).

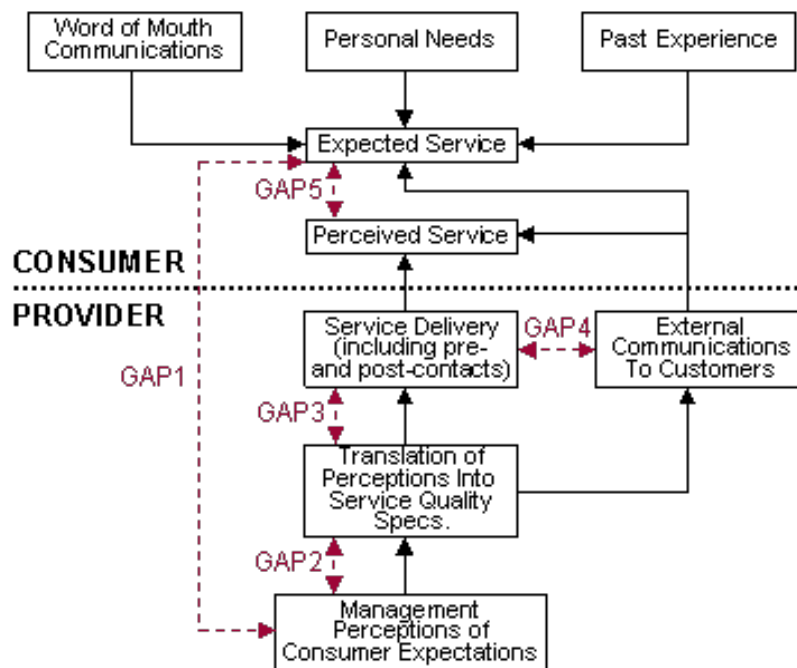


Figure 2.5, SERVQUAL model, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988)

The SERVQUAL model explores the customers' assessment of service quality and identifies gaps customer expectations of service quality from the service provider against the evaluation of the performance received from the service provider (Parasuraman et. al., 1988). The desired service of the customers is based upon what they believe can be performed against how they believe they should perform. There is also a tolerance as to adequate service levels that is the minimum level of acceptable service by the customer which relates to the acceptance that their standards will not always be met. Between these two service levels is a zone of tolerance that customers are willing to accept. Thus service quality is about measuring and managing customer expectations in order to create loyalty and create value with these consumers. Zeithaml et al. (1993) distinguish between three types of service expectations: desired service, adequate service, and predicted service i.e. customers have a level of required service that they wish to achieve from the service

provider. If their experiences of the service do not meet their required levels they are judged as being below acceptable service, anything above this but below desired service is satisfactory service and is usually accepted by customers as tolerable. This can be applied to this research in the form of students' attitude to their HEI and the expectations of service they have. If their expected experience is not met in line with their perceptions of the service then they are likely to become dissatisfied with the institution and problems discussed earlier in this chapter will become prevalent, e.g. poor NSS ratings for the university.

There is some critique of the service versus quality theory where it is explained that identifying and categorising the meaning of expectations on service quality within the SERVQUAL model can be difficult as expectations play a significant role in how individuals conceptualise their service experience (Oliver, 1993; Cuthbert, 1996). However expectations can be difficult to define and should not be included when measuring service quality (Babakus and Boller, 1992) therefore it is important that HEI's understand the differing expectations of their students and the impact this has on service level satisfaction (Appleton-Knapp and Krentler, 2006). These expectations can consist of a wide range of differing factors including teaching, support, facilities, support staff and more (Sander et al, 2000; Voss et al, 2007). This is evermore true when this expectation of 'good' service is applied to the higher education marketplace; a HEI's understanding of the service they offer can often be very different to that of the student (customer). Indeed it is argued (Clewes, 2003) that a definitive method to measure service quality does not yet exist and that each student's view on service quality is subjective to them (Guolla, 1999) and hence student perceptions of 'good customer service' can differ greatly within the same institution.

Cronin and Taylor (1992) criticise the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et. al. (1988) and advise that it is inadequate due to the differing perceptual views that can exist within customer groups. Instead they argue that it is important to identify the relationship between service quality and consumer satisfaction which lead to positive purchase decisions. Therefore they developed the 'performance only' model (SERVPERF) that explored the casual relationships between service quality and customer satisfaction alongside the impact of customer

satisfaction upon purchase behaviour. The research found a variance in service quality levels and explored consumer attitudes to service *satisfaction* rather than simply looking at service *attitudes* as identified in the SERVQUAL framework. It was also recognised that the satisfaction of a service quality experience is in fact linked to the perceptual expectation rather than the actual experience. This is a significant finding for this research and as such identifies the importance of defining perceptual influences upon the university experience. When critiquing the SERVPERF model Parasuraman et al., (1994) provided a counter argument to the validity concerns identified by Cronin and Taylor (1992) in relation to their model by further clarifying the correlation between perceived service and desired service, as well exploring the discrepancies between perceived service and adequate service. Thus they argue that the SERFPERF model is limited in that it does not explore the dimensions of service quality in significant detail.

The model of perceived service quality and satisfaction developed by Oh (1999), identified in figure 2.6 below, assess the role of customer value in the service quality process by exploring the relationship between price, customer perceptions of performance, service quality and customer satisfaction in relation to expected value. This model can be linked to previous discussion on student satisfaction, specifically the Douglas et al. (2008) conceptual model of student satisfaction as was discussed in section 2.2.1, which explored the link between service quality and student satisfaction.

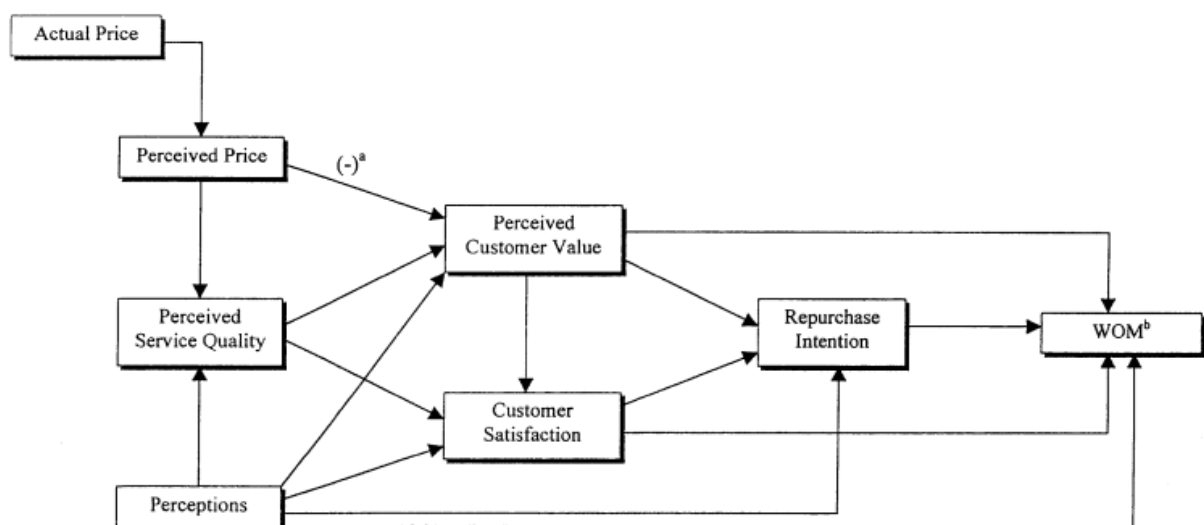


Figure 2.6, Model of service quality, customer value, and customer satisfaction, Oh (1999)

Oh (1999) identifies that customers make a judgement on the perceived value of their service quality experience (Spreng and Mackoy (1996), which is based upon the price they pay against their judgements of the original price. If it is deemed of 'value' then a satisfactory experience will follow and the opposite being true that a negative perception of the 'value' of the price can lead to an unsatisfactory experience. The benefits identified in the model of a valuable experience is repeat purchase behaviour and positive feedback from the customer. Although not directly applicable to the higher education sector there are parallels that can be applied to this research. Student's service expectations and the value placed upon their higher education experience is now closely linked to external factors such as the tuition fees paid. As such it can be argued that 'fees paid' by the student has a direct influence on the perception they have of the institution and their satisfaction with the university experience. This informs the theories relating to the notion of the 'customer in higher education' and will be discussed further in section 2.5 of this chapter. Oh's (1999) model also identifies the benefits of achieving a satisfactory experience can lead to repeat purchases and positive feedback via word of mouth. Again these are not directly related to the higher education sector but it can be argued that the positive response of students in being satisfied with their HEI experience will ensure benefits in terms of evaluative feedback on the institution, as discussed in section 2.2.

In reflection on the discussions above, Oliver (1980) found that service quality, when considered as an attitude, is seen as a function of expectations and as such can be used to determine prior attitudes towards satisfaction. This view of attitude therefore can affect consumer purchase behaviour. It is therefore important to determine the factors (within an organisation / institution) that can be affected by the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction experienced by a consumer (student) and the subsequent influence it has on purchase intentions. The identified gaps in the service quality models in relation to this thesis are that there is limited application to the higher education sector and as such there is a need to clarify the suitability of the research for the higher education sector. The models also do not identify the pre and post purchase behaviour of customers, this supports the gap in research identified in earlier discussions on student satisfaction and supports the rationale of this thesis to develop a holistic framework to document the student journey. The following section of the chapter will look to further explore the concept of service quality in the higher education sector.

2.4.2 Service quality in Higher Education

Over recent decades' service quality in higher education has become an ever increasing important consideration to understanding and managing student expectations (Athiyaman, 1997; Oldfield and Baron, 2000; Khan et al., 2011). The 1990's brought the first research focusing on service quality within higher education (Shank et al, 1995; Harrop and Douglas, 1996; Harvey and Knight, 1996; Ford et al, 1999). Since this early research more focus has been given to the topic (Barnes, 2007), and HEI's have started to focus on improved service within their organisation (Nedwek and Neal, 1994). Kwek et al., (2010) also considered the impact of service quality on the higher education sector, the research has shown that the idea of customer service in higher education is one that HEI's need to be ever more aware of. Quality in higher education is a complex and multifaceted concept and a single appropriate definition of quality is lacking (Harvey and Green, 1993), thus the best way to define and measure service quality in higher education does not yet exist (Clewes, 2003). Every stakeholder in higher education has a particular view of quality dependent on their specific needs therefore perceived quality, which results from the comparison of customer service expectations with their perceptions of actual performance (Zeithaml et al., 1990). O'Neill and Palmer (2004) identify that service quality in higher education is seen as the difference between student expectations of received service against their perceptions of the actual delivery. Guolla (1999) claims that students' perceived service quality is the originator to student satisfaction. Yeo (2008) states that service in the higher education industry should be the primary focus of institutions in order that they can provide quality learning experiences to students. Bitner et al. (1990) explain that service quality is the customers' general impression of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the service organisation.

In relation to the higher education sector there are several views on this with and definitions varying dependent upon the classification of 'quality' in higher education (De Jager and Gbadamosi, 2010). Therefore the methods of measurement to gain perceptions of quality in higher education are key. Some relate to the programme of study e.g. NSS, with Stodnick and Rogers (2008) explaining that quality impacting upon student satisfaction of their programme are the lecturers competence and knowledge as well as the empathy of the staff. The implications for higher education

staff therefore is to find effective methods to engage students in university life in order that they become more involved and engaged with their university experience which in turn could motivate them to study harder (Osman et al., 2017). Kotzé and Plessis (2003) suggest that engagement may be achieved by making students realise the importance of capitalising on the opportunity for their own personal growth. Therefore student perception of their institutional performance and the influencers upon them are a key consideration of HEI's. There must be acknowledgement by the organisation and as discussed earlier in this chapter states, be managed by the HEI to ensure perceived service levels are achieved and student satisfaction achieved. Positive perceptions of service quality and satisfied students can lead to encouraging feedback and improved retention (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002; Marzo-Navarro et al., 2005). This was also identified by Alves and Raposo, (2006) who acknowledged the link between satisfaction and positive praise for the institution. Therefore it is beneficial to further explore the influencers upon student perceptions of their higher education experience in this research. There is discussion from many authors regarding student experiences who suggest that positive perceptions of higher education have an influence on students' satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Douglas et al., 2006; Eagle and Brennan, 2007; Letcher and Neves, 2010).

Cronin and Taylor (1992) explain that current performance of the student influences upon the perceived service quality rather than the influence of previous educational experiences. Indeed Oliver (1980), argues that consumer satisfaction is determined by judgements of the consumer (better or worse than expected) on the basis of comparing the actual performance of a product with the expectations of the customer. When exploring service quality, performance dimensions can be harder to quantify as consumers may not be able to make as simple comparisons between (perceived) performance and their set expectations. Coye (2004) state that experience is directly related to the ability to meet or not meet expectations. Churchill and Suprenaut (1982) argue that satisfaction is related to the gaps in experience where the gap is related to the consumer's initial expectations. As such when defining service quality the judgement of perceived performance against expectations defines that perceived service quality is the variance between customer perceptions and expectations (Tan and Kek, 2004).

Given the ongoing importance of understanding and meeting students' expectations and perceptions of higher education (see section 2.3 of this chapter), HEI's need to recognise their students' needs and wants of service quality within the university and identify if they change over their time at the institution. Consequently how students distinguish the quality of service they receive is becoming of increasing significance for management and support functions within the institution. Having explored the nature of service quality and how it can impact on the students' higher education experience it has identified that there is a clear correlation between the service provision of a HEI and the experience and satisfaction of their students. This has meant that students now have a clearer understanding of their service expectations and consequently has led to many institutions to consider the notion of students as customers. This concept will be further discussed in section 2.5 of the chapter. The analysis of service quality and the impact upon students' perceptions and expectations is an area of interest to this research. It has been recognised as having an influence upon the satisfaction of the university experience. As such, the next chapter will further explore the link between service quality and customer satisfaction.

2.5 The notion of students as customers

The discussion in this chapter thus far has explored the concept of student perceptions and expectations and how service quality is becoming ever more prevalent to institutions. As identified, this has given rise to the notion of the 'customer' in higher education, indeed this subject is one of great debate. There has been a great deal of research on this topic and many authors have made attempts to give a definitive answer and define if a typical higher education customer exists. Undeniably as universities become more responsive to student needs the importance of defining the customer in higher education increases (Kamvounias, 1999; Jones, 2010; Bates, 2013; Koris, 2015). The idea of 'students as customers' has long being debated within the higher education sector (Douglas et al, 2006) and these findings can have an influence on the eventual experience of students within their institution. Kamvounias (1999) identifies the notion of the customer in higher education and applies the thinking to the measurement of quality in the sector. It has been argued that universities need to treat students as customers as they are entitled to an efficient, high quality service (Williams, 1993). Therefore it can be

argued that there are several difficulties in identifying the customer in the higher education marketplace in that the sector is different to the retail industry as there is no general agreement as to who exactly HEI customers are. This is supported by other authors, (Schwartzman, 1995; Sirvanci, 1996; Svensson and Wood, 2007) who state that there are fundamental differences between students and customers identifying a more complex concept than simply a buyer–seller relationship. Indeed some theorists (Davis, 1992; Sirvanci, 1996; Pitman, 2000) identify the concept of higher education institutions having internal and external customers, with the internal customers, HEI’s employees, working to meet the needs of external customers, students, government and industry.

There are also many who argue that students of HEI’s should definitely not be classed as customers as there are fundamental differences with this thought process to that of a retail service (Madu and Kuei, 1993; Franz, 1998; Lomas, 2007; Maguad, 2007). Owlia (1996) takes this further and asserts that students perform many roles within the university including buyer, user and partner. Sirvanci (1996) explores the basic differences between customers and students. Customers choose to purchase goods and services and businesses allow these transactions without any pre-determined restrictions on these customers. Yet universities can and do restrict admissions from prospective students through the use of entry criteria. This means that even if the student wanted to join an institution and are pay the set price i.e. tuition fees, being charged they may not do so. In retail customers usually pay for the product or service they purchase using their own finances. As identified in section 2.1 students do not directly pay for their studies and instead tuition fees are taken through student loans and paid back at a later date if and when they reach a particular salary (Browne, 2010). Obermiller (2005) argues that there are no other markets where the provider takes the customer’s money, engages in a lengthy and complex interaction to then possibly refuse to give them the final product that they want i.e. their degree qualification. This is another uniqueness of the higher education provision where there is no guarantee that although the student ‘has paid’ for their education there is no guarantee they will receive a degree certificate at the end. Instead it relies on their own commitment during their time at university. As identified earlier, the notion of a customer in higher education is important in that it identifies higher education institution as a service provider.

It is therefore also important to consider how students see themselves, Alolabi and Stockwell (2012) argue that students do not relate to the concept of being customers of an institution. Instead it is said that they wish to engage and participate in the wider educational process and not simply be directed information by their tutors and react to their demands. Svensson and Wood (2007) argue this point and identify that students can see themselves as a customer of their prospective HEI and therefore make perceptions of the relationship they will have with the university based upon this. This has resulted in a market position where institutions are becoming customer driven and needing to offer a standard of service to their students (Driscoll and Wicks, 1998; Coaldrake, 2001; Svensson and Wood, 2007). HEI's are operating in a dynamic competitive environment where students from across the globe are exploring their opportunities for study (Pitman, 2000; Pesch et al., 2008; Khanna, 2014). Perhaps now, more so than ever before, the higher education marketplace is in a state of flux, HEI's are facing tough decisions that will have a substantial impact on their long-term future. HEI's are now competing in markets with current and new providers for their students finances (Coaldrake, 2001).

Desai et al. (2001) argues that as students are consumers of a service provision (within the institution) they have needs and wants, it is therefore important that these are understood and met in order to provide an improved educational experience. A number of authors agree with this approach and suggest that implementing and adopting a customer orientation approach in academia in order to assess students' perceptions of the institution's commitment to understanding and meeting their needs (Hatfield and Taylor, 1998; Browne, 2010). Emery et al. (2001) expresses concerns about a customer-oriented approach in business education where the primary role of the academic is to ensure that the needs or expectations of each of their students (customers) are met. It is argued that by observing the traditional business philosophy that 'the customer is always right,' universities will increase student satisfaction, but if students are satisfied only by less coursework, easy exams, and higher grades then this is not necessarily in the academics control (Helms and Key, 1994). Additionally by embracing the notion of students as 'paying customers' could make them feel more entitled to pass their course and receive good grades even if undeserved. Additionally, students could feel justified in

complaining of unfairness and demanding reconsideration when their grades do not match their expectations – as would a customer with an unsatisfactory product. Emery et al. (2001) suggest that the rise of average course grades over the years is partly related to educators trying to "avoid grade challenges filed by students".

Hussey and Smith (2010) also identify that using the customer analogy in higher education is not only unsuitable but potentially as if students do not engage and work hard they will not be successful in their goal of gaining an academic qualification. They state that it would be unwise to liken a lecturer within the institution to a salesperson and accept that the customer is always right. It is instead about ensuring that the HEI provides the opportunity for students to succeed. Koris et al. (2015) claims that institutions who decide to embrace a customer-oriented approach to their students may result in a situation where teaching staff cater to students' wishes, yield to complaints, and care more about the students' concerns than for what they actually learn my encounter difficulties.

2.5.1 The drivers of students as customers

The issue of student expectations of a HEI have been discussed earlier in this chapter (section 2.3.1), where it was argued that students are now able to use their expectations as reference standards for satisfaction judgments (Temple et al., 2014; Tomlinson, 2017; McRae, 2018). Much of this is driven by the Browne Report (2010), as discussed in section 2.1 of this chapter, and the increase of student tuition fees of over £9,000 by most institutions; as a result HEI's have had to review their strategy to ensure they can compete with similar institutions in the marketplace to attract students. The Browne Report (2010) was introduced to ensure a more robust higher education marketplace and allowed universities to determine the fees they charged for their programmes. Much like a business marketplace where quality of provision influences pricing strategies. Due to these changes in the higher education sector HEI's need to ensure that they are 'customer friendly' and offer an attractive proposition for prospective students and show that they offer value. Acceptable levels of quality must be shown by institutions to ensure that consumers will benefit from a product (degree programme) and perceive the purchase as of value (Butz and Goodstein, 1996). Koris and Nokelainen (2015) suggest that HEI's should start paying more attention to being student-customer oriented because students know

best what they want to get from higher education. The consequence of this is that there has been a shift in power from the HEI to the student. This of course is not true of all institutions, for example the traditional 'red brick' universities still have the prestige associated with studying at them and as a result the fee increases haven't significantly impacted upon these institutions. This however has not been true of the Russell Group institutions where competition for student numbers is even greater than in previous years. Students now not only compare programmes of study available to them but also consider cost as a critical factor (Wilkins et al., 2012; Bachan, 2013; Esson and Ertl, 2016). This additional financial consideration, combined with programme content and other information, such as NSS results, has ensured that students have a range of data sources available to them to which they can consult when deciding upon the institution and programme they wish to enrol.

Clearly this could make a prospective student have a certain perception and expectations of the HEI, which may be different to the actual experience they gain upon enrolment onto a programme (positive or negative). Potentially this could lead to issues with retention and success rates. As discussed earlier in the chapter, this reinforces the idea of a gap in student perception and knowledge of their expectations of the service provision offered by the HEI. Another consideration of HEI's should be the emergence of online generation; students now have information available at their fingertips through the use of the internet and mobile phones. The rise in popularity of social networking sites is also an issue that HEI's cannot afford to ignore. The use of social networking by HEI's to engage with students is becoming a necessity rather than an additional service (Davis III, 2012). Solis and Carroll (2008) identifies that participation is no longer an option as Social Media isn't a spectator sport. Indeed some theorists have suggested that HEI's open themselves up to judgement from students by allowing themselves to feature on student review sites. These sites rate a university's performance based on student reviews much like sites from other markets i.e. Trip Advisor allows guests to rate their stay at a particular hotel; potential new customers then use this as a basis for deciding if they wish to stay at the hotel. Positive reviews (WOM) could enable the institution to increase enrolments onto a programme; but poor reviews could hinder the institution and thus sway them away from this idea. Read and Young (2006) state that administrators will worry about the classes that receive poor reviews,

especially as these conversations are happening on sites they have no control over. In fact sites such as www.ratemyuni.co.uk are already allowing students to voice their opinions of their institutions, with 193 UK institutions currently featuring on the site (as of August 2018). There are many other vehicles available for students to voice their opinion on an institution and programme, these include blogging and micro blogging sites such as ‘the student room’ and ‘Twitter’, where personal student experiences can be shared with millions of internet users. The challenge therefore is for HEI’s to keep their prestige but also adapt to meet the changing needs of the student. Over the next decade students will expect technology to play a key role in their education and as a result HEI’s needs to respond, otherwise they face being left behind.

Table 2.6 below summarises discussion in this section in relation to the concept of students as customers and identifies the key theoretical views on the topic. The following section of the chapter will examine the literature in relation to the key marketing theory and how this relates to decisions made in the higher education sector.

Influencers of student as customer	Influencers Overview	Theorists
Competitive HE environment	Students have a greater choice as to their HE provision meaning the marketplace is very competitive and students have greater power.	Wilkins et al. (2012); Bachan (2013); Koris and Nokelainen (2015); Esson and Ertl (2016)
Student voice	Students are able to express their opinion on their HEI through a range of formats resulting in a wider lens upon the institution.	Carroll (2008); Read and Young (2006)
Role of academic staff	The impact staff have upon the service provision offered by the institution, academics deemed to play key role in satisfaction levels.	Helms and Key (1994); Hatfield and Taylor (1998); Emery et al. (2001); Browne, (2010)

Table 2.6, Review of key literature in relation to students as customers

2.6 Defining marketing theory and the relevance to Higher Education

A key consideration for this research was how HEI's can effectively use positive student experiences within their institution to effectively market themselves. The concept of marketing is well established and has been undertaken by organisations for decades. It has been identified earlier in this chapter that the higher education sector is becoming ever more competitive and that universities now need to market themselves effectively in the face of the competition from other higher education institutions, both nationally and internationally (Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999; Ivy, 2001; Coates and Adnett, 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Marginson, 2006). Therefore institutions need to ensure they are competent in their ability to market and promote their university to prospective students. Marketing allows the institution to effectively promote the university in order that they can recruit new students, communicate with stakeholders, such as the media, public and alumni. For the purpose of this thesis it is important to not only define the marketing concept generally but also the relationship the function has on the wider university and student experience. A simplistic definition of marketing is provided by Kotler and Armstrong (2005), who claim it is the process of managing profitable customer relationships. Moutinho and Southern (2010) further build upon this and identify that marketing is the process of analysing, planning, implementing, coordinating, and controlling that involves the formation, pricing, promotion and distribution of products, services, and ideas designed to create and maintain beneficial exchanges with target markets for the purpose of achieving organisational objectives. Egan (2008) identifies marketing as the management process specifically responsible for the identification, anticipation and satisfaction of customer needs to ensure organisational profitability. However, Grönroos (2006) explores the notion that marketing has and will continue to change its definition, meaning that it is a more complex topic to define. Indeed others support this changing view of marketing and argue that it can no longer be seen as the sole responsibility of the marketing department, but as a cross-functional discipline within an organisation (Hackley, 2003; French et al., 2011). Exploration of the marketing concepts have identified that the traditional approach and definition of marketing is not necessarily appropriate for the higher education sector. Instead marketing is a varied subject which involves differing activities, including profitability, value and the establishment and satisfaction of customer needs in a mutually-beneficial manner through offering

appropriate products and/or services (Baran et al., 2008; Hollensen, 2010; Gummesson, 2011).

Drucker (1958) identifies that the only reason a company exists is to satisfy customers, and that the customers' point of view should determine marketing decisions made. Kotler and Armstrong (2013) acknowledge a similar view and define marketing as the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013). Therefore it can be seen that meeting customer needs generally relates to increased revenue generation for the organisation. Thus for all organisations, including HEI's, it is important to manage the customer experience to ensure satisfactory income is made. It is argued by authors that marketing acts only as an economic driver for organisations (Payne and Frow, 2005; Reinartz, 2005; Steffens, 2009) and therefore the role marketing in the broader context of the financial stability of the HEI is significant. Morgan et al., (2009) identifies that the economic outcomes of universities can be improved by facilitating effective exchange relationships between customers and organisations. This is an interesting perspective of marketing in terms of higher education where the institution does not primarily look to be profit driven, instead looking to establish effective relationships with their students (customers). In this sense the role of marketing within higher education is to promote the institution in a positive manner in the attempt to attract prospective students to the HEI. Therefore it is important to understand the perceptions and expectations that students have of their university experience and how institutions can focus their offerings towards these. Kotler (2017) acknowledges the importance of creating genuine value for customers rather than disposing customers of their earnings. This is clearly an important consideration for HEI's where there is not a physical exchange of money for the service provision. Instead students identify the concept of value in their university experience, Vargo and Lusch (2004) support the notion of customer value and identify a focus on customers' interactions with the organisation is key to identify value creation. Thus this shows the increasing importance of harvesting customer value in the marketing field.

The key focus therefore should be towards customer satisfaction and the approach of the organisation should follow. By undertaking a customer orientated approach it

will allow creation of value for the business and customer and as such is a significant element in market orientation decision making (Slater and Narver, 1994; Conduit and Mavondo, 2001). Market orientation can be defined as the use of customers' current and future needs as important factors that influence organisational performance (Kohli and Jaworski 1990). When considering this in relation to the higher education sector, Mackay and Yorke (1994) identify that HEI's should consider market orientation in their strategic planning decision making. As has been identified higher education is an increasingly competitive sector and as such the attraction of new students, as well as the retention of exiting students, is vitally important for universities. The result has been that universities have not only increased their marketing efforts on recruiting new applicants (Conway et al., 1994; Koris and Nokelainen, 2015) but also understood the need to retain their current students through satisfaction of their needs (DeShields, 2005). As a result it is reasonable to suggest that HEI's would benefit from a market orientated approach to developing successful customer relationship strategies. As such it is important to identify the relationship between the 'customer' in higher education and their needs and expectations of the institution. Lovelock and Gummesson (2004) explore the notion of relationship marketing and acknowledge that it is an extension of marketing which is based upon interaction of customer relationships and creation of value. Soliman (2011) further explore this notion and define that relationship marketing is the focus of the relationships between an organisation and their customers, or in higher education institution and student. Hollensen (2010) state that effective relationship marketing has a direct influence upon the organisations performance and thus profitability, it is therefore a logical decision for companies to focus on establishing rapport with their customers. In terms of HEI's the ability to understand prospective and current students' behaviours allows for an understanding of the key drivers within the relationship in order that these factors can be understood and effectively marketed. Therefore, the emphasis should be put on the activities that can improve the relationship, and as a result of it, also the eventual profitability through student tuition fees (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Hennig-Thurau and Hansen, 2013).

As has been identified in section 2.5.1, there is a continued debate over who the customer is in the higher education market with no universal agreement over the consideration that students are customers in the sector (Mark, 2013a). To further

identify the relevance of marketing theory to relation to 'the customer' in higher education it is important to further explore the topic. By identifying students as customers it is fair to assume that their needs and wants need to be understood and as such institutions must be responsive to these (Brennan and Bennington, 2000). Therefore, if students are not viewed as customers by HEI's it may be that there is a lack of specific marketing towards their wants and needs for studying at the university. As such there is a need for HEI's to acknowledge a need to be customer orientated towards their students (Guilbault, 2016). Therefore how the consumer of the service given is defined by the university will determine the service they provide (Pitman, 2000). Desai et al (2001) argue that students, as consumers of an academic provision, have needs and wants, which, if better understood, should result in an improved educational experience. Brown and Carasso (2013) defined this concept the 'marketisation' of higher education and there are other authors who agree with this notion of the application of market-oriented techniques in higher education (McCollough and Gremler, 1999; Gremler and McCollough, 2002; Jongbloed, 2003; Furedi, 2010; Molesworth, 2010). Research into the choice of higher education institution and consumer behaviour in these markets has recognised that universities need to be proactive in identifying the long-term factors in student choice upon their decision to study at university (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001). The Browne report (2010) and other Government policies that have attempted to improve the quality of higher education is based upon the view that that students currently or, or will soon become, knowledgeable customers making balanced choices on their higher education programme and institution (Baldwin and James, 2000).

The application of marketing in higher education is not a new concept and as such is considered a fundamental concern for all institutions (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Kotler and Fox (1995, p. 16) defined marketing in the context of education as 'the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with a target market to achieve organisational objectives'. Thus, how the university uses marketing can vary but essentially is about creating a positive perception of the institution to prospective students (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001). The marketing activities used should aim to build and improve the perceptions of the institution in order that a

holistic approach is taken in the recruitment of new students (Lavidge, 1970; Maringe, 2006). As such, most educational institutions now recognise the need to effectively market themselves in a competitively global marketplace. Literature on the practices and concepts of marketing in the higher education sector have been debated by many (Gibbs, 2002; Mateo, 2014). With some authors (Nguyen and Le Blanc, 2001) focussing on the importance of university reputation and image developing a competitive market 'unique selling point'. Brown (2015) identifies that a key strategy of marketing is the use of promotional literature to attract customers, this is a concept that is applicable to the context of higher education. Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) support the notion of the concept of educational marketing being based on models originally developed for use in the business sector. There is some support to this theory (Barrett, 1996; Newman and Jahdi, 2009) who debate that a marketing focus, in a business sense, should be acknowledged and embraced in higher education. Comments such as this regarding the marketisation of higher education through the use of business techniques serve to emphasise that contemporary higher education institutions should be regarded as a business, like any other. Those who oppose this view believe that the business world differs greatly in the morals and values of education and as such the introduction of market techniques in education is not applicable (Jongbloed, 2003; Molesworth et al., 2009). This has led some authors to discuss the concept of 'product marketing' with Kotler and Fox (1995) further defining that students could be considered the product of an institution with employees being the customers. Emery et al., (2001); Clayson and Haley (2005) also explore this viewpoint and identify a university's offerings as products. However, general consensus is that higher education marketing is better placed within the services marketing definition, for example Sines and Duckworth (1994) highlighted the key characteristics that provided a marketing based approach based upon the nature of the service quality as defined earlier in this chapter (Zeithaml et al., 1985; Parasuraman et al., 2004).

Frow and Payne (2007) identify the notion of customer experience and the link to a satisfactory experience. Thereby, the better the service provided to students, the greater satisfaction it will achieve. It can be stated that when satisfaction occurs it leads to more customers becoming loyal advocates of the institution which can create positive referrals, customer retention, an expansion of the customer base and

profitability. This shows the importance of HEI's being able to understand and manage the student experience in order that effective satisfactory relationships can be built. Developing this form of satisfactory relationship is a way for organisations to establish sustainable differentiation through offering a superior customer experience to their competition (Sharp and Dawes, 2001). Due to the global competitiveness of the higher education sector, the potential to establish sustainable relationships to gain advantage is an attraction for any higher education institution. Porter (2008) state that the customer experience has become a key factor in establishing a market position in the competitive marketplace. Lawer and Knox (2006) have an alternate view of customer relationships and identify that a successful customer relationship strategy can actually remove the need for organisations to market themselves. As instead the approach can encourage customers to become advocates of the business and reduce the need for investment in marketing publicity. Loyal customer advocates will promote the organisation in a much-more credible way than normal marketing efforts (Roy, 2013). Therefore this shows the importance of current and past students (Alumni) promoting their institution to prospective students of the HEI and how this acts as a key marketing strategy of the university. Mithas et al. (2005) identify that a successful customer-driven marketing strategy will lead to the creation of a substantial group of satisfied customers, which can bring long-term benefits to the organisation in terms of loyalty, profit and the satisfaction of organisational objectives. Therefore to summarise the role of marketing is seen to be vitally important for HEI's to ensure they offer a positive image of their institution to students and ensure they gain a competitive position in the market place.

2.7 Summary of chapter

This chapter has conducted a literature review on the key factors that are influencing the student experience within higher education institutions. The rationale for this was to identify similarities within the literature to establish key themes and more importantly identify key gaps in the findings in order that this research can explore further. When exploring these topics in greater detail it was recognised that there are a range of views and thinking by the authors, however there was also key themes that ran through all discussion. When exploring the changing policy context of higher education, it was highlighted how the marketplace has gone from 'free'

education that is heavily subsidised by government bursaries to the current tuition fees regime where students pay over £9,000 per academic year. These have been heavily influenced by government white papers, especially the Dearing report (1997) and the Browne report (2010), see section 2.1. This has had implications upon expectations of students when they arrive at a HEI (Hill, 1995; Sander et al., 2000) and thus a clear understanding of these factors are needed. Within the literature there was debate around the key influencers upon student expectations including teaching and support staff, social factors, facilities within the institution and wider marketing communications. Perception of the institution was also explored and the literature identified how this influences the expectations of the students when they attend the university. This was discussed in relation to employability of the student post university and explored if there should be an automatic assumption that university leads to a higher paid job upon Graduation. The agreement within the research did clearly show that there is a direct link between student satisfaction and the experience they have within the institution (DeShields, 2005; Douglas et al, 2006).

The literature also explored the notion of service quality in higher education and identified how this has become an ever important consideration to understanding and managing student expectations (Athiyaman, 1997; Oldfield and Baron, 2000). It was acknowledged that there is a range of views around if and how service should be linked to the higher education marketplace, and this gave credence to the concept of students as customers (Kamvounias, 1999; Bates, 2013). However this topic has been hotly disputed by others who deem that HEI's should not be subjected to service quality expectations, nor treat students as customers (Corts, 1992; Madu and Kuei, 1993). Finally, the chapter explored how HEI's now need to be responsive to the marketisation of higher education and need to recognise the need to market themselves and how they appear to prospective students. The next chapter of this thesis will introduce the conceptual framework applied to the research and identify how a framework for testing student expectation of their higher education institution was developed.

Chapter Three

Conceptual Framework

3.0 Introduction

The formulation of the conceptual framework has been based upon the review of the literature into the drivers upon student expectations and perceptions where it was identified that there are several key influencers upon student satisfaction within the higher education sector. The analysis of these concepts allowed for an identification of the current limitations around the existing literature. The key gaps identified related to the holistic nature of the student higher education journey with current research focusing upon the factors that influence their satisfaction over a specific period of time. It has therefore been identified that to gain a better understanding of the university experience and influencers of expectations upon it, it is important to explore this over a longer period of time, specifically the full programme of study. This will allow for a better understanding of how expectations may change over the student's period of study and which are seen as most significant to the university experience over this time. It was also apparent that there is a gap in the existing findings in relation to the influencers upon pre-university perceptions and how these inform the expectations of the student upon their chosen university. The models and theory explored also failed to identify the key drivers for students' post-university (after Graduation) which it is identified by this researcher as being an important factor upon student expectations.

Based on these gaps it was identified that there is a need for HEI's to effectively manage expectations of students during their higher education experience to identify factors that influence the student experience. This has therefore strengthened the need for this thesis to develop a conceptual framework that can identify the key dimensions that influence the perceptions and expectations of students in relation to their university experience. A conceptual framework is defined as a visual or written product that 'explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied, the key factors, concepts, or variables, and the presumed relationships among them' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 18). The conceptual framework for research is constructed, not found and incorporates pieces that are borrowed from

elsewhere (Becker, 2007; Robson, 2011). By using research theories that currently exist and are relevant to the study will allow for better definition of key thinking to better understand the concepts (Maxwell, 2013).

Therefore the conceptual framework introduced in this chapter has explored the key dimensions impacting upon the university experience and looked to identify how HEI's can effectively manage their students' perceptions and expectations of the university. The rationale for the framework is further supported by the fact that a key research objective of the thesis looks to identify if student expectations stay the same throughout their time at their HEI and if they develop / change during their educational journey. As this research is on a longitudinal basis looking at the three-year intuitional experience it can be defined that the framework will build develop the existing research in the field over a longer period of time than previous studies. The following section will define how the conceptual framework has been established and related to the thesis title to explore the key influencers and drivers on students' expectations of their higher education institution.

3.1 Conceptualising the framework

After examination of the key gaps in the literature it was important to establish a conceptual framework to further explore these findings and be used as a lens to explore the key dimensions impacting upon the university experience. The conceptual framework for this study will be used to plan the research and ensure that the topic of investigation is effectively explored (Robson, 2011). As such the development of the framework began in the early phase of planning for the data collection and followed the analysis of the literature findings. The rationale for this was to ensure the framework successfully identifies 'how HEI's can effectively manage student perceptions and expectations of their university experience'. The framework has been developed based on the literature findings as identified below and is underpinned by application to an appropriate philosophical perspective. For this research Plato's allegory of the cave has been used as the philosophical viewpoint upon which the conceptual framework for the thesis was based. The rationale for the use of Plato's allegory of the cave started when the researcher was exploring possible philosophies that could be effectively applied to the chosen methodology of the thesis and ensure that the research questions and objectives are

effectively met. Figure 3.1 below shows the approach taken towards the development of the conceptual framework to answer the research question.

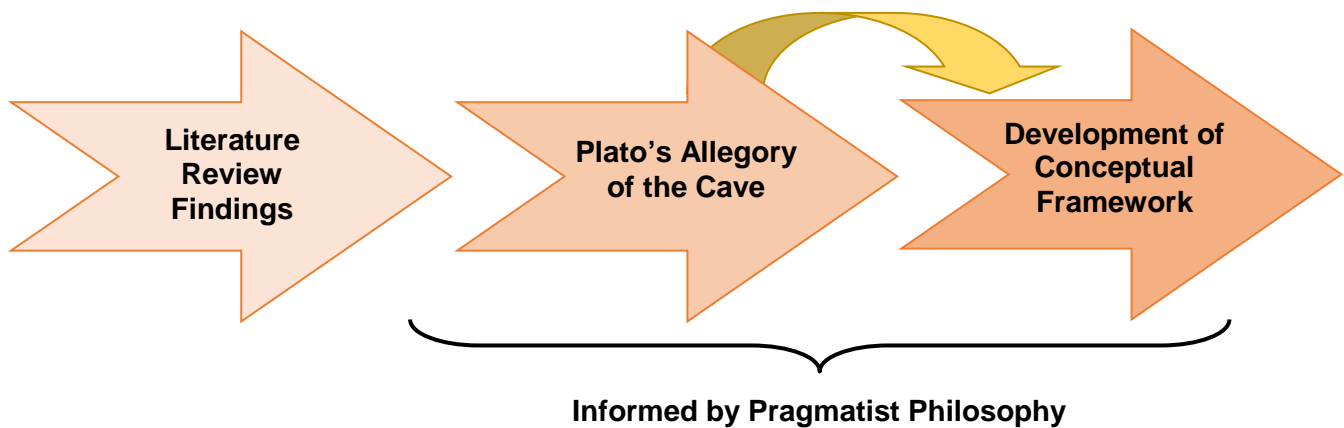


Figure 3.1, Approach taken to the development of conceptual framework

The choice of research philosophy was an important consideration for this study as it forms the basic foundation for the methodology undertaken. A pragmatist approach has been taken towards the study, see chapter four for further explanation, which allowed the researcher to undertake a practical application of the philosophy in relation to the conceptual framework. As such an important consideration was how the framework developed could be effectively applied to answer the research questions of the thesis. The design of the framework therefore needed to be appropriate and ensure the information collected was efficient in meeting the objectives of the research (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). The pragmatist approach is often associated with a mixed methods approach to data collection (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). As such this informed the methodological approach undertaken for this thesis and allowed for the conceptual framework developed to be tested by both qualitative and quantitative research design in order that a deeper analysis of the research objectives be undertaken.

The developed framework has been titled the 'allegory of the cave in education' (ACIE) framework and aims to link the literature around the subject in order that an understanding of the philosophical underpinning of Plato's work is made relevant to the thesis's overarching aim. The key dimensions of the philosophy have been used as a representation on which the framework has been built. These elements are identified as *fire, sunlight, prisoners, shadows and exit* with each dimension of

Plato's allegory being applied to the conceptual framework to show the influence on the expectations of the perceived student experience. Table 3.1 identifies how the framework dimensions relate to the research questions and objectives of the thesis as well as identifying the key literature themes for each dimension as discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

ACIE Dimension	Relevant Research Questions	Relevant Research Objectives	Key literature themes
Fire Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key drivers upon student choice of HEI and do these influence their perception of the university? (RQ1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction. (RO1) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal motivators 2. Preparedness for higher education 3. Service expectations 4. Previous educational experiences
Sunlight Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key drivers upon student choice of HEI and do these influence their perception of the university? (RQ1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction. (RO1) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. External motivators 2. Influence of family 3. Influence of previous institution 4. Influence of institution
Prisoners Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key drivers upon student choice of HEI and do these influence their perception of the university? (RQ1) • Do student expectations stay the same during their time at university or change? (RQ2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction. (RO1) • To identify the drivers on student expectations and identify the influence upon the university experience. (RO2) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expectations of institution 2. Student ability and skills 3. Student's perceptions of institution 4. Service expectations
Shadows Dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do student expectations stay the same during their time at university or change? (RQ2) • What models are currently available to test student expectations of their higher education experience? (RQ3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the drivers on student expectations and identify the influence upon the university experience. (RO2) • To identify if student expectations remain consistent or change over the period of their academic study. (RO3) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influence of staff 2. Impact of university facilities 3. Influence of social factors 4. Impact of university environment
Exit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key drivers upon student choice of HEI and do these influence their perception of the university? (RQ1) • Do student expectations stay the same during their time at university or change? (RQ2) • What models are currently available to test student expectations of their higher education experience? (RQ3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction. (RO1) • To identify the drivers on student expectations and identify the influence upon the university experience. (RO2) • To identify if student expectations remain consistent or change over the period of their academic study. (RO3) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employability outcomes 2. Engagement with education (further study)

Table 3.1, ACIE dimensions in relation to research questions, objectives and key themes

As can be seen the key literature which impacts upon the dimensions have been identified to show how these informed the development of the framework. This allowed for an effective model to identify the key areas of the university experience. This will allow the university to firstly create an effective environment for satisfying students' expectations, or in terms of the literature findings ensuring an effective service provision. It can be acknowledged that service quality has a direct impact upon student satisfaction and can be seen as a key influencer on student expectations of their university experience (Zeithaml et al., 1990; Guolla, 1999; O'Neill and Palmer, 2004). Secondly it will allow the HEI to ensure they are effectively marketing the institution to prospective students. As was identified in the literature, this is a key consideration for universities and allows them to ensure they are competitive in the sector. It is now commonly accepted that universities are required to use marketing techniques in order that they can make the institution attractive to potential students, be that university reputation, facilities or student testimony (Nguyen and Le Blanc, 2001; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Mateo, 2014). These factors support the rationale for this thesis and the development of the conceptual framework with the purpose to investigate the key influencers and drivers on students' expectations of their higher education institution.

3.2 Explaining Plato's allegory of the cave philosophy

It has been identified that Plato's allegory of the cave is one of the best-known and most insightful attempts to explain the nature of reality (Duarte, 2012). The theory depicts the journey of prisoners escaping from a cave to their freedom. This section elaborates on the underlying philosophical concept of the notion of the allegory of the cave and incorporates it into the conceptual framework of this thesis. It will also incorporate analysis of the theory and discusses the relevance to the student experiences and the journey that is undertaken in their university experience. Plato aimed to answer philosophical questions and in the allegory of the cave explored the concept of reality and natural behaviour. The allegory of the cave philosophy is told through conversation with Socrates, Plato's mentor, who it is told has influence upon the philosophical views of Plato. One of Socrates and Plato's concepts was that the world we see is a reflection of perceptions we make that are applied to the reality of the experiences we have (Judge, 2009). Therefore they argue that the world we see is only a reflection of the customs the world presents, thus a perceptual view of the

world we live in. This is particularly relevant to the nature of this thesis where it is looking to establish the perceptions of students prior to, and during, their university experience.

The history of the allegory is believed to have originated from a dialogue between Socrates and his students. Plato aimed to answer philosophical questions and in the allegory of the cave explored the concept of the nature of reality after overhearing this conversation which allowed him to establish the philosophy we now know as the allegory of the cave (Ferguson, 1922; Juge, 2009; Cazeaux, 2013). The philosophy imagines a cave, where prisoners have been kept since their childhood where they are chained into a fixed position and therefore forced to look ahead at a wall in front of them. The cave has a fire which reflects shadows of people walking on a walkway above the prisoners carrying different shaped objects. The prisoners make judgements of the shadows on the wall and as they have no other gauge presume them to be real rather than a shadowy representation of reality. Plato states the images on the wall appeared so real to the prisoners that they would assign prestige to the other prisoners who could remember the greatest detail about the images seen, the order appeared on the wall and which images appear together.

Following this the situation is changed further when Plato frees one of the prisoners so they are able to turn and look at the fire for the first time. The outcome of this was that the prisoners' eyes hurt from the bright light of the fire as he was accustomed to the shadows. The freed prisoner makes attempts to turn back to the wall and its flickering images as it was a more familiar sight. However when viewing the actual circumstances of his surroundings the prisoner realises that the images were in fact, not real at all, and were only shadows of the real images behind him. When the prisoner is taken from the cave and freed, they became further disorientated, however as their eyes adjust they are able to see for the first time the actual 'real world' they inhabit and their own image through the reflection in the water of a lake outside of the cave. After learning of the reality of the world, the prisoner could see how misrepresented their views inside of the cave were. They therefore need to embrace the new realities as by returning to the cave they would receive no pleasure in viewing the shadows as they previously had done. This relates to the research conducted for this thesis as the expectation of higher education and the perceived

actual experience they receive can be very different depending upon the perceptual view they have formed. This can therefore be identified that there is a natural self-reflection undertaken by the student during their university experience, as with the prisoners identified in the philosophy, initial views of an experience can change. Thus it can be argued that by applying Plato's allegory to the framework, not only will key dimensions influencing student expectations be identified but also how students themselves better understand their university experience. Plato's identifies that true enlightenment is gained through knowledge and philosophical reasoning (Juge, 2009). Thus, the personal journey undertaken by students over their university experience can enable them to gain knowledge of the institution and themselves to make a more informed and logical judgement on the satisfaction of the experience they have received within the university. Initial expectations and perceptions of the experience can and will change, but until personal reflection is fully understood by the student true understanding and enlightenment will not take place. This perspective will be further explored in section 3.5 of this chapter to identify the influence of student reflection upon their expectations of the institution and ultimate student experience received.

There have been some who have criticised Plato's view of enlightenment (Annas, 1981; McCabe, 1992) and explain that Plato does not concisely detail the philosophy in terms of what gains are achieved for the prisoner when they leave the cave and becomes enlightened. Therefore, it could be argued that it would be difficult for a HEI to accurately understand the nature of enlightenment for their students and that it is in fact a very individual journey. Abensour (2007) further supports this notion and acknowledges that just because one knows truth, it does not mean that one will live by it. Thereby it is important that students may have and gain enlightenment at different points of their self-reflection. Further criticism of the philosophy is that Plato identifies that those prisoners who exit the cave do not wish to return, however in relation to higher education, it is important that students do wish to continue to engage with their university. This is especially true when it comes to alumni activities, potential further study or indeed student testimonies for marketing activities. However despite these criticisms of Plato's allegory, on balance, the researcher identifies that the benefits of using this philosophy for the framework outweigh the negatives and as such it is deemed suitable for the research. This

development of the framework in relation to Plato's allegory will be further discussed in section 3.4 of this chapter.

3.3 Applying metaphor to the conceptual framework

The developed framework uses the key dimensions of the philosophy as a metaphor to explore the key influencers upon student expectations. A metaphor can be defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable' (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010). Metaphors are a method of taking word a word or phrase and relating it to a differing concept to demonstrate understanding. It can be further defined as "a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a 'similar' concept" (Lakoff, 1993). The use of metaphor can be conscious and unconscious and is attached to our everyday language and communication (Pecheux, 1982). The use of metaphor can therefore be a very appropriate medium for exploring philosophical viewpoints in this research. Metaphor is a strong indicator as to the understanding and identification of philosophical opinion and assumptions tacitly assumed or obviously recognised as a basis of the pedagogy or curriculum (Kuhn, 1973). By exploring how metaphors are applicable to analogies allows for a basic understanding and contextualisation of a paradigm framework. The use of metaphor is an imaginative strategy that can transport concepts and ideas that might not otherwise be articulated in the description of real life situations. Therefore as identified by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) metaphors can act as an effective method to describe a way of existence, emotion or undertaking in terms of another image. That image can then translate and recontextualise the original being, feeling or doing.

This is particularly relevant to the framework for this thesis, which will be introduced later in this chapter, which identifies where metaphor can be used to explain the link between the literature review findings and the allegory of the cave philosophy. It will look to contextualise the original concept from Plato and relates these views to the feelings and journey undertaken by students during their higher education experience. Consequently it is useful to conduct a further discussion and analysis in this section of the thesis. The author of this thesis was intrigued to discuss the role

metaphors can play in the transfer of knowledge in relation to the dimensions of the conceptual framework and the subsequent research findings into the impact on student expectations. Metaphors have historically been seen as a rhetorical mechanism to convey a message however in recent times, many cognitive experts and analysts of dialogue recognised that metaphors play a central role in thought and structure our perception and understanding of reality (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Some conceptual beliefs can be too difficult to describe in words so the use metaphors to convey these concepts are more appropriate. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) further elaborate on this idea and state that many abstract topics can be better understood through the use of metaphor. It therefore logical to use metaphor in explaining the concepts of student's experience, what they think and feel can be related to metaphor to clarify their thoughts and feelings towards a situation. Therefore it can be suggested that a metaphor establishes an equation between the metaphorical meaning and the truthful meaning and although they offer a similar resemble they are not identical to one another (Low, 1988).

Plato's allegory of the cave philosophy takes this metaphor approach to the prisoners rationalising their own identified thoughts compared to the realities and as such metaphor seems an appropriate medium for analysis of thinking around the key dimensions identified in the philosophy. These can be identified as; fire, sunlight, prisoners' and shadows, with the shadows forming an impression of the truth for the prisoners. As such this can also be true of student impressions of their university experience, they are influenced prior to joining the institution through differing dimensions, i.e. friends, family, teachers, career advisors etc and form their own shadows of 'reality'. By analysing these further and identifying suitable metaphors for dimensions the author aims to discover the reality from the assumptions by apply Plato's theory and metaphor to student experiences in education. Deignan (2005) suggests that metaphors should not be accepted without criticism and that the interpretations should be made clear but also challenged to identify if alternative comparisons can be drawn. This will therefore be an important consideration when applying factors to the metaphor dimensions and how they influence the framework that has been established. The next section of this thesis introduces the conceptual framework that has been developed in order to apply Plato's allegory of the cave philosophy to student's expectations of higher education and explore key concepts in

relation to Plato's ideology.

3.4 Developing a framework for Plato's allegory in higher education

In section 3.2 discussion on Plato's allegory of the cave identified that the shadows on the wall of the cave reflect the imagination of the prisoners in what they think they understand and see of the outside world, but without actually experiencing these in reality their understanding was actually based on perception. This can be related to students entering higher education in that they only relate understanding to views and experiences of others and it is not until they experience the situation for themselves can they begin to form their own perceptions on their experiences with a HEI. The escape from the cave is like a process of self-education, again emphasising the point that participation and experience are contributors to understanding personal preferences and similarly how initial perceptions may change (Duarte, 2012). Plato talks about true education or true philosophy. He states that the learning power is about becoming and education is the process of learning (Tubbs, 2005; Heidegger, 1993), i.e. students entering higher education will 'learn' new experiences and use their experiences within the institution to establish norms and inform their expectations. Plato defines that each and every individual is given the ability to learn and that the learning process differs from one another. Some critical views are delivered from authors (Moline, 1981; Gulley, 1986; Brooks, 2006) who believed that this is not predetermined and reject the notion that learning is a process instead stating that true education is a spiritual illumination which is inbuilt into us as individuals. Therefore personal set beliefs can be seen as a motivator on the experiences students have of their educational journey. This philosophy can be applied to key findings from the literature in relation to the influencers on student experiences of higher education, particularly to their pre-university perceptions of their expectation of the university experience.

Based on the analysis of Plato's philosophy and its relevance to the higher education experience and student expectations, a framework to base the findings of the research has been developed. As identified in section 3.1, the developed framework aims to explore the gaps in the literature around the subject and understand the philosophical underpinning of Plato's work. Each dimension of Plato's allegory theory has been applied to the framework and discussion is underpinned using

relevant and contemporary evidence to ensure the framework is appropriate to the research thesis. The literature research undertaken for the thesis has identified key themes of the university experience, acknowledged the term students as customers; explored how expectations and perceptions influence the student experience and recognised the concept of service quality in education amongst others. These themes served as useful foundation blocks upon which supplementary theoretical and philosophical implications can be developed. Further to this, exploring the philosophy and the literature in relation to testing the influencers on the student experience subsequently led to the development of a theoretical framework. Based on the key themes the dimensions of the ACIE conceptual framework has been produced based upon Plato's philosophy, see figure 3.2.

The framework will be explored further in this section of the chapter with each dimension discussed to determine its applicability and relevance in relation to the actual experience students undertake at their higher education institution. When exploring the limitations of previous research in relation to this framework it was apparent that there is not a defined framework for institutions to apply when defining the key factors relating to their students longitudinal higher education experience. The framework developed for this thesis will therefore categorise the dimensions of Plato's allegory philosophy and apply them to the key aspects identified in the literature relating to the student experience. By doing so it will give a holistic view of the student journey from start to finish, i.e. pre-enrolment to Graduation. This longitudinal view of the student experience has not been previously applied to a practical model and as a result the framework identified in this thesis will bring a unique contribution of knowledge within the sector. The framework explores both institutional factors that contribute towards the student experience within the HEI, alongside the drivers of student expectations that influence their perceptions and attitude towards the university.

Unknown ----- *Student reflective journey through the framework* -----> Known (enlightened)

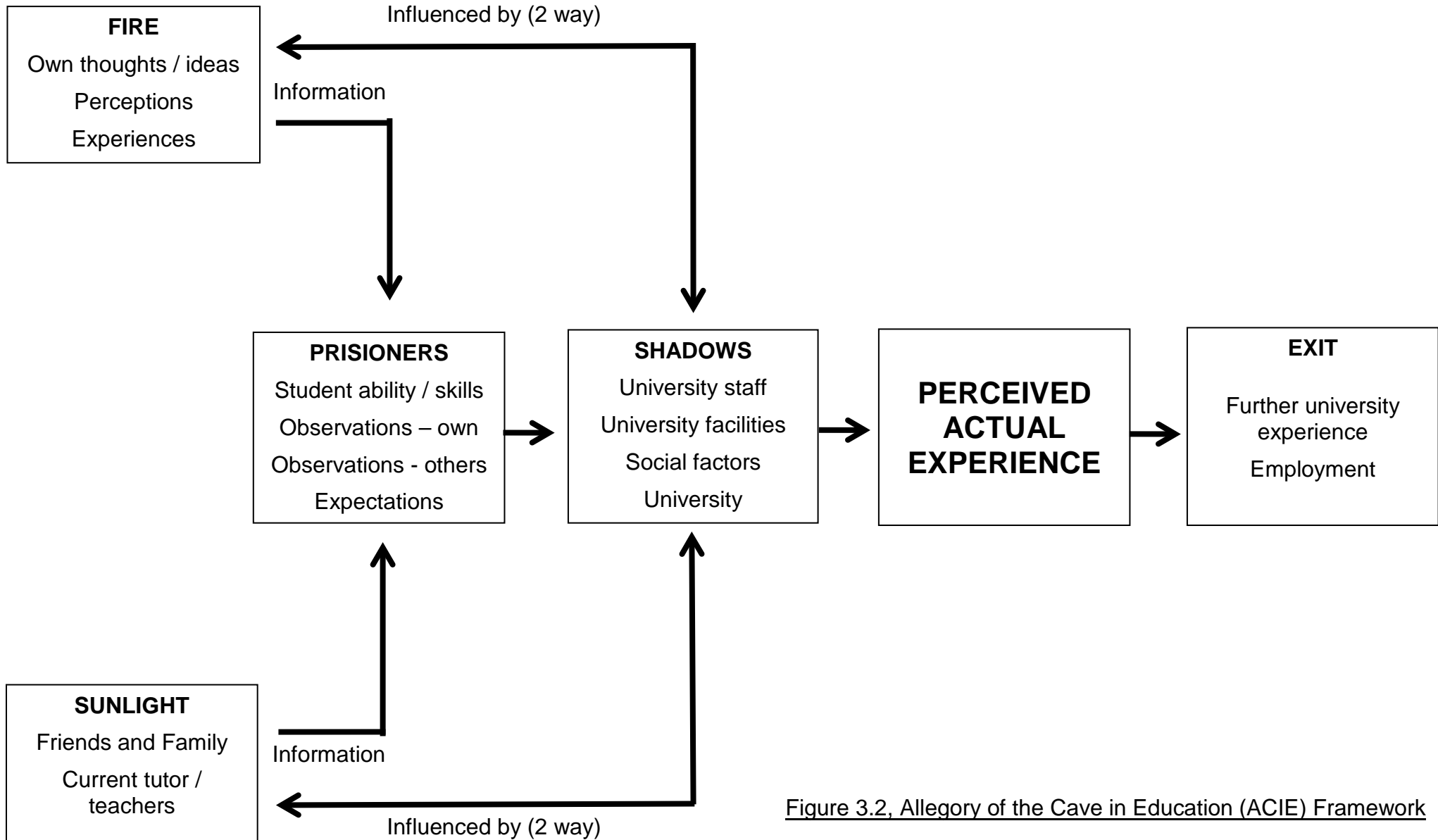


Figure 3.2, Allegory of the Cave in Education (ACIE) Framework

3.5 Student reflection within the framework

As can be seen in figure 3.2 the development of the framework has allowed for HEI's to identify and explore the dimensions that influence student expectations of the university experience. However it was also important to explore the journey that students undertake over the longitudinal nature of the framework and identify how their views on the institution and the student experience may change. As has been explained in earlier discussions, Plato's identifies that true enlightenment is gained through knowledge and philosophical reasoning (Juge, 2009). Thus, the personal journey undertaken by students during their university journey allows for a better understanding of the experience they have received. The methods used by the institution in managing the student experience is vitally important but so is student understanding of themselves, and how they grow over their three-year period of study. As understanding and self-reflection, or enlightenment, takes place then students should feel more capable in making informed and logical judgements on their experiences within the institution and how satisfaction they are from this. Initial expectations and perceptions of the experience may change based on this enlightenment and therefore true understanding of their own and their institutions performance gained. Therefore the framework has looked to recognise the 'educational transition' which students' undertake during their educational experience (Kohler and Field, 2003). This will therefore look to acknowledge not only the key drivers of student satisfaction with their experience but also how they personally develop during the three-year university experience. Wehmeyer (2007) identifies that ensuring a positive momentum of students' through an educational institution can lead to an increased satisfactory experience. Indeed Leese (2010) further acknowledges that understanding the student transition through an educational experience can allow for the institution to offer a customer-orientated approach to the student experience and therefore ensure expectations are better managed.

Therefore the framework developed will have a practical element which it is hoped will allow the HEI to create a student-focused approach to the university experience. This will enable the university to apply the dimensions developed in the framework to guide students through their educational journey with the hope that students become more self-aware as they progress through the institution. This is detailed on the framework through the known and unknown factors that contribute to the perceived

actual experience with the institution. Figure 3.3 below shows this process in greater detail and identifies how dimensions taken from Plato's allegory of the cave relate to the students reflective journey.

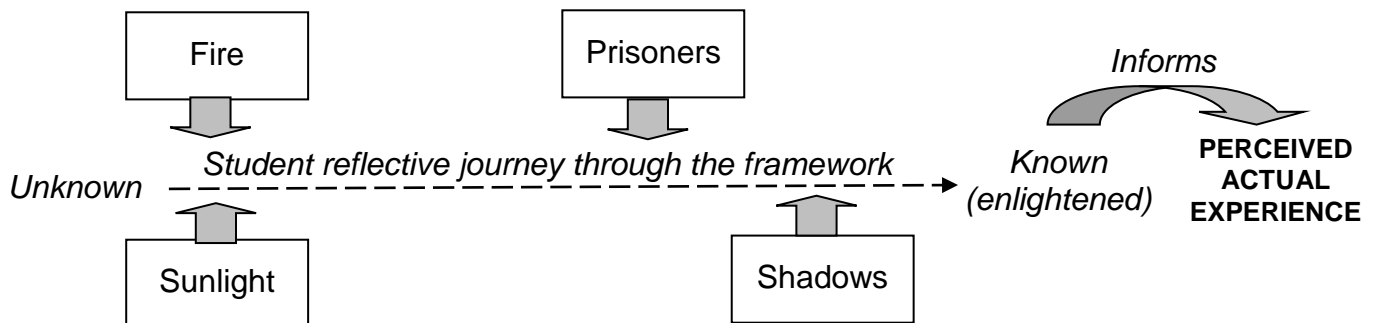


Figure 3.3, Plato's allegory dimensions in relation to the student reflective journey

As can be seen, initial perceptions and expectations of the likely experience are based predominately upon the unknown factors, this is due to students having a lack of awareness in relation to their educational experience, especially in the early phases of their educational journey. However as students' progress through their programme of study these unknowns become known's and can influence their expectations of the university experience. Such as expectations of tutor feedback, facilities available to them or timeframe for having marked work returned. Not meeting these expectations of student expectations at these more developed stages could result in dissatisfaction, however it may also be true that students begin to understand university processes and indeed expectations may lower. As such, Kohler and Field (2003) identify that it is important for universities to enable a student-focused approach that should be based upon students' objectives and interests of their educational experience. This shows the importance of institutions creating opportunities for student self-awareness of their own educational journey and allows for the opportunity to enlighten themselves throughout their learning experiences. This may be in a reflection of their initial perceptions of the university experience or of the expectations they place upon the university. The framework therefore can identify where key 'enlightenment' takes place for students during their academic programme and allow them to self-reflect upon this experience. As such it can be identified that students will leave their institution with a greater understanding of them self and the role the university has played in them becoming more confident and competent individuals. The conceptual framework developed therefore allows

for the institution to create an environment of reflection during the student journey and how the dimensions identified can be applied to the university experience to explore if and how student perceptions and expectations of their university experience influence these reflections.

3.6 Exploring the dimensions of the ACIE framework

The dimensions of Plato's allegory have been identified and will be discussed further in this section; analysis will be given to the key terms addressed in findings from the literature review for this thesis. The dimensions identified in the ACIE framework can be used as a structure to inform and understand student expectations and the influence they have upon the actual student experience within the HEI. The framework articulates the main influencers for each dimension which are explored in greater detail below.

3.6.1 Analysing Plato's fire dimension

It has been recognised that there are several noteworthy influences on student perceptions when considering their university / programme of study. These will be further explored in this section to establish the influence upon the decision making process of prospective students in their choice of institution. The routes of students' decision making processes in relation to their entering the higher education experience as well as the actual experience undertaken are highly influential in shaping their perspectives on the chosen institution. Therefore as identified by (Ramsden, 2013) it is important to define what a 'quality' university experience means to the student and to acknowledge what factors they judge as being important to them e.g. academic reputation. The perception of many students is that university study can improve or even guarantee employment after Graduation. Indeed Tomlinson (2008) found that a higher education qualification was seen as a 'good' that can act as a key determiner of their future employability. This emphasises the view amongst students that higher education qualifications will open up a wider range of employment and economic opportunities compared to their friends that did not attend a HEI. Thereby feeding the notion of students viewing higher education as an 'investment' for future successes, even though there cannot be a direct guarantee by the institution that this will lead to a guarantee of success in the job market upon Graduation. For students who had less clarity about the benefits of applying their

university experience, they still had a sense that university will 'lead to something beneficial' upon Graduation (Tomlinson, 2008).

Scutter et al (2011) underpin this view and found that the majority of students choose to go to university for career aspirations, not necessarily because of interest in their course. It is therefore shown that students believe that their employability is improved by attending university with the perception being that they 'must' attend a HEI to become employable in the future. Hodkinson et al., (1996) refer to a concept of 'pragmatically rational choice'; the idea that young people's decisions around participation (at university) are largely informed by what they perceive to be available and immediate options that closely bound to prior learning experiences. Thus, overall student satisfaction is based upon the satisfaction or dis-satisfaction with the institution that is based upon the experiences undertaken with the organisation (Bitner and Hubbert, 1994). This identifies that the assessment of the complete student experience and that satisfaction is based on the students' general experiences within the university. This is a key objective which this dimension of the conceptual framework aims to further text and explore through the mixed method analysis of the student experience.

3.6.2 Analysing Plato's sunlight dimension

When potential applicants are considering their HEI of choice they have several influencers upon them (e.g. friends and family, teachers, careers advisors, websites and marketing literature) and help them to define and compare their perspective institution and programme of study available to them. These considerations combined with prevalent statistics, such as the NSS results, has ensured that students have a range of data sources available to them to which they can consult when deciding upon the institution they wish to attend. This raises the notion of how students find out their prospective university. Traditionally the process has been through HEI's marketing discourse, such as promotional literature, recruitment events such as Open Days and working closely with local Colleges. This is underpinned by Moogan and Baron (2003) who identify that there is now a variety of information provided by universities to aid the decision making process of students. There are critics of this view (Elliott and Healy, 2001; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Maringe, 2006) including Hesketh and Knight (1999) who state that documents

provided to prospective students can often lack sufficient information to guide about practical and academic expectations of their chosen programme. Some researchers (Pearson, 1997; Yorke and Longden, 2004) advise that students can be poorly informed about the institutions they apply and that limited information from the institution leads to a lack of knowledge and can lead to poor decision-making by the prospective student. Forsyth and Furlong (2003) advise of an alternative view and state that at times students can receive too much information regarding their choice of institution. This can lead to a problem in identifying the significant information on which to make an informed choice, potentially leading to dissatisfaction when actually attending the university (Scheibehenne, 2010).

When students are exploring their choice of institution they will actively look for information to assess their options in order to make an informed decision (Briggs, 2006; Simões and Soares, 2010). Conclusions are not only based upon the information given to them by the institution through the prospectus but also wider factors such as friendship groups, parents, careers advisors, previous educational experiences and university reputation (Reay, 1998; Christie et al., 2001; Ball et al., 2002; Moogan and Baron, 2003). Most applicants to university have no experience of the quality of the academic experience before applying to study at the institution. Students therefore make decisions based on the information they have available to them rather than the quality of the student experience. Thus the quality of information provided by the HEI, both in terms of the 'messages provided' and 'methods used', should be clear to the applicant and ensure they can make an informed decision on their choice of institution (Helmsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Pampaloni, 2010; Chapleo, et al., 2011). It could therefore be suggested that marketing is an essential managerial function (Kotler and Fox, 1995) which universities could not survive without in today's highly competitive marketplace; effective marketing also helps to shape the image of the institution to stakeholders and most importantly potential students. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2016) suggest the effective marketing of the institution will improve the effectiveness of the university in recruiting and satisfying students through the meeting of their expectations rather than just providing an unsatisfactory service to them.

3.6.3 Analysing Plato's prisoners dimension

When new students arrive at university they have their own perceptions of the expected service, as defined in previous discussions, as well as individual attitudes which may include excitement or fear about the upcoming university experience. These perceptions may be correct but mostly these can be unrealistic or totally inaccurate (James, 2002) and therefore this can have an important impact upon their ability to succeed and have expectations met. Nelson and Kift (2005) goes further and identify that ill-informed influences could even lead to decisions about staying on the course or regarding decisions to not continue with the institution (Sharma and Burgess, 1994; Pargetter, 2000; MacNeil et al., 2009). When adapting to university, students face a number of challenges related to the transition into higher education (Leese, 2010). Essentially in the early period of their university experience they must participate in university and faculty orientation sessions, manage timetables, begin classes and understand module and assessment requirements. There may also be non-academic adjustments that also need making in relation to settling into a new environment, this is especially true of those who are living independently for the first time. They may have left friends and family, had to find somewhere to live, managing or finding part-time work as well as settling into a new social environment and making new friends. Clearly a lot for consideration and potential worry or anxiety for new students as well as those students in years 2 and 3 of the institution. Therefore it is an important consideration for all student groups within the HEI and as such the transition to the university should be managed effectively by the student and also the institution.

When further defining key drivers upon student expectations of their HE experience it has been identified (Crisp et al., 2009; Douglas et al., 2015) that key influencers related to the levels of feedback received, the accessibility they have to academic staff and the accountability for their own learning. Douglas et al., (2006) have acknowledged that these are seen as key issues on student satisfaction and have been identified as factors where expectations often do not align with student experiences and lead to negative experiences. The expectation of students therefore should also be carefully managed, and may differ by academic year, hence the institution should ensure effective communication between themselves and the differing student groups. Pancer et al. (2000) ascertain that students with a more

realistic expectation of university life tend to adapt to the university environment more quickly. Thus a clear understanding of what the university experience will be like allows students' to be better prepared for their studies. Additionally if HEI's understand these expectations they should be able to provide more effective support and clear information to students during their time at the institution. The transition to university is critical as it is related to student retention and satisfaction (Brinkworth et al., 2009) and thus a key concern for universities is the monitoring and tracking of student retention.

The *fire* dimension discussed earlier in this chapter looked to understand the perceptual influencers on students' expectations of their university experience. As discussed in chapter two, student expectations are a key consideration for HEI's with the management of unrealistic student expectations a key factor to a successful university experience (Hill, 1995; Sander et al., 2000). Thus showing that the clearer understanding institutions have of expectations of students within their institution then the better position they will be in to ensure effective management. This will lead to more realistic expectations by the student and therefore could lead to greater satisfaction of their university experience. The nature of these student expectations should be identified and explored by the HEI, in order that full understanding is established. Consideration should be given to key factors including; identification of students perception of value, student expectations of their learning environment, student expectations of future employability (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013).

To ensure that these influencers on student satisfaction can be effectively predicted it is beneficial to compare and understand the relationship between perceptions and their expectations. The ACIE framework has been designed to explore these factors and thus is hoped will become an effective tool for institutions to apply to their student experience. Trowler and Trowler (2010) argue that established models of student satisfaction (Keaveney and Young, 1997; Alves and Raposo, 2006; Douglas et al., 2008) fail to take into account the contribution that students make towards their own learning and satisfaction. Thus relying solely on student learning experiences to gauge satisfaction is limited and consideration should also be given to wider factors such as student engagement and student participation (Desai et al., 2001). Again the ACIE framework will provide a lens to categorise these issues and explore how

students' create expectations of the institution to identify what they consider to be the key factors in relation to engagement and participation.

3.6.4 Analysing Plato's shadows dimension

When students enroll at university, they will have expectations on staff within the institution that is generally based upon experiences from their previous educational experiences and the change from 6th form / college to the university environment. While there is recognition by some HEI's that the transition is not easy for students it is imperative that the staff within the institution understand and help manage this process. Pancer et al. (2000) examined student expectations about university and acknowledged the staff role in easing the transition to higher education. The importance of appropriate and timely feedback to students' is seen as an important factor (Slaughter et al., 2016) and students indicated that feedback on submitted work would be important to their university experience (Nicol et al., 2014). Pitt and Norton (2017) also identify the nature of feedback as being an important factor for student satisfaction.

O'Donovan (2017) states that students may need assistance in understanding feedback given to them by the institution as they may not recognise what is and isn't classed as feedback. It is also identified that feedback which is specific and provides guidance to improve students' grades is perceived as useful to them and is more preferable to generic comments given which is not seen as worthwhile (Weaver, 2006). So it is clear that engagement with academic staff through assessment and feedback is a key factor that influences upon the student experience (Yunker and Yunker, 2003). When further exploring the role of academic staff in the university experience it is interesting to identify the impact staff have on meeting student expectations. Hagenauer and Volet (2014) identified their research shows that there was an expectation towards academic staff that they would spend the majority of their time in duties relating to student teaching. There is also a correlation between the performance of staff and the service they provide, not just in terms of managing perceptions but also by exceeding expectations to create value for the student experience. Mazzarol et al., (2001) also identifies the role academic staff can play in in the marketing of the university by using their outstanding teaching performances as a sales point for the institution. The framework developed in figure 3.1 will assist

in evaluating institutions' staff performance and the role this plays on expectations of students within the university as well as the relationship with external promotion to potential applicants.

Other factors seen as important to the shadow dimension was that of the social environment within the institution and how the university facilities and environment contribute to the university experience. Before arriving at the institution there are perceptions made about the service students will receive from the university (Parasuraman et al, 1988; Tierney, 1999; Brown and Carasso, 2013). A key aspect upon this is how campus amenities such as IT facilities, library services and social environments impact upon the university experience (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Mai, 2005). Therefore the importance placed upon these will relate to the perception of a student's educational experience. Not having an appropriate environment for students upon arrival may create an instant negative experience and show that their expectations have not been met i.e. unusable PC's due to damage, a lack of support from library staff to find textbooks or unsuitable spaces to work can be detrimental to the institution. Thus management of these factors can be seen as important consideration for the institution and could be used to increase the likelihood of a satisfactory student experience. Several authors' support this view (Drew and Work, 1998; Sojkin et al., 2012; Yeo and Li, 2012) supports this view and explore the impact social conditions and wider amenities play a significant role in the university experience. It is stated that the learning experience is enhanced throughout the student journey through effective pastoral support alongside the expected academic help given. Sevier (1996) identifies that satisfaction is directly correlated to the individual students experience relating to the holistic university engagement which encompasses both academic and social experiences within the institution. Therefore it is important to consider these wider university services as part of the framework developed for this thesis to identify which of these, if any, influence student expectations of the university experience.

3.6.5 Analysing the exit

Upon completion of their programme, students' will graduate from the university and therefore the student/university relationship will change. The HEI's focus changes from managing the experience of the student to the importance of maintaining

relationships with students post-Graduation. Relationship-marketing practices provide evidence that recruiting new customers costs more than retaining customers and developing a long-term relationship with them, and could provide a competitive advantage (Reichheld and Teal, (2001). The advantage of this to the institution is that satisfied students are more likely to be loyal to the university thus meaning that they be more likely to stay and undertake further study (Casidy and Wymer, 2015) i.e. undertaking a postgraduate programme within the institution. The concept of satisfied students upon exiting the university also supports the argument that a contented and loyal student will positively influence quality of services (Rodie and Kleine 2000). This could be translated to how students engaging and contributing to institutional feedback, module / programme surveys, NSS and other externally facing reviews. A positive review by the graduate can inform the institution as to areas of quality in its teaching and learning as well as identify areas for improvement e.g. teaching concerns, facility concerns etc.

This positive relationship with graduates also has other advantages to the university in terms of their future marketing and recruitment activities. Satisfied students often recommend a course or university to prospective students (Russell, 2005; Durkin and McKenna, 2011), thus linking to the sunlight dimension of the ACIE framework, section 3.5.2. This notion of students' as an influencer is of ever-greater interest to HEI's, especially now that the views of graduates are used to rank university performance in league tables (The student survey, 2018). As identified earlier graduates now play a key role in the future recruitment success of their institution. If the university has successfully developed positive relationships with their students during their time at the institution then the feedback they give should be more favourable rather than negative. Therefore, it is important to understand how HEI's manage the relationship with their past students; the most common method of this is through the institutions Alumni association. Most discussion around Alumni relates to future financial donations from the graduate (Van Slyke and Brooks, 2005) however there are also other potential non-tangible benefits such as return visits to the institution to provide guest lectures, opportunity to provide future jobs in their organisations or other beneficially activities (Tom and Elmer, 1994). Therefore, this further supports the need for universities to not only build and develop relationships with students during their time at their institution but also after they graduate in order

that a holistic approach is undertaken.

Another key consideration of students exit from the institution relates to their employability. The importance of this is two-fold, firstly students' want to leave university and be in the best position to gain full-time employment alongside their degree award. Authors identify (Tomlinson, 2008; Scutter et al., 2011) found that the rationale for university participation is often driven by career aspirations. Indeed Sabri (2011) identifies that some students expect employment from their university degree. Thus, clearly this is a key driver for students when considering higher education and will dramatically affect upon their final views of their university experience. The second consideration is for the HEI and how student employability affects upon their performance as an institution amongst competition in the marketplace. The rationale for this is that as identified above this is a key attribute when students are making decisions towards their prospective HEI, and again will use industry benchmarks such as the NSS and the destination of leavers statistics (DLHE) data which collects information on what leavers from higher education are doing six months after Graduation (HESA, 2017). Meaning that students who have engaged with the institution's employability schemes throughout their time at the university will have a better opportunity to gain employment after Graduation. A strong performance here by their graduates can give the HEI a competitive advantage in the marketplace and assist in marketing and recruitment material for prospective students.

3.6.6 Identifying the relationships between dimensions

Having identified the dimensions of the ACIE framework, it is also important to understand the relationship between these. Figure 3.1 clarifies the interactions of the framework dimensions with the use of arrows. Looking firstly at the *fire* dimension, which as explained earlier explores the students' own thoughts, feelings, perceptions and previous educational experiences prior to joining the HEI. This consequently has a direct relationship with the *prisoner* dimension of the framework as the *fire* dimension informs the expectations of the students, thus dependent upon the nature of this experience will contrite to a positive or negative first interaction with the university. The *fire* dimension also has a two-way relationship with the *shadow* dimension of the framework, with this element exploring expectations placed upon

staff at the university, the facilities available as well as social factors that contribute to the experience and service delivered by the HEI. Again, how these are perceived will be influenced directly via the pre-university factors. However, the opposite can also be true where the *fire* dimension is influenced by the interaction with *shadows*; this is mainly through communication delivered to prospective students via the institutions marketing and recruitment activities. If these are clear and consistent and explain how academic service is delivered e.g. teaching contact hours then the pre-university perceptions will be better managed. Similarly, if students attend university open days and visit the campus and buildings used to deliver the 'service' they will have a better overview of what to expect at the institution.

Looking at the *sunlight* dimension which explores the external influencers upon students' perceptions of the institution, it has been identified that family and friends as well as teachers can directly influence expectations of the university experience. Therefore, this dimension informs the *prisoner* dimension as it has been identified that the *sunlight* factors, particularly family, have a direct influence upon the choice of institution chosen by prospective students when considering their choice of university. They can also strongly influence and in some cases raise the expectations that students have of the HEI and as such are an important external influencer upon student satisfaction. The *sunlight* dimension also has a collaborative relationship with the *shadows* dimension, in the nature of how it can influence expectations on university facilities and staff. Ideally, these two factors work closely together, especially when exploring relationships between the university and teachers / careers advisors of the feeder colleges and schools. By developing close associations there will be mutual benefits for both parties and will allow the HEI to provide clear and correct information to the staff at the colleges/schools to pass onto their students e.g. programme information or facilities available within the university. Relationships can also be developed with the parents/family of prospective students by inviting them to university recruitment events to ensure they get 'a feel' for the institution and therefore hopefully feel more likely to positively influence the applicant to choose their institution over others.

It is also significant to note the horizontal relationship between the *prisoners* dimension, the *shadows* dimension and the *perceived actual experience* received.

This is due to the connection and influence they have on the student journey. The *prisoners* dimension explores how the elements of the student experience that inform and influence the expectations students' have of their chosen university. These expectations will then be directly applied to the institution in the form of the *shadows* dimension where judgements will be made on university staff performance, facilities available as well as the environment that the HEI creates for their students. Both of these dimensions therefore contribute towards the *perceived actual experience* received by the student. The more positive the relationship between the dimensions will create a more satisfactory experience for the student. The final consideration is how this *perceived actual experience* relates to the *exit* dimension and considers how employable the student is upon Graduation i.e. how likely are they to gain employment when leaving the institution. It also considers if the student has been significantly engaged by the academic experience to continue into further study within the university. This dimension is therefore influenced by the *perceived actual experience* gained within the HEI and therefore the more positive the relationship between the dimensions; the more likely these *exit* dimensions will be met.

3.7 Summary of chapter

The chapter has identified a conceptual framework for the thesis and the significance and implications of the framework has been critically discussed. Gaps in the literature have been explored in order to identify and explore the key contributions to knowledge. To effectively answer the research questions an analysis of Plato's allegory of the cave was given to identify the framework for the study. Explanation was given to the rationale behind the choice of this philosophy and key dimensions were discussed in relation to the higher education sector. These were also applied to the concept of metaphor in order to establish and develop how the dimensions relate to in terms of understanding to the philosophy. The next chapter of this thesis will look at the research design and methodology of the research findings. In particular, it will describe and critically evaluate the mixed method research methods used in order to effectively explore the research question of the thesis and test the conceptual framework developed.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

4.0 Introduction

In Chapter 2 a critical review of the theories underpinning the *drivers and key factors that influence student expectations in higher education institutions* was undertaken to identify and examine key themes linked to the topic. Chapter 3 developed a conceptual framework for the thesis based upon the findings from the literature review. The research methodology is underpinned by the conceptual framework developed in the thesis. This chapter reinforces the framework by describing and explaining the research methodology deployed in this study and examining the research methods that have informed the choice of research design and methods of data collection. These collection methods have been designed to answer the research question and objectives of this thesis that have been identified via the literature review and previous research of the author (see pilot student results, section 4.5, of this chapter).

As will be detailed in this chapter a mixed method research framework encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methods was utilised. The chapter further elaborates on the stages of data collection undertaken and the rationale behind the longitudinal approach, covering a three-year undergraduate study period. Section 4.1 and 4.2 of this chapter discusses the establishment of the research focus and clarification of the research objectives. Section 4.3 undertakes an exploration and justification of the choice of research philosophies used. This is underpinned by discussion on the choice of a mixed method approach for this research in section 4.4. Section 4.5 explains the pilot study undertaken to identify themes related to the student experience that have informed the basis of this research. Section 4.6 and 4.7 explore the design of the quantitative questionnaires and qualitative focus-group interviews used in the research, detailing the qualitative and quantitative procedures undertaken for analysis of the data collected. Finally, section 4.8 examines the issues of validity, reliability and bias and explains how these were addressed in the study.

4.1 Establishing the focus of the study

The key drivers of student expectations have been explored in the literature review chapter of this thesis, having defined these issues it is important to establish the context of these factors in relation to this research's aim and objectives. When exploring the research question regarding how universities can understand and manage the influences on student expectations, it is important to firstly understand what student expectations of the HEI are. James (2002) identifies that there is no single framework that adequately manages the relationship between student expectations and institutional expectations. Gerritsen-van Leeuwenkamp (2018) defines that no evaluation tool is available to measure students' expectations and their perceptions of the quality standards within their higher education establishment. Therefore the focus of the study is to examine students pre-existing expectations of their institution to define their views at the start of their educational journey and map it all the way through to their final year. As identified in the previous chapter a conceptual framework has been developed to identify and manage key influencers upon student expectations to enable HEI's to effectively contribute to a positive student experience within their institution.

In order to conceptually understand these drivers, the start point of the study is to understand the pre-university expectations of students so that changes, if they occur, can be monitored through the duration of their academic period. The study therefore observes a cohort of undergraduate students over a three-year period of study whereby their expectations are observed at the beginning of each year by a quantitative questionnaire followed by a qualitative focus group towards the end of each academic year. The sequential approach taken in this is detailed in figure 4.1 below; this visual representation allows the researcher to identify key steps in the completion of the data collection, analysis and evaluation. As can be seen the mixed method research methodology follows and informs the literature review of the thesis. The information gathered from the literature is used to identify research aims and objectives for the thesis. The research methodology encompasses initial pilot interviews to further establish the scope of the research and identify key discussions for further consideration in the thesis. As identified above the methodology also uses quantitative and qualitative research encompassing questionnaires and focus groups. The quantitative research was undertaken before the qualitative research as the

research dictated that initial data was required to be collected via questionnaires at the beginning of each academic year, this is then explored further via qualitative focus groups at the end of each academic year. The resulting data is used to inform the conceptual framework of the research before analysis of the data collected is undertaken. Lastly, final conclusions and recommendations will be given and applied to the research questions and objectives.

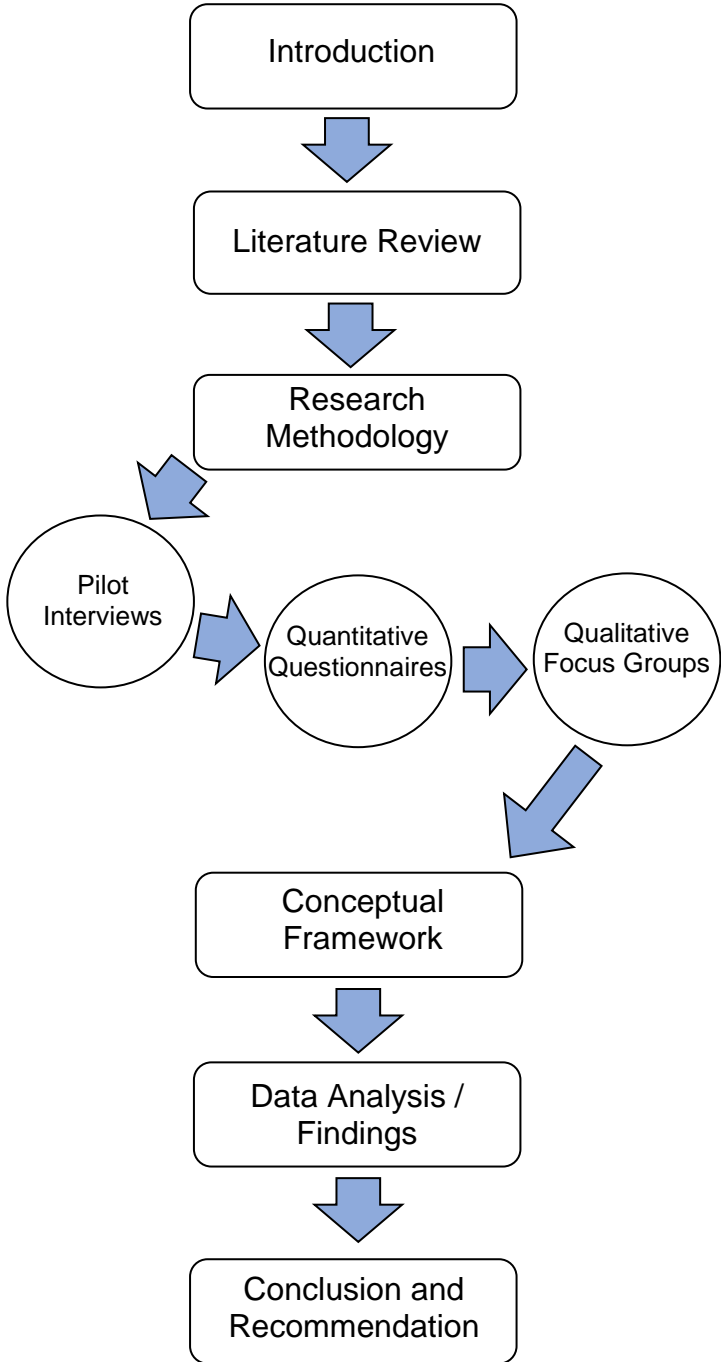


Figure 4.1, Research framework of this thesis

4.2 Research title, aim and objectives

For the purpose of clarity to this chapter, the thesis research title, overarching aim and objectives are identified below:

4.2.1 Research title

'An investigation into the key influencers and drivers on student's expectations of their higher education institution'

The rationale behind the research title is to classify and connect the key influencers upon student expectations in order that they can be defined, analysed and practically applied to institutions within the sector to ensure that a holistic overview is given. By doing so the thesis will analyse and address key gaps that currently exist in the literature in relation to the longitudinal nature of university study.

4.2.2 Overarching research aim

To support the research title, objectives and research questions (see section 4.3.3) the overarching aim of this thesis is to *identify a framework for higher educational institutions to understand and manage the expectations of their students*. The framework will allow universities to apply the framework in their institution to understand and manage their students' expectations in order to enable a satisfactory student experience within their institution. This overarching aim is underpinned with the below research questions and objectives which further clarify the key factors of the aim by ascertaining key influencers on student perceptions and expectations of their higher education experience.

4.2.3 Research questions and objectives

Research questions derived from the above research title and overarching aim are:

Research Question 1 (RQ1) - What are the key drivers upon student choice of HEI and do these influence their perception of the university?

Research Question 2 (RQ2) - What are the key drivers upon student expectations of university?

Research Question 3 (RQ3) - Do student expectations stay the same during their time at university or change?

RQ1 is identified by the literature that suggests there are a number of influences which determine student views of an institution (Byrne and Flood 2005; Tomlinson 2008) with the question looking to further clarify existing views and detail the role of perception upon these influencers (Sabri 2011; Kandiko and Mawer 2015; Dandridge 2018). RQ2 will address the drivers upon student expectations during their university experience (Krentler and Grundnitski 2004; Forrester 2006; Walker and Palmer 2011), to identify the most important factors at the different stages of their academic journey. RQ3 identifies that there is a current gap in the literature regarding the longitudinal nature of the student journey and will explore the student journey over a three-year period across their university experience. These questions and resulting objectives will be used to develop a framework to analyse student expectations across their period of study. To answer the research questions three specific research objectives have been identified; these objectives are shown below:

Research Objective 1 (RO1) - To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction at the institution.

Research Objective 2 (RO2) - To identify the drivers on student expectations and identify the influence upon the university experience.

Research Objective 3 (RO3) - To identify if student expectations remain consistent or change over the period of their academic study. (RO3)

Table 4.1 below identifies how the research questions and objectives are informed by the literature of the subject and enables a clear distinction of the key areas that will be further analysed in this thesis.

Key Research Questions	Specific Research Objectives	Relevant literature
What are the key drivers upon student choice of HEI and do these influence their perception of the university? (RQ1)	To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction at the institution. (RO1)	Telford and Masson (2005); Longden, 2006; Tomlinson (2008); Sabri, 2011; Scutter et al (2011); Fredrickson (2012); Lenton (2015); Dandridge (2018)
What are the key drivers upon student expectations of university? (RQ2)	To identify the drivers on student expectations and identify the influence upon the university experience. (RO2)	Tierney (1999); Fazey and Fazey (2001); Byrne and Flood (2005); Christie et al. (2006); Brown and Carasso (2013); Woodall et al, (2014)
Do student expectations stay the same during their time at university or change? (RQ3)	To identify if student expectations remain consistent or change over the period of their academic study. (RO3)	Parasuraman et al, (1988); Cronin and Taylor (1992); Keaveney and Young (1997); Alves and Raposo (2006); Douglas et al. (2008)

Table 4.1, Research questions, objectives and key references

The objectives are exploratory in nature as they seek to identify the influencers and drivers on student expectation of the higher education experience, thus enabling the researcher to clarify the key factors in order to ensure the research problem can be better understood. This is consistent to the view of Malhotra (2007) who suggested that researchers must use exploratory investigation in order to understand the basic research question that is being explored. Important parameters of the research may be unknown or have not been thoroughly defined, therefore it is important that these considerations are addressed as soon as possible for this thesis.

Therefore, by undertaking an *investigation into the key influencers and drivers on students' expectations of their higher education institution*, the researcher will be able to investigate and categorise student views on pre-entry to the institution and establish themes for further examination in the data collection process. These will specifically be explored through the use of the mixed methodology of questionnaires and in focus group discussions via a longitudinal data collection. The choice of this methodology has been based upon the pragmatist research philosophy which will be discussed further in section 4.3.1. Prior studies on the topic have predominately relied on singular methods where data is collected in a single academic year. Thus this research will present a different perspective on the influencers of student expectations to identify how they may change over the period of their studies. The

mixed method approach will allow for the capture of quantitative and qualitative data on the topic and allow for a more in-depth analysis of the drivers on student expectations. Cooper and Schindler (2003) state that this cause and effect approach allows the investigator to establish and test key themes. Also by incorporating this approach, the researcher was able to plan an effective research design meaning that the framework for the research methodology can be validated effectively. As can be seen from figure 4.2 below the approach used in this research, to collect the appropriate data required to answer the research questions of the thesis, has been identified. The pragmatist philosophy has supported the use of both inductive and deductive approaches which reinforces the use of a mixed methodology. A combination of both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (focus group interview) techniques have been used to ensure effective methods to undertake data collection were applied (Tashakkori and Tedlie, 2010; Creswell and Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2013).

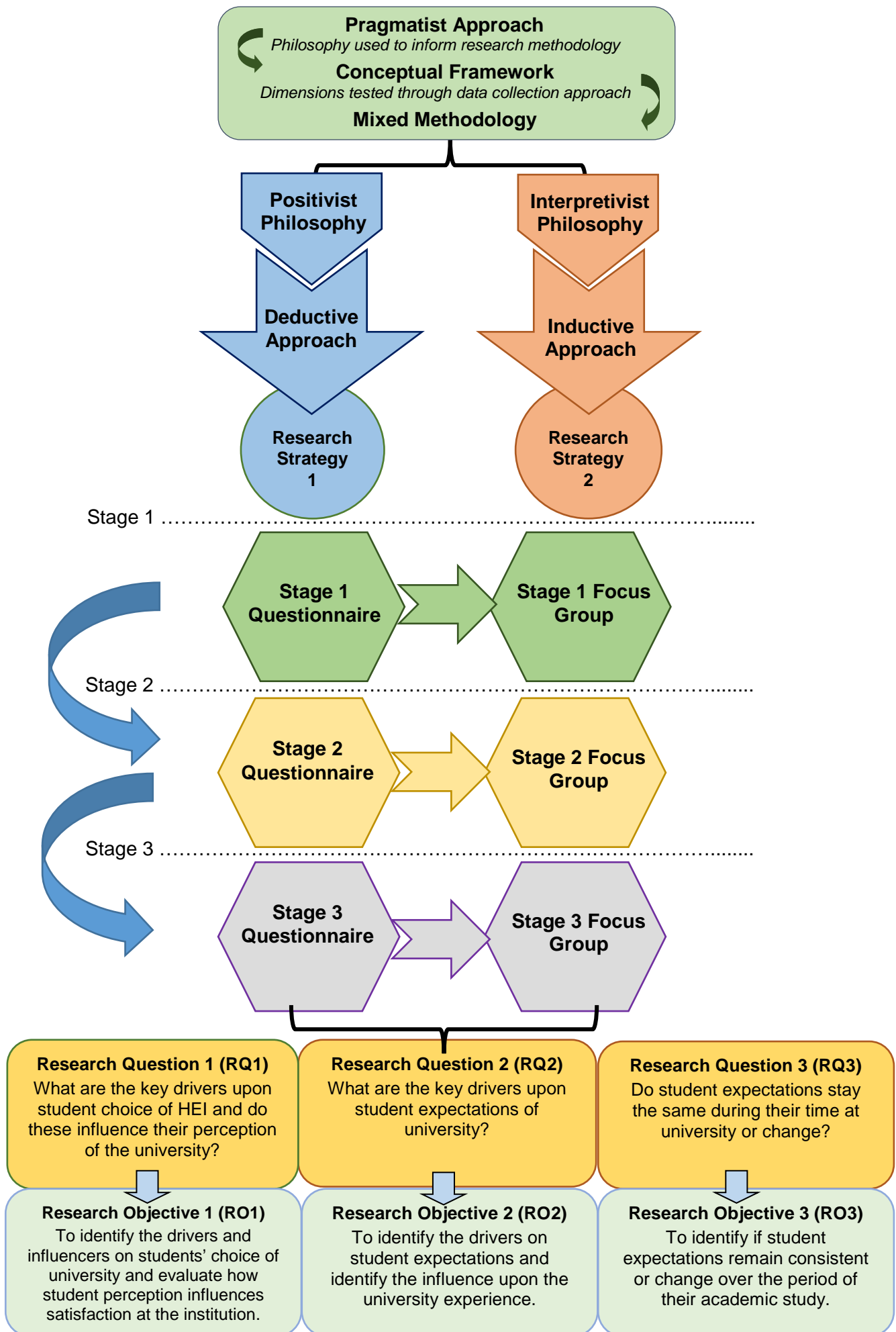


Figure 4.2. The Philosophical positioning and mapping of this thesis to research questions and objectives

4.3 Research philosophy

To effectively undertake the appropriate data collection process for the thesis it was important to gain an understanding of the nature of the philosophical approach undertaken and ensure it is appropriate for the investigation that is taking place. A research philosophy is a belief about the way in which data about an experience should be gathered, analysed and used. Hughes and Sharrock (2016) identify that philosophy plays a seemingly vital role in human intellectual affairs, thus demonstrating the value of understanding. Mason (2017) states the indirectness and circular nature of philosophical questioning is helpful in itself as it often encourages in depth thinking and generates further questions in relation to the topic under consideration. Easterby-Smith et al (2008) categorise key rationale in exploring philosophy in relation to a research methodology: (1) it can help the researcher refine the research methodology used in the study. (2) Knowledge of research philosophy will enable and assist the researcher to evaluate different methodologies and methods to avoid inappropriate use and identify any limitations. (3) It will allow the researcher to identify new methods that may previously have been outside of their experience, see figure 4.3.

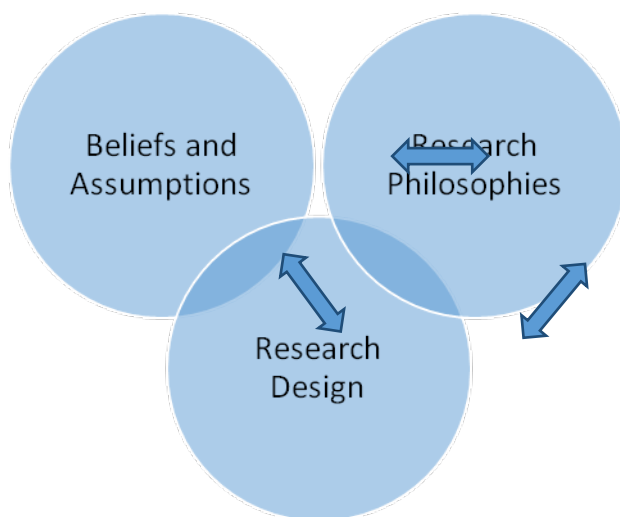


Figure 4.3, Developing research philosophy as a reflective practice, Bristow and Saunders (2015)

4.3.1 The Pragmatist approach undertaken for the research

Pragmatism can be defined as a method of addressing and resolving issues, in essence a behaviour undertaken or a way of acting (Ormerod, 2006). As a philosophical approach, it allows for a distinctive manner of understanding truth that begins with examining what practical difference ideas or beliefs make (Peirce, 1992). Early thinking around the subject identified that the true nature of pragmatism is what researchers' make of it, how it can guide their behaviour and the influence the methodological practices undertaken (James, 1907; Dewey, 1937). It can be argued that pragmatism can mean different things to different people, and as such alternative methodology design will be applied by researchers to meet the requirements of their study (Ulrich, 2007). Dewey (1998) identifies the pragmatist approach as a self-correcting process where practices should be evaluated and revised upon reflection of the experiences undertaken by the researcher. Pragmatism can be seen as a philosophical approach that means the researcher must have more than the ability to compromise. Instead it looks identifies that an understanding of the truth should be sought and begins with an examination of the practical difference that ideas and beliefs can make to the study (Feilzer, 2010). Patton (2002) states the aim of pragmatism is a means of promoting methodological appropriateness to enable researchers to increase their methodological flexibility and adaptability.

For the purpose of this study the pragmatist view was established as the most appropriate approach as it allows the researcher to be free of mental and practical constraints imposed by the "forced choice" between alternative methodologies such as postpositivism or constructivism (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). This was particularly relevant to this study where there was a need to be adaptable in the data collection process to ensure the data collected was appropriate and allowed the research question to be best answered. It meant that the researcher was able to use a range methods to collect the data for the thesis and not focus on only one technique. Robson (1993) identifies that the pragmatist approach means researchers do not have to 'be prisoners of a particular research method or technique.

Critics of the pragmatist approach argue that pragmatists can hold an ‘inaccurate’ view of the data they collect as the aim of the methodology is to provide an accurate account of the findings for themselves rather than the actual reality (Rorty, 1999). Morgan (2007) identifies that how a researchers values and pre-determined views can influence the outcomes of their research often mean the pragmatist approach provide a ‘mirror of reality’ rather than the truth. However despite these criticisms the approach is seen to be the connection between philosophy and methodology (Greene and Caracelli, 2003). Table 4.2 below gives an overview of the pragmatist approach.

Ontology	Epistemology	Theoretical perspective	Methodology	Method
Reality is constantly renegotiated, debate and interpreted in light of its usefulness in new unpredictable situations.	The best method is one that solves the problems. Finding out is the means, change is the underlying aim.	Dewey's perspective; research through design.	Mixed method design.	Quantitative and Qualitative methods.

Table 4.2, Overview of Pragmatist approach (Crotty 1998)

The approach favours a mixed method approach as has been undertaken in the research for this study. Pragmatism has been identified in the research literature as the appropriate paradigm for conducting mixed methods research (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998; Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). The philosophical approach has implications for researchers undertaking a mixed methodology research design and will allow a holistic approach to the research to be undertaken. The approach can also present challenges for the researcher in that the pragmatism approach can be seen as is wide-ranging and thus it is vital for the researcher to ensure the approach undertaken is comprehensive (Greene and Caracelli (2003). Further details on the mixed method approach undertaken for this thesis will be given in section 4.4 of this chapter. Having explored the pragmatist research approach it is also necessary to identify how this method influences the research design. As was identified in table 4.2 above and is further explained in figure 4.4 below, there are decisions to be made by the researcher regarding their choice of research design and methods in order that the key research questions can

be answered. The research design utilised will allow the researcher to select the most appropriate data collection method for the investigation.

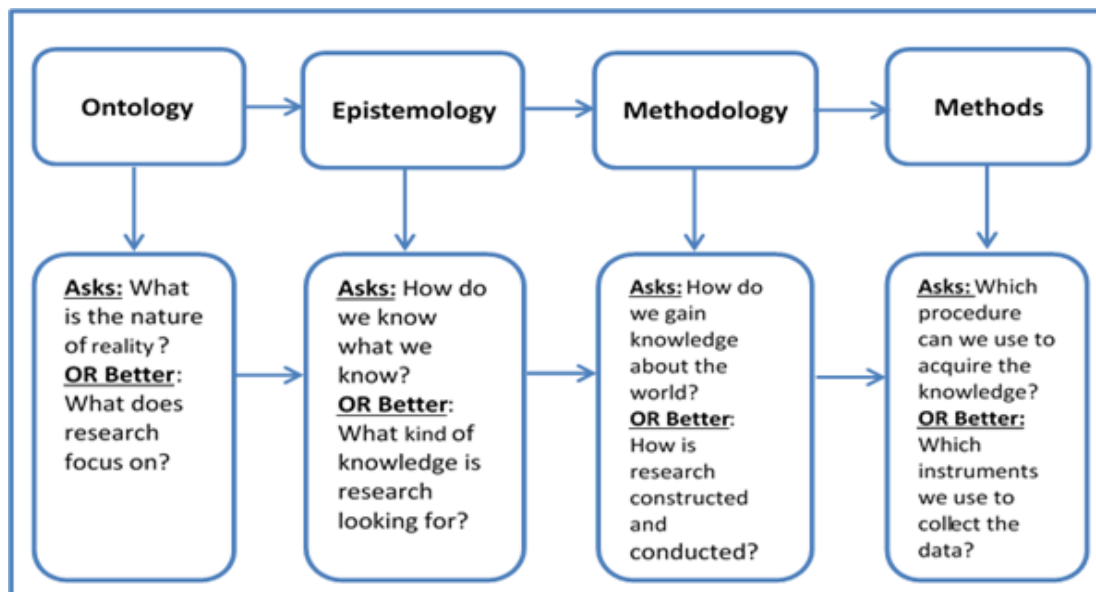


Figure 4.4, Research design and methods, Sarantakos (2005)

Ontology explores what constitutes reality and how we understand existence (Marsh and Furlong (2002). Ontological questions deal with the nature of ‘being’ and asks questions of reality in relation to known knowledge. The term epistemology (what is known to be true) as opposed to doxology (what is believed to be true) encompasses the various philosophies of research approach. Therefore ontological and epistemological positions are related but need separation; an ontological position can affect but not determine an epistemological position towards methodical design. Two major research philosophies have been identified in the Western tradition of science, namely positivist (sometimes called scientific) and interpretivist (also known as antipositivist) (Holden and Lynch, 2004). These two philosophies will be further explored in the following sections to define the appropriateness for this research design.

4.3.2 Positivist philosophy

The positivist idea is that the social world exists externally and that the characteristics can be explored through objectivity and suitable methods (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008). Positivists believe that reality is stable and can be observed and

described from an objective viewpoint (Killam, 2013), i.e. without interfering with the phenomena being studied. They contend that phenomena should be isolated and that observations should be repeatable. This often involves manipulation of reality with variations in only a single independent variable so as to identify regularities in, and to form relationships between, some of the constituent elements of the social world. Predictions can be made on the basis of the previously observed and explained realities and their inter-relationships. ‘Positivism has a long and rich historical tradition. It is so embedded in our society that knowledge claims not grounded in positivist thought are simply dismissed as a scientific and therefore invalid’ (Myers, 2013, p.38). Table 4.3 provides an overview of the positivist philosophy research behaviour and values.

Ontology	Epistemology	Axiology	Typical Methods
Management and organisations are: - Real, just like physical objects - Uninfluenced by how we feel about them - Granular, fixed and structured	Discover the truth and predict the future through: - Observable, measurable facts - Causes and effects - Laws, rules and generalisations	Value-free research: - Researcher is detached, neutral and independent - Maintains objective stance	Quantitative methods - Highly structured - Large samples - Measurement

Table 4.3, A positivist research, Bristow (2015)

It is also important to consider the independence of this philosophy, especially in relation to this thesis where the research participants are students of the researcher and therefore the researcher neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research’ (Remenyi et al. 1998, Saunders et al, 2016). It can also be argued that the views of the researcher are important and should be considered as part of the data collection process, indeed the thesis is influenced by the researchers’ feelings and attitude towards the research topic. Therefore, it is important that a positivist researcher will use a highly structured methodology in order to facilitate effective data collection (Gill and Johnson 2002).

4.3.3 Interpretivist philosophy

Interpretivists contend that only through the subjective interpretation of and intervention in reality can that reality be fully understood. The study of phenomena in their natural environment is key to the interpretivist philosophy, together with the acknowledgement that scientists cannot avoid affecting those phenomena they study. They admit that there may be many interpretations of reality, but maintain that these interpretations are in themselves a part of the scientific knowledge they are pursuing. Table 4.4 provides an overview of the interpretivist philosophy research behaviour and values.

Ontology	Epistemology	Axiology	Typical Methods
Managing and organising are: - Flux of processes, experiences, practices - Complex, rich - Socially constructed through culture and language - Multiple meanings, interpretations, realities	Make meaning through: - Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations - New understandings and worldviews	Value-bound research: - Researchers are part of what is researched - Subjectivity and empathy - Researcher interpretations key to contribution.	Qualitative methods: - Small samples - In-depth investigations - Interpretations

Table 4.4, An interpretivist research, Bristow (2015)

A key element of the interpretivist philosophy is that the researcher has to adopt an empathetic stance towards the participants involved in the data collection. The challenge here is to enter the social world of the research subjects and understand the world from their point of view (Saunders et al., 2016). This is again appropriate for this thesis as the research question and objectives aim to identify the key factors that influence the student experience in higher education institutions. From this investigation, it was identified that the most appropriate research philosophy for the current investigation was an adaptation of both approaches. The research traditions start in Classical Greek times with Plato and Aristotle who adopted a positivist view to research (Hirschheim, 1985). It has been observed that no single research methodology is intrinsically better than the other, many authors calling for a

combination of research methods in order to improve the quality of research (Kaplan and Duchon, 1988; Neuman, 2013). This perspective stems from the pragmatic foundations for conducting mixed methods research where the notion of 'what works' applies well to selecting the methods that 'work' best to address a study's problem and questions (Greene, 2008). After exploration of the two philosophies, it was decided that a mixed method approach to data collection was most appropriate for this thesis as it allowed the researcher to undertake a comprehensive analysis of data.

4.3.4 Research approach

There are two main methods of research approach available to researchers, these being: inductive and deductive. The most suitable approach to use will be dependent upon the purpose of the data collected and is generally used to either create a new theory or to test an existing theory respectively (Saunders et al., 2016). An inductive approach is used when the researcher intends to create a new theory and begins with observation and the search for patterns from the observations. The conclusion of these observations is with the creation of new theory - this represents a bottom-up approach whereby new knowledge is created as no existing theories currently exist (Saunders et al., 2007; Bernard and Bernard, 2012). As such, inductive approach is generally associated with subjectivity and follows the interpretivist philosophy and qualitative data collection (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, Saunders et al., 2016).

In comparison, the deductive approach looks to test a hypothesis or established theory and therefore aims to deduct conclusions and suggestions from existing theory. The key difference from the inductive approach is that the deductive approach begins with expected patterns that are then tested alongside observations. The term deductive, means to deduce or to reason from particular to general (Saunders et al., 2016), when applying this to research the emphasis of the approach is to identify a theory, establish a hypothesis and then identify if there are relationships that have a wider implication than the existing research. Saunders et al. (2007) identify the purpose of the deductive approach is to start with theory, follow a logical path to establish a new hypothesis that can be confirmed or rejected, without the researchers direct involvement. The deductive approach is therefore

generally associated with objectivity and causal reasoning using quantitative data collection (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Figure 4.5 visually depicts the two differing approaches available to researchers.

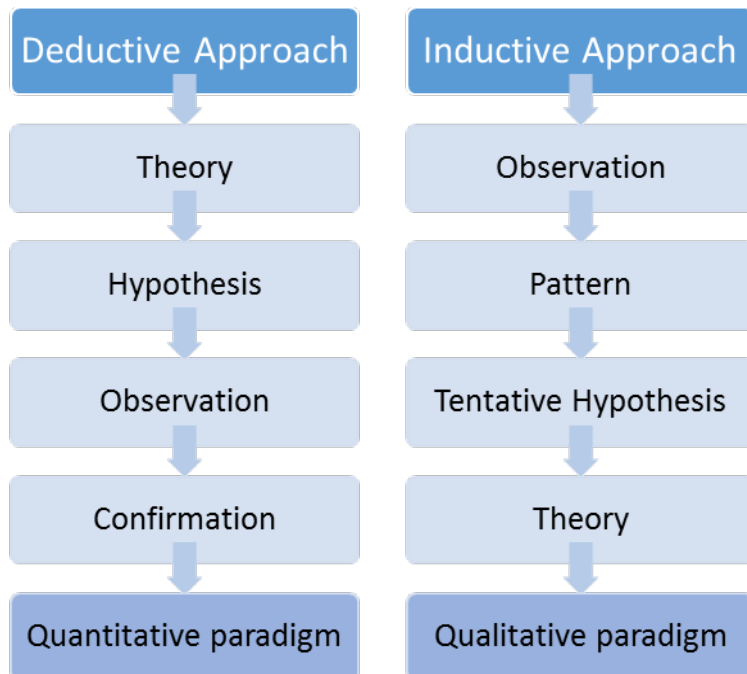


Figure 4.5, Induction versus deductive approaches, based on Elo and Kyngäs (2008)

When exploring the most suitable approach to undertake for this thesis it was deemed that the use of both deductive and inductive approaches were relevant. This is based upon the pragmatist paradigm used and on the basis that the mixed method approach has used both positivist and interpretivist philosophies. The deductive approach is underpinned with the positivist viewpoint and the inductive approach supported by an interpretivist perspective. The rationale for using two approaches is informed by the nature of the study and the longitudinal data collection approach used. Saunders et al. (2016) identifies that use of an effective approaches allows the researcher to collect the appropriate primary data to answer the research questions.

4.4 Rationale for choice of mixed method research

The primary data collection encompassed a longitudinal two stage mixed method data collection approach of questionnaires followed by focus groups to test the

research question. Following identification of the most appropriate research philosophy, it was important to further explore the mixed method research approach. This research methodology was used to guide this study as described and supported by several authors (Creswell and Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Punch, 2014). The mixed methods approach is a research design with both philosophical assumptions and methods of inquiry. The methodology involves collecting, analysing, and mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the methods used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The idea of mixing both kinds of approaches and data is not a new one with the advocates of quantitative and qualitative research paradigms having engaged in debate about the most effective form of methodology for many years (Campbell and Smith, 1983; Gall et al., 1996; Bryman, 2006). Yilmaz (2013) identifies that effective evaluation should not be based on one method and stated that research which represents both paradigms can be blended so that the researcher can engage in inquiry that represents both views.

Qualitative research stresses the relationship between the researcher and what is studied, it is interested in the process. Whereas quantitative research emphasises measurement and is interested in the relationship between variables (Palinkas et al., 2015). Quantitative supporters (Black, 1999; Schwandt, 2000; Creswell, 2003) identify views that are consistent with what is commonly known as a positivist philosophy (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The quantitative paradigm is based on positivism; 'the view that social research should adapt scientific method, that it consists of rigorous testing of hypotheses by means of data that take the form of quantitative measurements' (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007). This supports the research approach identified for use in this thesis. Science is characterised by empirical research; this can be classified as research that tests a hypothesis by experience, observation or experimentation. 'The philosophical position of the quantitative paradigm is that there is only one truth, an objective reality that exists independent of human perception'. (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This gave the suggestion to the researcher to use quantitative research as an opening approach for observing the initial thoughts of the target participants.

The most popular method to ensure this outcome is written or orally administered questionnaires with a limited range of predetermined responses. Sample sizes are

much larger than those used in qualitative research so that statistical methods to ensure that samples are representative can be used (Bogdan and Biklen, 1997). Other authors argue that qualitative research is based on interpretivism, (Altheide and Johnson, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 2000; Creswell et al, 2003) the view concerning people and their surroundings and reflect that a different research logic reflecting humans against natural direction is required known as constructivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Mills et al. (2006) identify several issues to consider when designing research studies for constructivist grounded theory. A key consideration is to develop a rapport with participants that enables a beneficial purpose during interviews and a significant contribution of their discussions into a grounded theory model.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) identifies suitable methods that can be used in qualitative research include in-depth interviews and focus group as well as participant observation. Samples sizes should be small and purposeful to give meaningful data that should be used to provide important information and not just because they are representative of a large number of the sample (Sale et al, 2002). Traditionalists such as Guba and Lincoln (1994) believe that research should be specific to each individual investigation and that it is impossible to differentiate between differing studies as they each have their own causes and effects i.e. explanations are driven directly from the researchers' findings. According to Jick (1979), quantitative and qualitative techniques are merely tools; integrating them allows us to answer questions of substantial importance. Cresswell et al. (2007) note a rationale for using mixed method research is that because it uses both types of research it makes up for the fundamental weaknesses of each type.

Gaining an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research puts a researcher in a position to decide upon the best strategy for their own analysis (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Indeed some theorists argue that researchers should collect several differing data types using a range of methods and strategies to enable advantageous results and increase the quality of the research (Brewer and Hunter, 1989; Johnson and Turner, 2003; Punch, 2014). Mertens (2014) argues that mixed methods include a diversity of perspective in samples and leads to less biased and more objective social research. Onwuegbuzie

and Leech (2004) found that the inclusion of quantitative data collection, analysis and interpretation in qualitative data collection, analysis and interpretation added significance to qualitative findings.

Therefore, mixed methods research offers researchers the opportunity to use a methodology that develops and integrates both techniques in order that inquiry is more significant. Mixed methods research as a research paradigm can also help bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004). The rationale for the approach in this thesis is that by using both approaches allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of the data collected and a more accurate examination given to the expectations of undergraduate students at the HEI. Had the research only relied on quantitative research or only qualitative research key findings may have been missed and as a result the 'true story' of student's expectations of their institution may have been missed. It is important that following the gathering of data from quantitative questionnaires that further discussion and analysis was undertaken to explore key themes through qualitative focus groups. This approach has allowed the researcher to undertake a thorough analysis of the influences on students' expectations of their higher education institution.

4.4.1 Mixed method data collection

When exploring and deciding upon an appropriate method of data collection for the thesis it was important to define the most effective research instruments to answer the research questions and produce the correct response from respondents (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2006; Saunders et al., 2007). To achieve validity of the methodology effective methods of collecting data should be used in order to effectively answer the research question and objectives set in this thesis. As identified in section 4.4 of this chapter a positivist / interpretivist research philosophy was applied to this methodology and a mixed method approach undertaken. The purpose of the mixed method data collection was to examine and explore the thesis question and as a result ascertain an understanding of student expectations and how they are influenced were key to the methodology of the thesis. Before undertaking the mixed method approach an initial pilot study of semi-structured interviews were conducted (see section 4.5) to ascertain key themes for examination in the research

collection. Upon completion of the pilot study, further detailed data collection was undertaken via quantitative questionnaires and qualitative focus groups. Questionnaires were used to examine key areas identified in the pilot study further in order to examine and explore the themes that drive the student experience. It also looked to clarify the drivers on student expectations of their higher educational institution. The focus groups followed the questionnaires and sought to clarify and conclude key themes that were identified in the quantitative research and explored the key issues further in order that the influences on student expectations could be clarified and analysed in detail.

4.4.2 Rationale for use of quantitative and qualitative research methods

Saunders et al. (2007) define that primary data collection is an effective method to address and analyse a research problem i.e. the research questions and objectives of the thesis. Efficient and effective primary data collection greatly benefits the research and allows the researcher to gain an understanding of the research subject. Primary data comprises of both qualitative and quantitative techniques for data collection (Sandelowski, 2000). Quantitative methods are defined as an unstructured, exploratory research methodology based on small samples that provide insight and understanding of the problem while a quantitative method seeks to quantify the data and apply some form of statistical analysis to the findings (Johnson and Turner, 2003). The quantitative method is well suited to providing factual and descriptive information qualitative methods are more suited to providing richer data about people and situations in order to analyse and understand behaviour in a wider context (Miles, 1990).

The qualitative method is seen to be more flexible and allowing respondents the opportunity to express experiences in their own terms and context (Saunders et al., 2016). Therefore, to identify the drivers on student expectations this thesis has undertaken both methods to establish both a holistic interpretation of the topic in question. It has been identified that this research has used both qualitative and quantitative methods as they are seen as complimentary of each other in collecting primary data (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004). The approach has been undertaken in this thesis where quantitative questionnaires have provided data for statistical analysis and qualitative focus groups then given opportunity for deeper analysis of

key information identified in the questionnaire. Further details on the questionnaire and focus groups will be discussed in section 4.6 of this chapter.

4.5 Pilot study

A pilot test assists the researcher in determining the focus of their study by recruiting participants who share similar interests as the final sample (Turner, 2010). The pilot study is part of the first phase of the research procedure, following the literature study. A pilot study can therefore be described as a mini-version of a full study or a trial run done in preparation of the complete study (Van Teijlingen, 2001, Lancaster et al., 2004). The approach to the pilot study for this thesis was the latter where it was used to define the feasibility of the research topic. For this thesis, the pilot study was used as the initial investigative phase that aimed to define the key characteristics of the student experience to assist and enable the researcher to identify a clearer and more focussed research question and methodology. Testing the research techniques and methods allows the researcher to identify if they worked in practice and where necessary be adapted and modified accordingly (Blaxter, 2010). Thus, this allowed the researcher to establish that the views described in the positivist philosophy were appropriate to ascertain the views of the thesis target population i.e. undergraduate higher education students.

4.5.1 Undertaking the pilot study

The aim of a pilot study is to provide information, which can contribute to the success of the research project as a whole. (Van Teijlingen, 2001; Sampson, 2004; Blaxter, 2010). The pilot study for this research served a dual purpose, firstly, it identified the viability of the research area i.e. student expectations impact upon the university experience and secondly, clarified the key areas for further investigation within this area. The focus of the pilot study was first year undergraduate students at the University of Leeds, at the time of the interviews the researcher was working at the institution and therefore for convenience the pilot study was undertaken there. As per the research criteria of the thesis all students were enrolled onto a full-time undergraduate business studies degree. The group were canvassed to identify those who were willing to take part in the research with three students volunteering to participate in the study. The transcript of these interviews are available in appendix 2. The participants were all classified as UK students and had undertaken

one academic semester at the university and therefore had some knowledge of being a higher education student but were also still having 'new' experiences that were shaping their views and expectations of university. This group acted as the perfect pilot group for the wider thesis as the participants of the pilot were similar to those that have been used in the final research, i.e. they were of the same age, had similar expectations and influences and were registered as undergraduate students on a business management programme.

4.5.2 The pilot study interviews

Interviews can provide insights that are not available to researchers working with large survey samples and are known to be the most suitable approach when seeking rich data illuminating individuals' experiences and attitudes (Gall at al., 2003; Creswell 2013). The drawbacks can be that interviews could be seen as time-consuming to conduct and analyse with some arguing they can be seen as unstable or unreliable because of the inconsistency in the interview questions, thus making it difficult to code the data collected (Creswell, 2014). For the purpose of this study they were deemed appropriate as the benefits of identifying student views were deemed more important than any issues with coding the data. Analysis of the findings will be discussed later in this chapter (section 4.5.3). Respondents' perceptions and beliefs are at the heart of the qualitative research and this was the main motivation for undertaking initial qualitative analysis via the pilot interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants with the aim to learn about their opinions and perceptions of their initial university experience. The interview questions were of exploratory nature due to the small scale of this study and early stage in the overall research project. The discussions areas were designed to identify common themes in the participants' accounts of their university experience and sought to classify the key topics for further exploration. The interviews took place in January 2013 at the University of Leeds and were conducted in interview rooms to ensure confidentiality of discussions and allow participants the opportunity to offer their candid opinions. Chenail (2011) states that the pilot study usually takes place in a setting that is convenient for the researcher and that resembles the one to be used for the actual research. During the interviews the researcher made great attempts not to limit the participants' discussions and attempted to give them time to talk about how they understood and described their experience of being a higher

education student. This was particularly important as each individual's experience can be perceived differently by different people.

When considering the method of qualitative data collection there are several options available to the researcher, including procedures such as content analysis, domain analysis and thematic analysis. These can be undertaken by using either computer software (including ATLAS.ti and NVivo) or by using a manual approach (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003). Both manual and computer-based approaches make use of coding systems, therefore it can be argued that both approaches can be integrated (Miles and Huberman 1994; Jennings 2010). For the pilot interviews of this thesis a combination of both NVivo and manual methods were undertaken. The rationale behind the use of manual data analysis rather than computer based analysis was twofold, (1) the manual approach depends on the judgement of the researcher and allows for easier analysis (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). (2) The interviews were used to form the basis of further research; therefore, it was important for the researcher to clearly identify key themes that emerged from the data analysis process.

When undertaking content analysis, visual coding is recommended to ensure key themes can be identified and coded. Braun and Clark (2006) explain that visual representation identifies themes that can then be organised via tables or mind maps as techniques to organise and identify data effectively. Table 4.5 below identifies the themes used to categorise the data collected via the pilot interviews based on the findings from the literature review. From this, questions for the pilot interview were identified to ensure that they were relevant to the focus of this study.

Literature Findings	Identified Theme	Sub-themes	Question Example
Byrne and Flood (2005); Christie et al. (2006); Gibney et al. (2011)	Reason for undertaking higher education	Choice of institution Performance drivers Employability Prospect of study	What were the most important factors for you choosing to study at university?
Scott (1999); Marcus (2008); Yooyen et al. (2011); Kandiko and Mawer (2015)	Influencers on decisions	Marketing literature Guidance – previous institution Guidance – family / friends	Why did you decide to study at university?
DeShields (2005); Douglas et al (2006); Yeo and Li (2012); Sabri (2013)	Drivers of student satisfaction	Social factors Teaching standards Support and feedback given Perceptions of students	Before coming to university did you have any kind of set expectations?
Callender and Jackson (2008); Alves and Raposo (2010); Browne (2010); Tomlinson (2017)	Expectations of students	Students as customers Service quality standards Tuition fees	What general perceptions did you have of university and have they been met?
Jackson et al. (2000); Christie et al. (2006); Gibney et al. (2011); Briggs et al. (2012)	Preparedness for higher education	Previous educational experiences Skills developed Perception of own ability to perform	Did you feel prepared for university?

Table 4.5, Pilot interview plan - key themes and questions

4.5.3 Pilot study data analysis

As identified earlier pilot study's aim was to familiarise the researcher with the significant topic areas for further exploration in this thesis and provided identification of key themes to be further analysed later in the research via quantitative questionnaires and qualitative focus groups. The results of these interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis approach, the full interview transcripts can be found at appendix 2. Clarke and Braun (2013) define this approach as a qualitative analytical method that identifies, analyses, reports and present themes within data in order that the data can be organised in greater detail and explore key elements. Interview transcripts organised and appropriately formatted in order to ensure that data was organised effectively and then coded to ensure further analysis and identification of key themes. After undertaking investigation of the transcript, a word frequency analysis was undertaken to identify the views of student participants

Key Word	Word Count	Similar Words	%	Theme identified
Think	189	believe, considered, guess, mean, means, reason, suppose, think, thinking, thought, thoughts	4.22	Student feelings towards institution
Get	166	arrived, becoming, beginning, come, comes, coming, develop, developing, experience, experiences, get, getting, going, make, making, obtain, obtaining, receive, started, take, taking	2.85	What do students get from their educational experience
Know	113	experience, experiences, know, knowing, learn, learning, live, lived, lives, living, recognise, recognised	1.95	What do students know about their university experience
Wants	46	need, needed, needs, required, want, wanted, wanting, wants, wish	1.12	What students want from their university experience
Experience	85	experience, experienced, experiences, experiencing, feel, feeling, see, seeing	1.04	The importance of student experience
Support	50	back, bearing, friends, help, helping, helps, keep, live, lived, lives, living, support	0.90	The support students are given during their educational experience
Involved	47	ask, asked, engage, engagement, interest, interested, interesting, involved, need, needed, needs, required, take, taking	0.74	Student engagement with their higher education experience
Customer	26	customer, customers	0.72	Concept of student as customer
Expectations	51	ask, asked, bearing, carried, expect, expectations, look, looked, looking, required, wait	0.55	What do students expect from their higher education experience

Table 4.6, Key wording from pilot interviews and themes identified

The results of the pilot interview clearly showed that the students had a keen interest in their university experience and showed that their feelings and attitudes towards the institution were fundamental to this experience. As shown the key themes identified from the interviews were; the importance of the student experience, what students think (perceive) and get (expect) from their university experience, support and involvement are important to them and an identification of the term students as customers (service quality). These terms were used as the basis for further analysis in the qualitative and quantitative analysis used in the methodology of this research. These will be discussed further in the following sections of the report.

4.6 Quantitative methodology

4.6.1 Research hypothesis

The literature review identified that there were several influencers upon students' expectations of their higher education institution with an identifiable gap in the literature with regards to how these may change over the period of study at the institution. The quantitative analysis was undertaken to test the research objectives and questions for the thesis. Alongside this, it was important to develop a research hypothesis to test the quantitative findings of the research in further detail. To effectively test the data collected the following two hypotheses were developed:

- **Hypothesis (H01)** – *student perceptions influence their satisfaction at the university.*
 - H0 – There is no link between student perceptions and student satisfaction at the university
 - H1 – Student perceptions do influence satisfaction at the university
 - H2 – Student perceptions do not influence satisfaction at the university

- **Hypothesis (H02)** – *student expectations influence their satisfaction at the university.*
 - H0 – There is no link between student expectations and student satisfaction at the university
 - H1 – Student expectations do influence satisfaction at the university
 - H2 – Student expectations do not influence satisfaction at the university

The above hypotheses can be directly linked to the quantitative nature of the exploratory research design where an identification of the unknown variables or factors in the study are explored before moving onto the explanatory stage of the research. In relation to this study the hypothesis will be applied to the quantitative questionnaire and will aim to identify the influencers on student expectations and perceptions over a period of time as identified in figure 4.7 below.

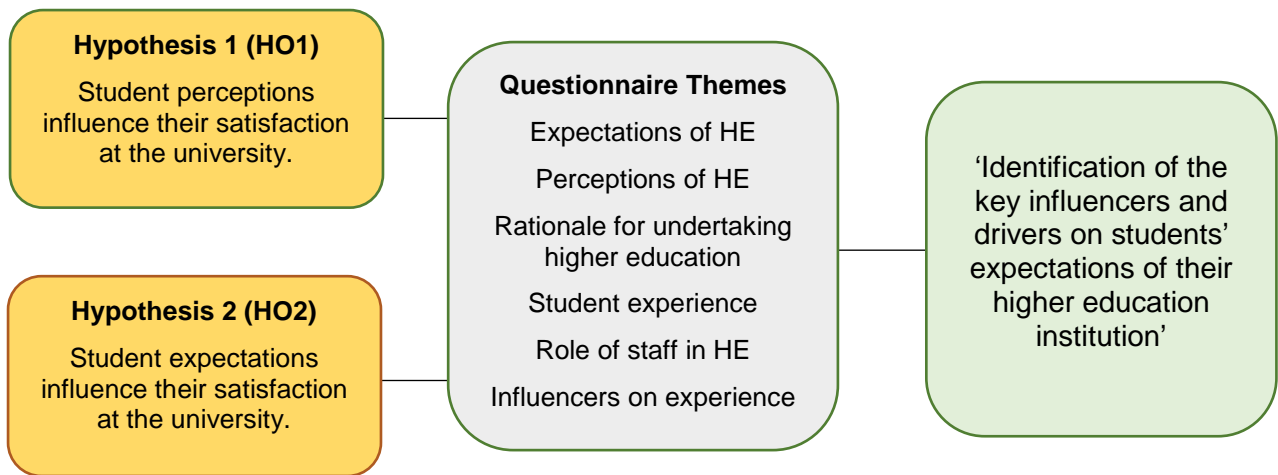


Figure 4.7, Research hypothesis related to questionnaire themes and thesis title

Table 4.6 further details the relationship between the hypotheses and objectives from the thesis to establish how they contribute to the research questions being met. In addition, when applying the hypothesis to the key theoretical themes it can be identified that the fundamental themes identified in the literature review are covered by the hypotheses.

Hypothesis to Test	Relevant Research Objectives	Key theoretical themes
Hypothesis (HO1) Student expectations influence their satisfaction at the university.	To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction at the institution. (RO1) To identify the drivers on student expectations and identify the influence upon the university experience. (RO2)	1. Expectations of institution 2. Expectation of value 3. Employability 4. Role of staff
Hypothesis (HO2) Student perceptions influence their satisfaction at the university.	To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction at the institution. (RO1) To identify if student expectations remain consistent or change over the period of their academic study. (RO3)	1. Personal motivators 2. Preparedness for higher education 3. Service expectations 4. Previous educational experiences

Table 4.6, Hypotheses to test against research objective and theoretical themes

Building upon table 4.6, the hypothesis has been further developed to identify independent variables to test the hypothesis effectively. The variables have been developed from the key findings analysed in the quantitative questionnaire (figure 4.7) and identify which variable themes have been tested. The independent variables are divided into sub-variables for deeper analysis as per table 4.7 below. The sub-variables are taken from specific questionnaire questions developed for the quantitative research. This allowed for a detailed analysis of the key influencers upon H01 and H02 to ensure an accurate examination of the university experience. The purpose of this analysis is to accept or reject the null hypothesis and identify if the independent variables are statistically significant. The independent variables will be tested using regression analysis based upon the dependent variable 'university experience'.

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Sub-variable tested	Questionnaire question
Perception (H01)	Reason for undertaking higher education	Prospect of study	Q8
		Programme choice	Q15
	Influencers on student decisions	School/college prepared for study / gave necessary skills	Q7, Q9
	Previous educational experiences	Performance compared to previous institution	Q12
Expectation (H02)	Staff influence	Access to lecturers / enthusiasm of staff	Q21, Q23
	Feedback given	Time for work marked / feedback on work important	Q25, Q26
	Students' own ability	Performance expectations	Q12, Q29
	Social factor influence	Support from friends	Q6
		Importance of social activities	Q10

Table 4.7, Sub-themes / hypotheses to test in quantitative analysis

Figure 4.8 below identifies visually how the independent variables are tested using the two hypotheses for the thesis, *influence of student perception (H01)* and *influence of student expectation (H02)* to examine the dependent variable university experience.

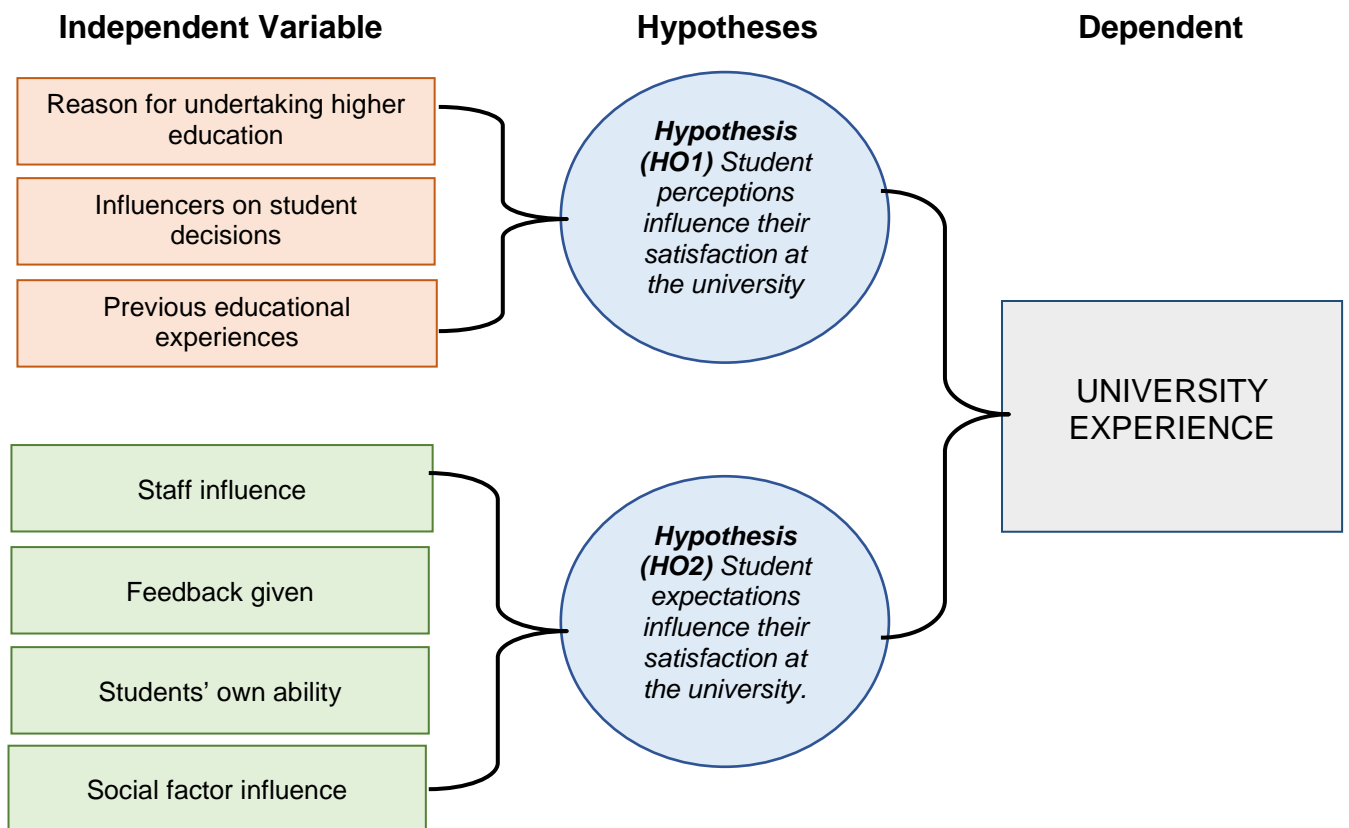


Figure 4.8, Links between the hypotheses, independent influencers and student expectations

Having identified the hypotheses to test the following section of the chapter will identify the quantitative method used to explore and answer the hypotheses of the thesis.

4.6.2 Use of quantitative questionnaire

Having identified the hypotheses to test relating to the quantitative research it is necessary to explore the method used, for this thesis questionnaire survey was deemed as most appropriate. The purpose of the quantitative questionnaire was to gain a deeper understanding of the influencers on students' expectations within their HEI. The responses from this data collection were used to answer the research questions and objectives of the thesis as well as inform the qualitative focus groups as part of the mixed method approach. The rationale for this method of data collection includes; 1. It enabled a higher response rate as the questionnaires were distributed to respondents to complete and were collected personally by the researcher. 2. Allowed for anonymity of respondents because participants names

were not required on the completed questionnaires and 3. Reduced the opportunity for bias as they were presented in a consistent manner. Apart from the advantages listed above, it has been argued by some researchers that questionnaires have their weaknesses; for example, there is the question of validity and accuracy (Burns and Grove 1993). The subjects might not reflect their true opinions but might answer what they think will please the researcher, and valuable information may be lost as answers are usually brief.

The topic of validity and accuracy will be addressed later in this chapter, see section 4.8.1. Robson (2002) also comments that questionnaire-based surveys often only capture surface opinions, seeing as respondents will not necessarily report their beliefs and attitudes accurately. This was an important consideration for this research as the author works at the institution where the data collection took place and therefore had an existing relationship with some participants. This topic will be discussed further in section 4.9 of this chapter when ethical considerations are discussed. The questions asked were based on the initial pilot interview results where key themes of the research were identified, as was discussed in section 4.5.3. Reference to appropriate literature findings on the subject areas (see chapter 2) were referred to in order to support the generation of appropriate questions for the questionnaire.

4.6.3 Questionnaire participants

The questionnaires were distributed to undergraduate students at the University of Sunderland over a longitudinal three-year period, this institution was chosen due to ease of access to the sample population where, as identified above, the researcher works. The University of Sunderland is located in the North East of England and gained university status in 1992 (University of Sunderland, 2018). The questionnaire design was based on the analysis of key issues identified by the respondents in the pilot interviews. The first questionnaire were disseminated to the participants within their first three weeks of study at the institution (October). This was then followed up with a qualitative focus group towards the end of the academic year (April) where key themes identified in the questionnaires were discussed further. This process was repeated with the same group of students over the next two academic years to total a three-year data collection period. The rationale for this approach was to

ensure that the study was able to capture student's expectations over their 'academic life', it also allowed the author to analyse and interpret if and how respondents views of their university experience changed over this time.

The analysis undertaken over the three-year period used a three-phase approach as follows; *Phase 1* took place in October 2014 and was concerned with exploring initial expectations of students within the university and the focus on establishing their pre-university perceptions and initial expectations of the tutors, facilities and other related university functions. *Phase 2* followed in October 2015 and explored if and how expectations of students had changed from their first year at the university (phase 1 results) and identified trends for further exploration and to inform research design for phase 3. Finally *phase 3* took place in October 2016 and identified the final views of the students on entering and during their final year at the university. Particular focus was given to exploring the areas of research that have changed most considerably from the initial 'phase 1' findings and summarised the impact these changing expectations could have on the student journey within the institution. These changes were discussed further in the qualitative focus groups whereas for consistency the quantitative questionnaire remained the same throughout the research period. The longitudinal approach allowed the researcher to measure and analyse the changing expectations of students over their time at the institution. The use of longitudinal data (both prospective and retrospective) can ensure a more complete approach to empirical research (Ruspini, 2000).

4.6.4 Sample selection

Creswell (2013) identifies the importance of selecting the appropriate sample group for the methodology and advises of using appropriate sampling strategies. Creswell and Clark (2011) also suggests the importance of acquiring participants who will be willing to openly and honestly share information or 'their views/opinions' and conduct the research in situations where participants are a comfortable environment, (especially for focus groups or interviews) and where the participants do not feel restricted or uncomfortable to share information with the researcher. The sample group of this thesis, undergraduate higher education students, volunteered to undertake both forms of research for this thesis and as a result were under no pressure to respond in a particular way. It was also identified that responses would

be treated as confidential and only used for this research, as a result open and honest views were given. The nature of the research for this thesis is very specific and does not need a wide-ranging sample of the population; instead, it was important to get a representative sample for this study, namely undergraduate university students.

The sampling population for this research thesis consisted of students from the United Kingdom, Europe and Overseas and were all studying on a Business related programme at the University of Sunderland totalling 176 respondents over the 3 year period of study. The cohort of students are typical of the general student population in regards to their age, gender etc. Demographic information was collected from these participants in the questionnaire for information although the quantitative analysis will not focus on this specifically as it is not relevant to the research objectives of this study. It was decided that purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling (Teddlie and Yu, 2007), was the most appropriate method for this research. Participants were not selected randomly but judged to be of interest to the researcher, which was not seen as a limitation since the questionnaire was specifically intended to analyse the needs of the expectations of the sample group of undergraduate students. Another important point to identify is that the participants of the questionnaires were from the same cohort of students throughout the three-year period. This is also true of the qualitative focus groups as will be identified in section 4.7 of this chapter. The rationale for this is that the research was able to follow this group of students and identify how their views on the institution change over their time at the university. This is a key focus of the thesis and applies directly to research question 3 - *do student expectations stay the same during their time at university or change.*

4.6.5 Distribution of questionnaires

The survey was disseminated in a paper-based format and given to respondents in lecture and seminar sessions. Response rate and quality of data was generally good due to the questionnaire distribution being on a personal basis and clarity could be given on questions (if required) when respondents were completing the questionnaire. This also meant that the majority of questionnaires were returned immediately meaning the researcher did not have to wait long for a response. The

researcher left the room whilst the questionnaires were completed in order to avoid any pressure being put onto the participants and to keep their identity anonymous. Once completed participants put the questionnaire on a table and left the room, when all the participants had completed the survey, the researcher collected the questionnaires. Only a few participants declined to fill in the questionnaire, mainly due to time constraints, some others took the questionnaire away to complete in their own time but did not complete or return the survey. When distributing questionnaires at years 2 and 3 it was explained to the participants that they should only complete the questionnaire if they had completed it in year 1. This was to ensure consistency in the data collection, however a slight flaw to this was that due to the anonymity of the participants the researcher had little control over this.

As discussed previously the data was collected over a period of three academic years. The first questionnaire was distributed to students in the second week of semester one in their first year at university (October 2014), meaning that their initial views of the institution were given and an impartial response of their expectations and early experiences of the institution given. Subsequent questionnaires followed the same methods and were distributed at roughly the same week of the following years i.e. October 2015 and October 2016. A total of 176 questionnaires were distributed as detailed in table 4.8 below.

Year	One	Two	Three	Total
Respondents	65	53	58	176

Table 4.8, Questionnaire respondent numbers by year of study

4.6.6 Question design and research themes

The questionnaire (see appendix 4) was divided into four themes in order to clearly establish the research themes being addressed, as discussed earlier in this chapter, these were identified from the pilot study interviews and literature review, see table 4.9 below. The table also identifies themes from Plato’s allegory as discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Research Theme	Plato's Allegory Dimension	Content of Questions	Question Numbers
Demographic characteristics	<i>Prisoners</i> – identifying the participants background	Gender, Age, Nationality, Home life	1 - 6
Rationale for undertaking a higher education programme	<i>Prisoners</i> – understanding motivators / attitudes towards higher education study <i>Fire</i> – identifying participants perceptions of higher education and previous educational experiences <i>Sunlight</i> – identifying the influence of external factors on decision to undertake HE study	Support, Preparation, Information, Performance	6 – 9, 13
Student experience	<i>Fire</i> – identifying the impact of participants perceptions on their experience within the institution <i>Sunlight</i> – identifying how the external influences impact upon student experience <i>Prisoners</i> – exploring how participants own views, abilities and expectations impact upon the student experience <i>Shadows</i> – identifying the role of staff, facilities and environment in determining the student experience	Expectations, Perceptions, Influencers (Social factors, Friendship groups)	10 – 14, 15 - 24
Expectations of higher education	<i>Prisoners</i> – exploring how participants own views and abilities impact upon their expectations of the institution <i>Shadows</i> – identifying the role of staff, facilities and programme choice upon student expectations of the institution	Tutors, Academic staff, Facilities, Programme	13 - 27

Table 4.9, Questionnaire design by theme, question content and number in relation to Plato's allegory dimensions

4.6.7 Questionnaire questions

Questions were worded carefully and avoided long, ambiguous, leading or biased questions, as well as the use of jargon. The following outlines the differing question types used and explains the choice of these questions from the questionnaire.

Numerical rating

Likert scales of various types were used, the rationale for using these question types were to allow for a response of feeling towards the answers given by the respondents. Both numeric and 'strongly agree to strongly disagree' scales were used to allow for a positive or negative response towards the questions. In the data analysis, each statement was assigned a separate variable.

10. It is important to have structured interests outside of academic study (e.g. sports clubs, societies, structured social groups).

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

11. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very unsatisfied and 10 is extremely satisfied, how satisfied do you expect to be with your University experience?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Multiple choice

These type of questions required respondents to choose just one response from a list of options. Only one variable per question was necessary in the data analysis, again an example of this is shown below.

2. How old are you?

a) 18 -20

b) 21 – 25

c) 26 - 30

c) 31 or over

Check lists

These questions offered a list of choices which respondents could select as many answers as they felt appropriate and applied to them. Each statement was assigned a separate variable in the data analysis. An example of this question type is shown below.

13. What were your main reasons for choosing your programme? (you can select more than one answer)

a) Continue in an area already studied

b) Did not get first preference

c) Expectations of family and / or friends

e) Gain entry to another degree program

f) Improve job prospects / earning potential

g) Interest

h) Recommendation of teachers / careers advisors

i) Visit to a university for an activity or information session

Open questions

Open questions allowed respondents to formulate their own statements with the aim being that this would encourage them to give more detailed qualitative responses as shown below.

28. Any other comments?

.....

.....

4.6.8 Data entry and analysis

The hypotheses shown earlier in the chapter identified that variables for testing were based upon the quantitative questionnaire developed for the research. The independent variables are divided into sub-variables for deeper analysis and investigation to test the hypotheses. For analysis, the survey data was entered into the statistical analysis software IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) version 24. SPSS was used to facilitate advanced analysis of data, such as correlations between variables. The rationale for the use of SPSS was that it is the most commonly used quantitative data software package that allows the researcher to reduce the time required for the analysis. (Bryman and Cramer, 2005; Cronk, 2017). Furthermore, it allows improved graphical analysis of results by using cross tabulation between variables (Neuman, 2010; Pallant, 2013). To analyse the data collected from the questionnaire in this research this analytical approach was undertaken to examine the relationship between student expectations and perceptions and their actual university experience. After the data was collected it was organised, investigated and examined through the software by using regression analysis. Any open-ended responses were analysed through quantitative content analysis with the aim of quantifying emerging characteristics and concepts. Concept analysis is the process of analysing verbal or written communications in a systematic way to measure variables quantitatively (Rolfe, 2006). Further details on the analysis of the quantitative data will be explored in chapter 5 of this thesis.

4.6.9 Transition of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods

As per the pragmatist philosophical approach and mixed methodology described earlier in this chapter there is a need to also explain the qualitative methods used to support the quantitative methods that were used. The aim of the qualitative research in this thesis was to further explore key findings from the quantitative data collection process. The need to connect the findings from the questionnaire and focus group interviews is determined by the fact that although questionnaires assisted in the identification of key influencers on student expectations and their perceived university experience, it fails to allow for deeper insight into the key factors of the findings. Alongside this, participants' responses to the questionnaire could not be followed up with further probing questions to further explain the response. As such qualitative focus groups will allow the researcher to further explore these key concepts identified and discuss this with participants in a suitable manner. The qualitative data collection phase builds directly on the results from the quantitative phase in order that the quantitative results can be explained in more detail through the qualitative data. In order to maximise the advantages of using mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative data sets were triangulated to gain a holistic understanding of the student experience through the identification of key themes across both methods. The longitudinal approach undertaken by this research also allowed for key themes to be explored across the students' three-year university timeframe. As a result the use of quantitative and qualitative techniques allowed for the conceptual framework and research objectives to be systematically tested. McKim (2017) identifies that a key advantage of conducting mixed methods research is the ability to use several methods to examine the same research objectives. Therefore this approach has ensured the research undertaken gained a greater in depth understanding of the research questions of the thesis. It also allowed the researcher to counterbalance any perceived weaknesses in the individual quantitative and qualitative approaches (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). The following section will further explain the qualitative methodology undertaken in this thesis.

4.7 Qualitative methodology

Clarke and Braun (2013) define content or thematic analysis as a qualitative analytical methodology that identifies, analyses, reports and present themes within data, it helps to organise and describe data in detail and interpret various segments of the research area. Thematic analysis is also said to be flexible and accessible when analysing qualitative data and provides an instrument to examine and critique data effectively. Creswell (2013) states that thematic analysis applies to a range of theoretical approaches thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the key themes identified with the research. The research objectives of this thesis are again detailed below for reference, with the qualitative data contributing to the analysis and testing of these.

Research Objective 1 (RO1) - To identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction at the institution.

Research Objective 2 (RO2) - To identify influencers on student expectations and explore if they change during their time at university.

Research Objective 3 (RO3) - To identify if student expectations remain consistent or change over the period of their academic study. (RO3)

The most appropriate qualitative method to test the objectives for this research was deemed to be the use of semi-structured focus group interviews. The rationale for this was that the researcher was able to use the discussions in the focus groups to examine the objectives in further detail with student participants and establish their thoughts and feelings towards the *drivers and key factors that influence their expectations of the higher education institution*.

4.7.1 Focus groups

Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data. They are generally loosely structured and encourage interactive discussion between small groups of respondents simultaneously (Kitzinger, 1994; Krueger, 2014). Typically, a focus group will contain from four to eight people, a moderator will lead the group in an in-

depth discussion on one or more particular topics. The discussion should usually last between 60 to 120 minutes (Kitzinger, 1994). For this thesis, the focus group interviews were used to further explore key issues identified by participants in the quantitative questionnaires. The decision to use focus groups for this research was to capture qualitative data via a smaller sample of participants' i.e. undergraduate students, who had participated in the earlier questionnaires. Furthermore, the rationale for the use of this qualitative data collection technique was to give the researcher the opportunity to discuss and probe key themes in greater detail taken from the questions asked in the questionnaires.

Focus group interviews are an efficient qualitative method that is used to discover the 'why' behind the 'what' in participant perspectives (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups help in the understanding of consumer preferences and choices, as they explore why people feel, think or act in a specific manner (Cameron, 2005). For this thesis discovering the feelings, thoughts and expectations of the participants were key to answering the research objectives and therefore supported the use of this method of quantitative data collection. Flexibility and speed of data collection are two advantages of using focus group interviews as there is only one moderator interacting with the participants and allows for a range of views for those taking part so a collective overview can be gained (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2014). Focus groups also explicitly use group interaction as part of the method. This means that instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view (Kitzinger, 1994). Disadvantages associated with focus group interviews can be that group dynamics in the group could possibly silence individual voices meaning not all participants contribute equally to the discussion. Some researchers (Morgan, 1996; Barbour, 2008) have also noted that group discussions can actually generate more critical comments than individual interviews as peer support brings out more confident responses from participants. The researcher made effort to ensure this was not the case for this research when moderating the groups; this will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

4.7.2 Conducting the focus group

The objective of the focus group research was to identify, explore and discuss student participant's opinions on the influences of their university experiences. For the purpose of this research, the focus groups were categorised by level of study, encompassing students at years 1, 2 and 3 of their undergraduate degree programme. This aligns with the methodology undertaken in the quantitative data collection via questionnaires with the purpose to ensure consistency in data analysis. Thus enabling the researcher to gather in-depth longitudinal feedback from the participants using the mixed methodology identified earlier in this chapter. The focus groups consisted of 17 students across the 3 years of undergraduate study, these encompassed 7 year 1 students, 6 students from year 2 and 4 students from year 3. These students were the same cohort and started at the university in September 2013 as shown in table 4.10 below for further details on the focus group participants. The benefits to the study of using the same cohort of student was that their attitudes could be tracked throughout the three-year period to establish how feelings and views have altered throughout their period of study via qualitative methods. This allowed the researcher to establish key factors that influence student behaviour and experiences within their HEI for further discussion in the data analysis section of this thesis.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Date undertaken	April 2015	April 2016	April 2017
Time studied at HEI	8 months	16 months	24 months
Group size	7	6	4
Breakdown of group	4 female 3 male	3 female 3 male	1 female 3 male

Table 4.10, Focus group participant details

4.7.3 Recruiting participants

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, see section 4.6, respondents to the quantitative questionnaires were asked to identify if they would be interested in undertaking further qualitative research via focus groups. From these respondents 24 students showed interest in being part of the focus groups. However, after identifying dates to undertake the interviews this number was confirmed at 17. This number was initially to be 19 with an additional two 3rd year students due to participate however unfortunately due to unforeseen circumstances they were unable to attend. The reason the other students did not participate was due to clashes with work commitments or not responding to the suggested dates given. The responses of the 17 participants in the focus groups were used to discuss in greater depth the opinions and attitudes towards their undergraduate student experience based across their three-year period with the institution. All focus groups took place in April, this month was chosen as it was towards the end of the students second semester of the academic year, thus allowing the researcher the opportunity to identify how key themes had developed over that academic year.

Kenyon (2004) suggests the formation of friendship groups to facilitate the focus group interview process. It involves selection of interviewees who know each other, this is believed helps participants to relax and to feel encouraged to participate in group discussion. As discussed above, participants were invited to take place on a voluntary basis but were volunteering with their peers so were not in isolation and thus felt more supported to participate in the focus groups. This was true of the participants who partook in the focus groups as they studied alongside one another in their programme of study within the institution and thus had prior experience of working with each other meaning they felt more comfortable in the focus group environment. An additional advantage is that friends and colleagues could relate each other's comments to incidents in their shared experiences. They were also more likely to challenge each other on contradictions between what they professed to believe and how they actually behaved. This was certainly true of the respondents in this research who felt comfortable both supporting and challenging their peers during discussions.

4.7.4 Moderating the groups

The atmosphere created in a focus group can produce a wide spectrum of opinion and allow the participants to discuss several issues and state their first-hand experiences and opinions on these topics (McClelland, 1994). The value of group dynamic interaction is two-fold, first, it can gather insight and expressions of group feelings for researchers who may not realise all the angles as they approach a subject, it is an extension of individual interviewing (Cameron, 2005). Additionally it can produce new and additional data and add to the explanation and understanding of an event, activity or behavioural pattern in the discussion field (Morgan, 1996). The role of the researcher in the focus groups is key and their job is to utilise group dynamics and lead group members to their points of view, attitude and experiences towards the research theme. Greenbaum (2000) identifies that the most critical role of the moderator is to facilitate the focus group to achieve the aims of the research. Fundamentally, the moderator should lead the group, direct flow of discussion, build harmony with the participants, encourage involvement and achieve the research objective. For these focus groups, the researcher lead the group discussions, questions were semi-structured and based on previous findings from the literature review and most significantly the quantitative questionnaires. The approach taken was to create a relaxed atmosphere where the participants could feel calm and comfortable to share their views on the subject being discussed by the group. When moderating the discussions, it was important to ensure that the researcher was not dominating discussions and allowed participants to contribute their views.

The responsibility of the interviewer is to introduce the theme to be discussed and encourage group members to speak confidentially about the topic, they may initially take a back seat and allow the participants to debate the topic amongst themselves (Kitzinger, 1994). The structure of the focus groups were flexible so the moderator used semi-structured questions and allowed conversation to follow a natural flow. Key points were noted during discussions with the participants and the full focus group discussion transcribed at the end of the three separate focus groups (See appendix 5). All the focus groups were recorded using a digital camcorder, a voice recorder was also used in case there was any issue with the video camcorder however thankfully this was not needed. To aid the participants to engage with the topic and speak freely the focus groups were undertaken in a neutral but familiar

environment, the researcher therefore chose to undertake the interviews in the university building where the students studied. Participants were all students within this building and therefore felt familiar with the rooms and layout. This was advantageous to the moderator as the participants immediately relaxed into their surroundings and engaged in discussions without uncertainty relating to their environment. The rooms used had comfortable chairs and a table so all participants could see and interact with one another during discussions. Drinks and light refreshments were provided to all participants.

Prior to starting the focus groups time was spent with the participants to inform them further about the study and how the focus group would run, this was to ensure that the maximum amount of time could be given to discussing the key issues in the allotted period of one hour. All paper work was completed prior to the focus group (consent form and focus group rules), see appendix 6, to again maximise the amount of discussion time available. After the focus groups had taken place the researcher took time to reflect on the sessions, reflections from the first and second focus groups were used to inform and prepare for the next set of focus groups. The conversations were transcribed as quickly as possible to ensure accuracy and allowed data analysis of the findings to take place promptly.

4.7.5 Focus group data analysis

The focus group interview themes were derived from the quantitative questionnaire and further explored key themes that were identified. Discussion was given to the key themes and questions raised from the literature review of this thesis (see chapter 2), table 4.11 gives a breakdown of the key themes of the research related to questions asked as part of the focus groups.

Focus Group Themes	Question Types
Pre-University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought process to deciding upon institution • Influencers – careers/friends/teachers • Any university influence e.g. open day
Choice of Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for choice • Expectations of university experience • Perceptions prior to arrival • Expectations after Graduation
Prospect of Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings towards university prior to starting • Initial concerns / worries • What elements of university study did they look forward to
University Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling towards university • Perceptions versus actual experience • Levels of satisfaction • Better or worse experience to expectations
Influencers on Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff influence • Social environment • Support services • Engagement

Table 4.11 – Focus group interview themes and questions

After the focus groups had taken place, the discussions were written up and analysed through the computer software package NVivo where it was collected, organised and analysed. NVivo is designed to assist in the analysis of qualitative data through recording, sorting, matching and linking key themes in order to gather information to assist in answering the research question (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). All data collected in the discussions were categorised and coded based on specific topics and themes identified by focus group participants. Coding is used to enable the researcher to organise data and facilitate interpretation (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). It was also important to try to distinguish between individual opinions expressed in group discussion from the actual group consensus, therefore any singular themes that occurred during discussion were identified and explored as well as the more general points. The researcher will explore these themes in further detail in the qualitative analysis chapter of this thesis.

4.8 Addressing issues of validity, bias and limitations of the research

The literature on research methodology requires researchers to critically assess the issues of validity, reliability and bias (Saunders et al., 2007). The issue of hypothesis validity needed to be addressed for this research as it seeks to determine whether the research tools used will produce the expected response to the questions asked to the participants. The issue of 'reliability' will be a measure of the consistency of the data and results attained. This research has used structured questionnaires and semi-structured focus group interviews as the research instruments as has been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter.

4.8.1 Validity in interviews and questionnaires

Validity is classified as the extent to which data collected will affect the credibility of the research findings (Saunders et al., 2016). Reasons for this could be that validity can be impacted upon by the degree of participants' and observers' error and potential bias (Robson, 2002). This could be caused in a variety of ways, including, incorrect selection of study measures, insufficient amount of data collected, wrong recruitment criteria, and a range of other factors (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). There are three types of 'validity' in research: 1. Criterion-related validity (predictive or concurrent), 2. Content validity, 3. Construct validity. Criterion-related validity is the degree of correspondence between a test measure and one or more external criteria, usually measured by their correlation (Drost, 2011). Patton (1990) defined content validity as —a qualitative type of validity where the domain of the concept is made clear and the analyst judges whether the measures fully represent the domain. Construct validity refers to how well you translated or transformed a concept, idea, or behaviour – that is a construct – into a functioning and operating reality, the operationalisation (Trochim, and Donnelly, 2001).

Firstly, for the purpose of this thesis *criterion-related validity* requires the research instruments (interview and questionnaires) to explore student experience / expectations (Saunders et al., 2007). Therefore, the researcher needed to ensure that the data collection design was relevant to the topic and related to the responses given in the pilot interviews (see section 4.5). The data collection methods also needed to be given to a relevant sample group of students, again this was discussed earlier in this chapter, see section 4.6.4, therefore the design can be described as

free from bias. Secondly, *content validity* addresses the content wording and sentences used in the questionnaires and interviews, these have been reviewed to ensure their relevance to the research objectives of this thesis. Each stage, pilot interview to questionnaire, questionnaire to focus groups, have informed one another and ensured that the questions asked were appropriate and informed by research. Again this shows that sound content validity has been achieved in this research. Finally, *construct validity* is needed to identify what should be measured, in this research the measurement is of student expectations and how these influenced their university experience. The questionnaire and focus groups have allowed for direct responses to key concepts in relation to this topic these were informed by the findings from the literature review and ongoing data collection / analysis of the research.

4.8.2 Bias in focus group interviews

There can be some concerns about bias from interviewers influencing upon the credibility of interviews. With bias coming in two forms; interviewer's personal behaviour and the method and content of the interview (Saunders et al, 2007). These can often negatively influence content and intention of the interviewees' responses and opinions. Thus, it is important that effective methods were used in the data collection process to avoid any such bias taking place and allowing for truthful and accurate interviewee responses (Morgan, 1996). To avoid bias arising from the interviewer and interviewee interactions the interviewer should be prepared and knowledgeable of the interview process. As identified earlier in this chapter the author of this thesis acted as the interviewer in all interviews and focus groups, in order to manage these successfully a significant amount of time was spent researching the processes and best practices to ensure efficiency and no bias in the discussions undertaken. There was also opportunities for participants to opt out of being involved in interviews and those who did volunteer were given information on what to expect in the interviews and as such were not guided off topic by the interviewer. These actions helped to reduce the bias from the interviewer and influence upon the interviewees and ultimately enhanced the creditability of the focus group interviews.

4.8.3 Limitations of methodology

A common limitation in any mixed method methodological study is the construct validity of the data collected from the qualitative element of the study. This is due to the credibility of qualitative data being dependent upon the honesty of participants responses to the questions asked (Saunders et al., 2016). This therefore has been taken into account so that these limitations do not negatively impact upon the overall findings. Though this cannot be totally eliminated, this methodological limitation was reduced in this research by giving advance notice to the participants of the intention of the focus groups and identifying that discussions will only be used as part of the study. As a result, participants were able to feel more comfortable in their responses to the questions asked. Alongside the qualitative data used within this methodology the limitations of the quantitative questionnaire used in the research also needs identifying. A methodological limitation in any mixed method study is the content validity of the questionnaire element to ensure appropriate sampling size and selection criteria were implemented. It has been identified that questionnaire instruments can be limited due to follow up questions not been asked to get deeper insights on the nature and criticality of issues being studied (Saunders et al, 2016). This limitation was reduced with the use of focus group interviews following the questionnaires to further discuss issues identified in the quantitative study.

The final issue for consideration was the generalizability of findings for this study, Saunders et al. (2007) identifies that validity and reliability of findings are generally stronger for quantitative studies and therefore unlike qualitative findings, quantitative findings are more generalizable as long as the sample size is representative of the defined population. This suggests that the quantitative findings unlike the qualitative findings are easily generalizable across the student population of undergraduate at the institution used for the study. However, despite the lack of generalizability it is important to add that the qualitative research is still a formidable element of this research as they can provide deeper understanding into the drivers of student expectations identified earlier in the chapter. Thus ensuring that a holistic overview was undertaken to ensure a rigorous methodology has been undertaken.

4.9 Ethical considerations

When undertaking the data collection for this thesis the researcher followed the University of Sunderland's research ethics guideline code of conduct (University of Sunderland, 2017), which required the researcher to consider ethical issues relating to the participants' rights of anonymity, rights to confidentiality and their choice of voluntary participation. When collecting the questionnaire responses all data was treated confidentially, this was explained to the respondents together with the aims of the study before they participated. As discussed earlier in this chapter the researcher left the room whilst the questionnaires were undertaken, completed questionnaires were left in the room and not handed directly to the researcher to avoid any pressure being put onto the participants and to keep their identify anonymous. Respondents were asked to leave their details for follow up focus groups if they were interested but were also able to leave this blank if they wished to keep their anonymity.

Focus groups were recorded via video camera and again permission from the participants was sought before commencing recording. There were no issues with this and participants were happy to allow recording of the focus group interviews. Had there been any problems, participants were informed that the process could be stopped at any point if they felt uncomfortable, thankfully, this did not happen and the focus groups ran as planned. Saunders et al. (2016) identify that it is important for the moderator to specify the purpose and the intention of the interview prior to recording of the discussion. This was explained to the participants by the researcher and it was explained that the main purpose of the recording was to ensure all discussion was covered and no errors or omissions were made. The key advantage to the researcher of recording the focus groups was that when analysing the interviews it helped to reduce any unintentional bias by the researcher and provided an accurate record of the discussions.

Participants involved in the focus groups were given a consent prior to the interviews that advised of the chance to withdraw from the research at any time for any reason, and that they understood that they had agreed to participate of their own will. Participants were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity of the results of the research and it was made clear that there was no link to their academic studies and

that the research would only be used for research purposes and would remain anonymous. As has been identified, the research responsibilities regarding ethics were taken seriously throughout this research and the author was always keen to ensure that no pressure was put onto respondents or that they were in any way coerced into participating in the study.

4.10 Summary of chapter

The methodology has used a mixed method approach consisting of initial questionnaires followed by qualitative focus groups. Three questionnaires were distributed over three phrases (academic years). The questionnaires had both closed and open-ended questions, while the focus groups analysed key findings from the questionnaires further. This chapter has described the research methodology, including the population, sample, data collection instruments as well as strategies used to ensure the ethical standards, reliability and validity of the study. The next chapters of this thesis will examine the results of the mixed methodology discussed in this chapter, firstly through analysis of the quantitative questionnaires and testing of the hypotheses developed. Followed by an exploration of the qualitative focus groups to further define and test the influencers upon student expectations of their higher education experience.

Chapter Five

Quantitative Data Analysis

5.0 Introduction

This thesis explores the drivers and key factors that influence student expectations in higher education institutions, therefore the purpose of this chapter is investigate this further. A two-stage approach has been undertaken, analysis has been undertaken using SPSS software to undertake regression analysis of the data from the questionnaire surveys of 176 undergraduate students. Secondly, the statistical results will be used alongside the findings from the content analysis of the semi-structured focus groups as presented in chapter six and inform the analysis and discussion chapter (seven) of this thesis.

The remaining part of this chapter is divided broken down as follows; section 5.1 identifies the data analysis procedure undertaken in this chapter and shows the process undertaken to collecting the quantitative data for the thesis. Section 5.2 presents the results from the regression analyses of the data from the distributed questionnaires to undergraduate student participants to answer the two hypotheses established for the quantitative research (H01 and H02). Section 5.3, uses the statistical results to validate the results from the quantitative analysis before providing a chapter summary and a link to the next chapter which identifies the qualitative findings of the research and applies these to the conceptual framework developed for the thesis.

5.1 Data analysis procedure

The data analysis process for the quantitative data began with the collection of data through the research questionnaire (as discussed in the methodology chapter of the thesis). There were 223 questionnaires distributed to student participants across the three academic years, with 190 returned. Those which were not returned was due to students taking the questionnaire away to complete but then not returning them. This represents a very good response rate of 85.2% according to Saunders et al. (2016). However, after further analysis of the questionnaires only 176 were fully completed and subsequently analysed in this study, resulting in a still very positive response rate of 78.9%. It was also explained to students they should only complete the questionnaire at years 2 and 3 if they had completed in the 1st year to ensure consistency in student respondents. After the data collection was undertaken, the next step was to analyse the collected data and to present the results via SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data in the form of tables and examine the key characteristics defined by the participants (see appendix 7 for an overview of the descriptive analysis).

This section will present the results from the statistical analysis of the questionnaire surveys taken across the three academic years, the analysis will answer the research questions for the thesis, as shown again below:

Research Question 1 (RQ1) - What are the key drivers upon student choice of HEI and do these influence their perception of the university?

Research Question 2 (RQ2) - What are the key drivers upon student expectations of university?

Research Question 3 (RQ3) - Do student expectations stay the same during their time at university or change?

.

5.2 Regression analysis

The regression analysis undertaken is based on the dependent variable relating to ‘university experience’ to test the two hypotheses of *perception* and *expectation*. The hypotheses are tested using independent variables which are then further classified into variable sub-themes for detailed analysis as per table 5.1 below. The purpose of this analysis is to accept or reject the null hypothesis and identify if the independent variables are statistically significant.

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Sub-variable theme tested	Questionnaire question
Perception (H01)	Reason for undertaking higher education	Prospect of study	Q8
		Programme choice	Q15
	Influencers on student decisions	School/college prepared for study / gave necessary skills	Q7, Q9
	Previous educational experiences	Performance compared to previous institution	Q12
Expectation (H02)	Staff influence	Access to lecturers / enthusiasm of staff	Q21, Q23
	Feedback given	Time for work marked / feedback on work important	Q25, Q26
	Students’ own ability	Performance expectations	Q12, Q29
	Social factor influence	Support from friends	Q6
		Importance of social activities	Q10

Table 5.1, Hypotheses variables tested in the quantitative analysis

The overall hypothesis are shown again below for reference, it can be seen that the null hypothesis for H01 is ‘*there is no link between student perceptions and student satisfaction at the university*’ and the hypothesis for H02 is ‘*there is no link between student expectations and student satisfaction at the university*’.

Hypothesis (H01) – *student perceptions influence their satisfaction at the university.*

- H0 – There is no link between student perceptions and student satisfaction at the university
- H1 – Student perceptions do influence satisfaction at the university
- H2 – Student perceptions do not influence satisfaction at the university

Hypothesis (H02) – *student expectations influence their satisfaction at the university.*

- H0 – There is no link between student expectations and student satisfaction at the university
- H1 – Student expectations do influence satisfaction at the university
- H2 – Student expectations do not influence satisfaction at the university

As identified in the methodology, figure 5.1 identifies the link between the independent variables tested in relation to the two hypotheses for the thesis, *influence of student perception* and *influence of student expectation* to test the dependent variable university experience.

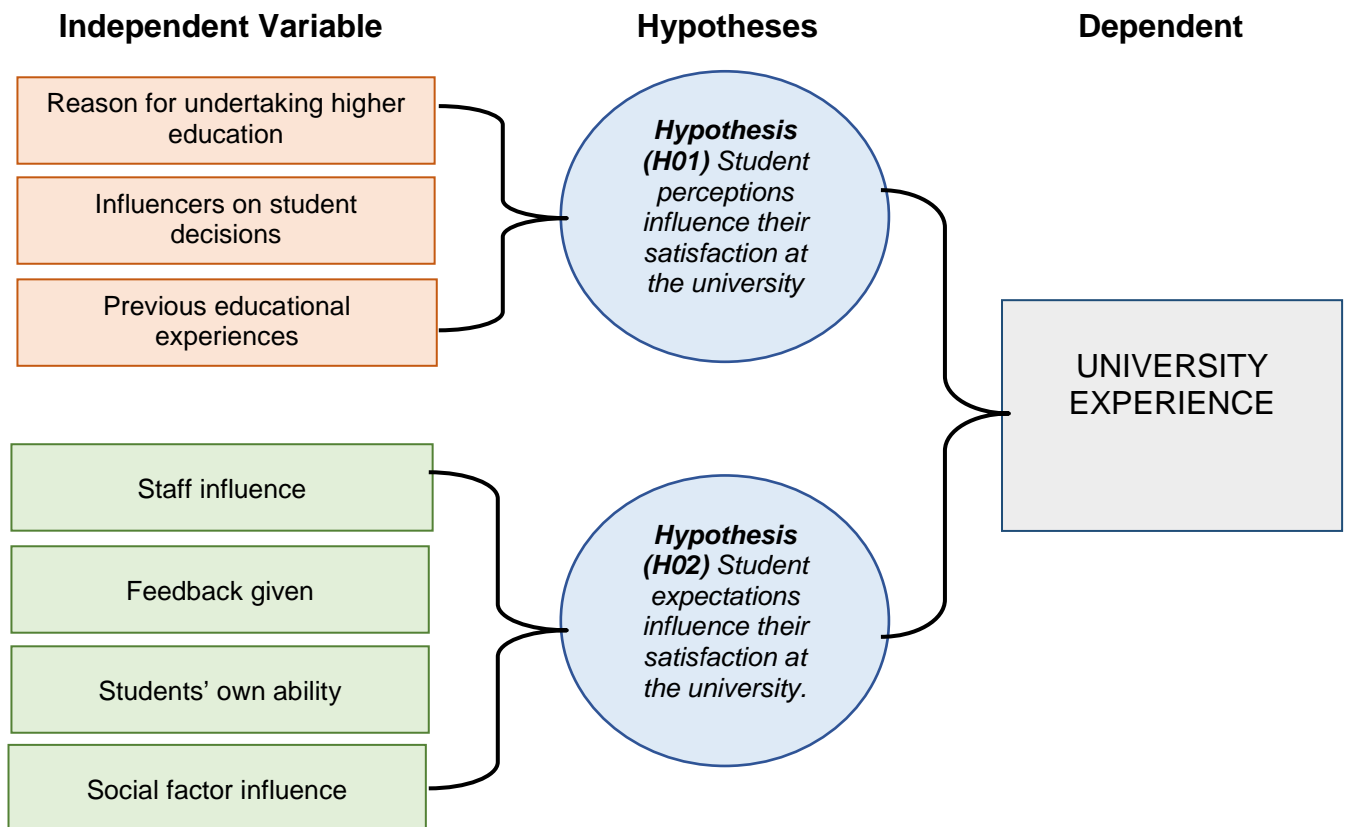


Figure 5.1, Link between the hypotheses, independent variables and university experience

The following analysis will look to identify if the above null hypotheses for this thesis are accepted or rejected. The regression model is expressed below in terms of university experience (y_{sq}) is a function of perception (x_{ad}), expectation (x_{ab}) capabilities:

$$y_{sq} = f(x_{ad}, x_{ab})$$

The mathematical equation is:

$$y_{sq} = b_0 + b_1 x_{ad} + b_2 x_{ab} + e$$

Where:

y_{sq} = university experience (dependent variable)

x_{ad} = student perceptions influence their experience at the university^{H01}

x_{ab} = student expectations influence their satisfaction at the university^{H02}

b = b-values; b_0 (constant); b_1 and b_2 (coefficients of the x-values)

e = error term

Using the above regression equation, linear regression analyses was conducted on the questionnaire responses using IBM SPSS software, as discussed in chapter 3, research methodology. The results are presented below:

5.2.1 Linear regression analysis – Independent variable, perception

The analysis undertaken has compared the cohort responses across the three-year period of study to ascertain where any significant changes has taken place. When exploring the perceptual influencers on the university experience there were several influencers identified, as identified in table 5.1 above. When looking at reasons for undertaking a higher education programme, the influencers were defined as *prospect of study* and *programme choice*. As shown in the model summary below, the R square and adjusted R square values differ dependent upon the year of study. R-squared is a measure of best-fit for linear regression models. It identifies the percentage of the variance in the dependent variable that the independent variables explains cooperatively. R-squared measures the strength of the relationship of the model and dependent variable on a scale of 0 – 100% (Cameron and Windmeijer, 1997). The adjusted R-squared increases if the new variable improves the model more than would be expected by chance. It decreases when a predictor improves the model by less than expected by chance (Shumway and Stoffer, 2011).

Model Summary – Reasons for undertaking higher education (Perception – H01)

Year	Prospect of study				Programme choice			
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
One	.120 ^a	.014	-.001	1.373	.175 ^a	.031	.015	1.361
Two	.499 ^a	.249	.234	.829	.271 ^a	.073	.055	.921
Three	.129 ^a	.017	-.001	1.288	.120 ^a	.014	-.003	1.289

a. Predictors: (Constant), ProspectStudy

a. Predictors: (Constant), ChoiceofProg

Firstly looking at *prospect of study* as a reason for undertaking higher education, the smallest drop observed was in year 2, whereas years 1 and 3 decrease to -.001 from .014 and .017 respectively. Secondly, when looking at programme choice in relation to student choice for undertaking higher education study a similar case was true. Across all 3 years there was a decrease when looking at the relationship from R-squared to adjusted R-squared and thus identifies that the predictor improves the model by less than expected chance. The R square value shows that the most significant period for analysing the reasons for undertaking higher education is at year 2 with 24.9% and 73% of the variance in the dependent variables (*prospect of study* and *programme choice*) is explained by Model 1. This shows that the independent variable sub-theme relating to 'reason for undertaking higher education' explain a combined total of 97.9% of the variance in perceived 'university experience' at stage 2, whereas at years 1 and 3 it is not as significant. This is an area for further exploration in the final chapter of this thesis.

To identify the statistical significance of the multiple regression results an ANOVA table tests the overarching null hypothesis of the study. In relation to the tables above H01 the null hypothesis is H0: *there is no link between student perceptions and student satisfaction at the university*. When looking at *prospect of study* as a predictor, see below, it can be seen that year 2 is statistically significant with a result of zero, (Sig. = 0.00; $p < 0.05$) and there is a relationship, between the dependent and independent variable as such the null hypothesis should be rejected. When the Sig. value is 0.00 it identifies that the variable makes a statistically significant unique contribution to survey score (Pallant). The ANOVA table also explores *programme choice* as an influencer on student perceptions. It again identifies that the most noteworthy year group is at stage 2 with a significance of .050, although not at zero as with *prospect of study* but can still be defined as an important factor in the relationship between the dependent and independent variable.

Anova^a – Reasons for undertaking higher education (Perception – H01)

Year	Prospect of Study						Programme Choice					
	Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
One	Regression	1.745	1	1.745	.926	.340 ^b	Regression	3.704	1	3.704	1.999	.162 ^b
	Residual	118.716	63	1.884			Residual	116.757	63	1.853		
	Total	120.462	64				Total	120.462	64			
Two	Regression	11.614	1	11.614	16.891	.000 ^b	Regression	3.426	1	3.426	4.039	.050 ^b
	Residual	35.066	51	.688			Residual	43.254	51	.848		
	Total	46.679	52				Total	46.679	52			
Three	Regression	1.570	1	1.570	.947	.335 ^b	Regression	1.365	1	1.365	.821	.369 ^b
	Residual	92.844	56	1.658			Residual	93.049	56	1.662		
	Total	94.414	57				Total	94.414	57			

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

b. Predictors: (Constant), ProspectofStudy

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

b. Predictors: (Constant), ChoiceofProg

The Coefficient table below enables for an evaluation of the independent variables (prospect of study and programme choice), by identifying which of the variables contribute to the prediction of the dependent variable (university experience). To compare the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable, the Beta-values in the standardised coefficients column will be explored. When looking at the data over the 3 year university period for both sub-themes of 'reason for undertaking higher education' it shows that year 2 has the most significant beta values of .499 (prospect of study) and .271 (programme choice). This also shows that year 2 has been identified as the most significant year in relation to students' undertaking higher education study and thus has the strongest contribution in explaining the dependent variable (university experience). For *programme choice* year 1 makes the second strongest unique contribution (.175), whilst year 3 makes the weakest unique contribution (.120). This is reversed for *prospect of study* with year 3 making the second strongest unique contribution (.129) and year 3 making the weakest unique contribution (.120).

Coefficients^a – Reasons for undertaking higher education (Perception – H01)

Year	Model 1	Prospect of Study					Programme Choice					
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Model 1	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
One	(Constant)	7.728	.474		16.307	.000	(Constant)	7.602	.425		17.880	.000
	ProspectofStudy	.146	.152	.120	.962	.340	ChoiceofProg	.256	.181	.175	1.414	.162
Two	(Constant)	6.403	.314		20.419	.000	(Constant)	7.010	.321		21.815	.000
	ProspectofStudy	.486	.118	.499	4.110	.000	ChoiceofProg	.362	.180	.271	2.010	.050
Three	(Constant)	7.264	.469		15.492	.000	(Constant)	7.314	.448		16.336	.000
	ProspectofStudy	.160	.165	.129	.973	.335	ChoiceofProg	.200	.221	.120	.906	.369

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

Having established the first sub-theme category of ‘reason for undertaking higher education’ that influences the first independent variable of perception, the same process was undertaken to establish the second sub-theme category of ‘influencers on student decisions’. The model summary above identifies that the adjusted R-square, as with ‘reason for undertaking higher education’ the most significant year was year 2 with .165 (16.5%), in comparison to year 1 .24 (2.4%) and year 3 .048 (4.8%).

To further analyse the model summary, the ANOVA table below shows the significance of influencers on decision in relation to the dependent variable of university experience. As can be seen year 2 is statistically significant with a result of .001 and year 3 also significant although with a slightly higher score of .055. This identifies that the relationship between the dependent and the first independent variable is noteworthy at these stages of the academic journey thus both identifying that the null hypothesis is rejected. The rationale behind this will be explored later in this thesis in the analysis and discussion chapter.

Model Summary and Anova^a – Influencers on decision (Perception – H01)

Year	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
One	.199 ^a	.040	.024	1.355
Two	.425 ^a	.181	.165	.866
Three	.254 ^a	.064	.048	1.256

a. Predictors: (Constant), DecisionInfluencer

Year	Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
One	Regression	4.768	1	4.768	2.597	.112 ^b
	Residual	115.693	63	1.836		
	Total	120.462	64			
Two	Regression	8.448	1	8.448	11.269	.001 ^b
	Residual	38.232	51	.750		
	Total	46.679	52			
Three	Regression	6.080	1	6.080	3.855	.055 ^b
	Residual	88.333	56	1.577		
	Total	94.414	57			

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

b. Predictors: (Constant), DecisionInfluencer

The Coefficient table below further analyses the above findings in relation to influencers on student decision to study higher education against the university experience they undertake. The Beta-values that year 2 has a significant value of -.425, closely followed by year 3 with -.254. Thus again identifying that these two academic year groups are significant influencers on students perceptions of the institution.

Coefficients^a – Influencers on decision (Perception – H01)

Year	Model 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
One	(Constant)	6.797	.859		7.913	.000
	DecisionInfluencer	.232	.144	.199	1.611	.112
Two	(Constant)	8.430	.273		30.828	.000
	DecisionInfluencer	-.300	.089	-.425	-3.357	.001
Three	(Constant)	8.591	.488		17.613	.000
	DecisionInfluencer	-.348	.177	-.254	-1.963	.055

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

The final sub-theme for consideration in relation to the first independent variable *perception* is ‘performance compared to previous educational experiences’. The model summary table below identifies that, as with previous tables, year 2 is of most noteworthy with an adjusted R Square value of .100 (10%) with stage 3 showing a higher influence with an R Square value of .073 (7.3%). In saying this these are both low numbers so it could be argued that they are not significant to the first independent variable. The ANOVA table below has identified that years 2 and 3 of academic study are of significance to the first independent variable of *perception* as there is a relationship, between the dependent and independent variable meaning the null hypothesis should be rejected. Year 2 has a significance predictor score of .012 and is the strongest academic year in relation to the dependent variable with year 3 also seen as significantly important with a score of .022. There may be several reasons why year 1 is not seen as significant, one assumption may be that students at this stage are still new to the institution and may not at that point be able to rationalise how they are performing / performed. This subject will be discussed further in the final chapter of this thesis, analysis and discussion.

Model Summary and Anova^a – Performance compared to previous institution (Perception –H01)

Year	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
One	.121 ^a	.015	-.001	1.373
Two	.343 ^a	.118	.100	.899
Three	.299 ^a	.090	.073	1.239

Year	Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
One	Regression	1.778	1	1.778	.944	.335 ^b
	Residual	118.683	63	1.884		
	Total	120.462	64			
Two	Regression	5.492	1	5.492	6.800	.012 ^b
	Residual	41.187	51	.808		
	Total	46.679	52			
Three	Regression	8.461	1	8.461	5.513	.022 ^b
	Residual	85.952	56	1.535		
	Total	94.414	57			

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Comparing your performance of college to university

The Coefficient table below analyses the relationship between the university experience and students experience at their previous institution. The Beta-values shows that year 2 has the most significant influence on the relationship with a value of -.343, followed by year 3 with a value of -.299 and finally year 1 with a least

significant value of -.121. These findings underpin the other calculations in relation to the sub-theme and show that years 2 and 3 are key years in relations to the influence of previous educational experience.

Coefficients^a – Performance compared to previous institution (Perception – H01)

Year	Model 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
One	(Constant)	8.349	.263		31.751	.000
	Performance	-.169	.174	-.121	-.972	.335
Two	(Constant)	8.183	.254		32.187	.000
	Performance	-.384	.147	-.343	-2.608	.012
Three	(Constant)	8.176	.263		31.035	.000
	Performance	-.478	.204	-.299	-2.348	.022

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

5.2.2 Linear regression analysis – Independent variable, expectation

Having identified the sub-themes of the first independent variable *perception* this section of the chapter will look at sub-themes relevant to the second independent variable of *expectations*. The first sub-theme variable of staff influence is explored below. As with the analysis in section 5.2.1 in this chapter when analysing the model summary data, the R square and adjusted R square were used with the latter identified as it accounts for statistical shrinkage in the linear relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable (Shumway and Stoffer, 2011).

Model Summary and Anova^a – Staff influence (Expectation – H02)

Year	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
One	.216 ^a	.047	.031	1.350
Two	.362 ^a	.131	.114	.892
Three	.002 ^a	.000	-.018	1.298

a. Predictors: (Constant), StaffInfluence

Year	Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
One	Regression	5.612	1	5.612	3.078	.084 ^b
	Residual	114.850	63	1.823		
	Total	120.462	64			
Two	Regression	6.100	1	6.100	7.667	.008 ^b
	Residual	40.579	51	.796		
	Total	46.679	52			
Three	Regression	.000	1	.000	.000	.987 ^b
	Residual	94.413	56	1.686		
	Total	94.414	57			

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

b. Predictors: (Constant), StaffInfluence

The model summary table above shows that the adjusted R Square at year 2 is most with a value of .114 (11.4%), with year 1 shown as the next most significant value of .031 (3.1%), admittedly considerably lower. Year 3 was seen as not significant to the relationship between staff influence and the university experience. After undertaking an analysis of the model summary, the next stage is to explore the data via the ANOVA table below. As identified earlier in this chapter, an ANOVA table tests the overarching null hypothesis of the study. For H02 the null hypothesis is H0: *there is no link between student expectations and student satisfaction at the university*. The ANOVA above shows that there is significant influence at year 2 with a value of .008 and at year 1 with a value of .084, although this is a little higher it can be argued that this stage is worthy of further exploration. Thus, these both have a correlation to the second independent variable of *expectation (H02)* as there is a

relationship, between the dependent and independent variable meaning the null hypothesis should be rejected. Interestingly for this variable sub-theme, year 3 was not found to be significant for impacting upon the second independent variable of *expectation*. Greater analysis of the reasons for this will be undertaken in the analysis and discussion chapter of the thesis. The coefficient table shown below identifies that the beta-values at year 2 (.362) and 1 (.216) are most significant in the relationship between the influence of staff and students experience at their previous institution. This supports the data from the ANOVA table and thus can be said to be statistically significant to the findings of this research, with the greatest implication at year 2 followed by year 1, year 3 was not seen as having a significant impact on the dependent variable.

Coefficients^a – Staff influence (Expectation – H02)

Year	Model 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
One	(Constant)	6.002	1.238		4.849	.000
	StaffInfluence	.301	.172	.216	1.754	.084
Two	(Constant)	4.265	1.212		3.518	.001
	StaffInfluence	.457	.165	.362	2.769	.008
Three	(Constant)	7.711	1.380		5.589	.000
	StaffInfluence	-.003	.193	-.002	-.016	.987

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

The next sub-theme to be analysed in relation to influencers upon expectations is *feedback given* by staff within the institution. Firstly looking at the model summary below it can be seen that year 3 has the strongest influence on the independent variable of university experience with an adjusted R Square of .118 (11.8%). Year 1 was next with an adjusted R Square of 0.36 (3.6%) albeit with a low figure. Year 2 was not seen to have any influence on the university experience dependent variable. Further support for the significance of this connection is shown in the ANOVA table below where it can be seen that at year 3 there is a statistically significant score of .005 showing that there is a relationship between the dependent and independent variables and as such the null hypothesis should be rejected. At year 1 the figure is a little higher with a score of .069 but it can be identified that this is a significant

score of the research and again supports that the null hypothesis should be rejected. As with the model summary it is shown that at stage 2 there is no significance to the relationship between the dependent variable and feedback given.

Model Summary and Anova^a – Feedback given (Expectation – H02)

Year	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
One	.227 ^a	.051	.036	1.347
Two	.116 ^a	.014	-.006	.950
Three	.365 ^a	.133	.118	1.209

a. Predictors: (Constant), Feedback

Year	Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
One	Regression	6.189	1	6.189	3.412	.069 ^b
	Residual	114.272	63	1.814		
	Total	120.462	64			
Two	Regression	.631	1	.631	.698	.407 ^b
	Residual	46.049	51	.903		
	Total	46.679	52			
Three	Regression	12.599	1	12.599	8.624	.005 ^b
	Residual	81.815	56	1.461		
	Total	94.414	57			

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Feedback

The Coefficient table below analyses the relationship between the university experience and feedback given to students to identify the key year groups. The Beta-values identify that year 3 has the most significant influence on the relationship with a value of -.365, followed by year 1 with a value of -.227. This is underpinned by the ANOVA data table below which supports the rejection of the null hypothesis. Year 2 was again shown as the least significant stage in relation to the importance of feedback with a value of -.116.

Coefficients^a – Feedback given (Expectation – H02)

Year	Model 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
One	(Constant)	5.673	1.353		4.191	.000
	Feedback	.348	.189	.227	1.847	.069
Two	(Constant)	6.675	1.119		5.963	.000
	Feedback	.128	.153	.116	.836	.407
Three	(Constant)	3.865	1.312		2.945	.005
	Feedback	.526	.179	.365	2.937	.005

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

The penultimate sub-theme for analysis in relation to the second independent variable *expectation* is how students expect to perform at the institution, coded 'performance expectations' for this analysis. The model summary table below shows that with an adjusted R Square of .60 (6%) year 2 has some impact upon the university experience. The next most important was year 3 with a value of .037 (3.7%). Although neither of these are large percentages there can still be seen to have an influence upon the relationship between the variable and dependent values although they are not hugely significant. As can be seen in the below ANOVA table there are no significant values (< 0.05) and thus the null hypothesis can be accepted. Of the values that were identified year 2 was identified as the lowest value with year 3 next lowest, year 1 was seen as the least important stage of study. Although these are not statistically valued there is still some notion in understanding these factors to gain a holistic understanding of the variables in relation to this study. Greater examination of this will take place in the final chapter of the thesis. The Coefficient table, also below, supports the findings of the ANOVA table and identifies that there is not a significant relationship between the university experience and performance expectations of students. The Beta-values identified that year 2 had the most notable influence on the relationship with a value of -.280, followed by year 3 (-.233) and lastly year 1 (.043).

Model Summary and Anova^a – Performance expectations (Expectation – H02)

Year	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
One	.043 ^a	.002	-.014	1.382
Two	.280 ^a	.078	.060	.918
Three	.233 ^a	.054	.037	1.263

a. Predictors: (Constant), PerformanceExp

Year	Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
One	Regression	.218	1	.218	.114	.736 ^b
	Residual	120.243	63	1.909		
	Total	120.462	64			
Two	Regression	3.654	1	3.654	4.331	.042 ^b
	Residual	43.026	51	.844		
	Total	46.679	52			
Three	Regression	5.128	1	5.128	3.216	.078 ^b
	Residual	89.286	56	1.594		
	Total	94.414	57			

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

b. Predictors: (Constant), PerformanceExp

Coefficients^a – Performance expectations (Expectation – H02)

Year	Model 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
One	(Constant)	7.903	.760		10.393	.000
	PerformanceExp	.057	.168	.043	.338	.736
Two	(Constant)	9.196	.776		11.858	.000
	PerformanceExp	-.340	.164	-.280	-2.081	.042
Three	(Constant)	9.305	.916		10.160	.000
	PerformanceExp	-.372	.207	-.233	-1.793	.078

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

The final independent variable sub-theme for analysis that relates to second hypothesis *expectation* is social factor influence, with sub-variables *support from friends* and *importance of social activities* being tested. Looking firstly at support from friends, it can be seen that the model summary table below displays that with an adjusted R Square of .189 (18.9%) year 2 is the most relevant upon the university experience. This is followed by year 3 with a value of .113 (11.3%) and finally year 1 which has was identified as less influential with a value of .030 (3%). The second sub-variable of importance of social activities followed a similar theme but identified that in all years this was not seen a key influence upon the university experience. To test these further the ANOVA table below shows that when looking at support from friends as a predictor it can be seen that all year groups was seen as statistically significant with a result of near zero for all stages (.089 at year 1, .001 at stage 2 and .006 at stage 3). This shows that there is a definite relationship between this dependent and independent variable and therefore the null hypothesis should be rejected. When looking at the importance of social factors it can be seen that there is no significance in relation to the university experience at any year of study. Therefore it is identified that this sub-variable is not relevant to the results of this thesis and as such can be removed from the hypothesis testing, see section 5.3 of the chapter for further discussion.

Model Summary – Social factor influence (Expectation – H02)

Year	Support from friends				Importance of social activities			
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
One	.213 ^a	.045	.030	1.351	.032 ^a	.001	-.015	1.382
Two	.452 ^a	.204	.189	.853	.167 ^a	.028	.009	.943
Three	.358 ^a	.128	.113	1.212	.084 ^a	.007	-.011	1.294

a. Predictors: (Constant), Is it important to have close friends at university a. Predictors: (Constant), Are extracurricular activities important

Anova^a – Social factor influence (Expectation – H02)

Year	Support from friends						Importance of social activities					
	Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
One	Regression	5.444	1	5.444	2.982	.089 ^b	Regression	.126	1	.126	.066	.798 ^b
	Residual	115.018	63	1.826			Residual	120.336	63	1.910		
	Total	120.462	64				Total	120.462	64			
Two	Regression	9.542	1	9.542	13.103	.001 ^b	Regression	1.301	1	1.301	1.462	.232 ^b
	Residual	37.137	51	.728			Residual	45.378	51	.890		
	Total	46.679	52				Total	46.679	52			
Three	Regression	12.121	1	12.121	8.248	.006 ^b	Regression	.666	1	.666	.398	.531 ^b
	Residual	82.293	56	1.470			Residual	93.748	56	1.674		
	Total	94.414	57				Total	94.414	57			

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

b. Predictors: (Constant), Is it important to have close friends at the university

b. Predictors: (Constant), Are extracurricular activities important

The final analysis is from the coefficient table shown below which identifies that the beta-values at year 2 (.452), year 3 (.358) and year 1 (.213) are all classified as most significant in the relationship between support from friends and the university experience. This supports the data from the ANOVA table and thus underpins the previous discussions that identified this sub-variable as being statistically significant to the dependent variable. The sub-variable importance of social activities is again shown to not be significant with negative scores at year 1 (-.032) and 2 (-.167) and a low score at year 3 (.084). As explained earlier this sub-variable will be removed from the 'social factor influence' variable identified in table 5.1.

Coefficients^a – Social factor influence (Expectation – H02)

Year	Model 1	Support from friends					Importance of social activities					
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Model 1	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
One	(Constant)						(Constant)					
	Important to have close friends at the university	6.836 .414	.781 .240	.213	8.748 1.727	.000 .089	Are extracurricular activities important	8.356 -.065	.806 .255	-.032	10.367 -.256	.000 .798
Two	(Constant)						(Constant)					
	Important to have close friends at the university	5.709 .605	.536 .167	.452	10.644 3.620	.000 .001	Are extracurricular activities important	8.152 -.181	.472 .149	-.167	17.285 -1.209	.000 .232
Three	(Constant)						(Constant)					
	Important to have close friends at the university	5.778 .572	.684 .199	.358	8.442 2.872	.000 .006	Are extracurricular activities important	7.192 .160	.808 .253	.084	8.905 .631	.000 .531

a. Dependent Variable: University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)

5.3 Hypothesis testing using ANOVA regression analysis

Having undertaken an analysis of the independent variables and independent sub-themes it is important to clarify the statistical significance of each independent in relation to the dependent factor of university experience. By identifying the statistical significance the researcher can identify the importance of each sub-theme and accept or reject the hypothesis.

Independent variable	Independent variable sub-theme	Statistically significant	Accept / Reject null hypothesis	Accept / Reject alternative hypothesis
Perception (H01)	Reason for undertaking higher education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Prospect of study</i> • <i>Programme choice</i> 	Yes – Year 2 Yes – Year 2	Reject H0	Accept H1
	Influencers on student decisions	Yes – Year 2	Reject H0	Accept H1
	Previous educational experiences	Yes – Year 2 Yes – Year 3	Reject H0	Accept H1
Expectation (H02)	Staff influence	Yes – Year 2	Reject H0	Accept H1
	Feedback given	Yes – Year 3	Reject H0	Accept H1
	Student own ability	No	Accept H0	Accept H2
	Social factor influence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Support from friends</i> • <i>Importance of social activities</i> 	Yes - all years No	Reject H0 Accept H0	Accept H1 Accept H2

Table 5.2, Acceptance or rejection of independent variables / sub-themes

As can be seen from table 5.2 six of the seven independent variable sub-themes are statistically significant and as such the null hypothesis are to be rejected. It is worth noting that the ‘social factor influence’ sub-theme only classified *support from friends* as being significant and therefore the null hypothesis was accepted for *importance of social activities*’ and as such this independent variable has been renamed as ‘support from friends’. It has also been identified that students’ own ability was not seen as a significant factor influencing student expectations of their university experience and as a result the null hypothesis H02) was also rejected. As can be seen in figure 5.2 below, the updated independent variables from this research are shown in relation to the two key hypotheses of the study. The figure shows that the key variables with an influence on H01 were identified as ‘reasons for undertaking higher education’, ‘influencers on student decisions’ and ‘previous educational experiences’. With the key variables on H02 being ‘staff influence’, ‘feedback given’ and ‘support from friends’ which have been informed by the findings of the

regression analysis undertaken in this chapter. The impact of this analysis will be discussed further in chapter 7 to ascertain how the quantitative research results help to answer the research questions and meet the objectives of this thesis.

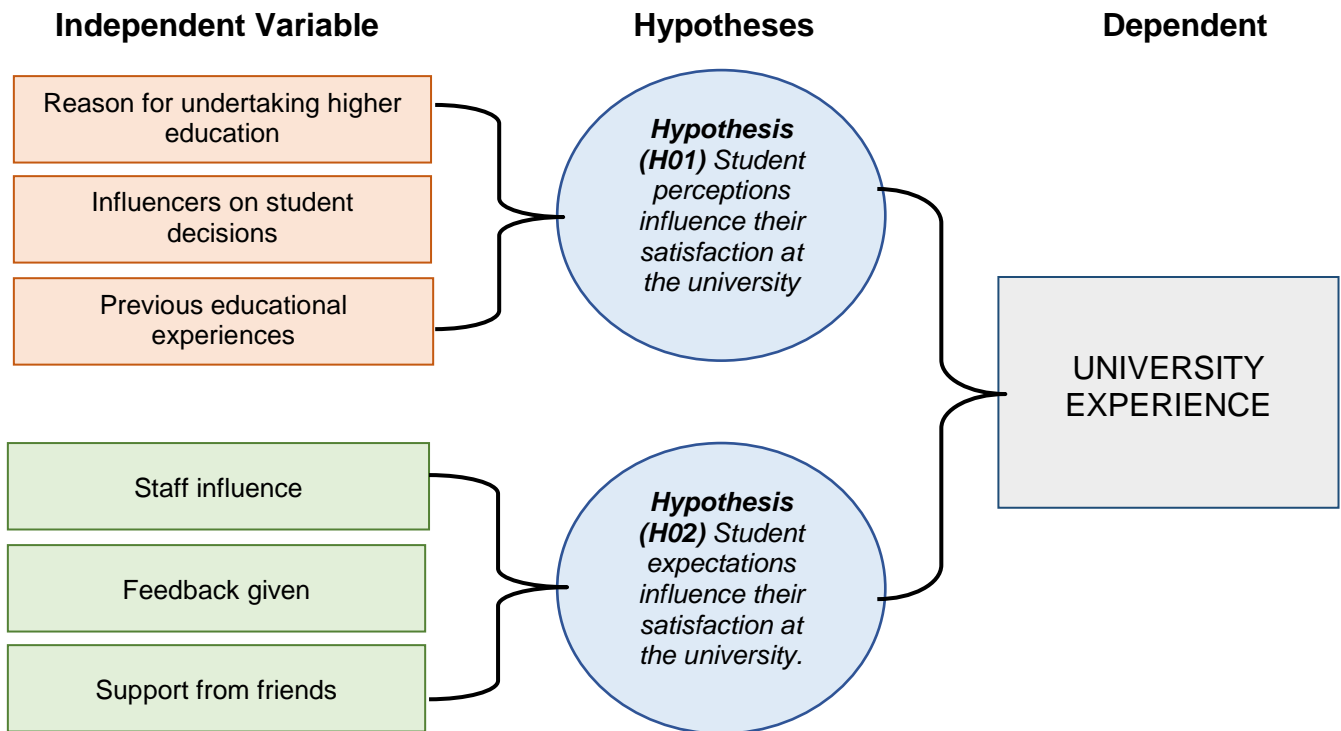


Figure 5.2, Updated link between the hypotheses, independent variables and university experience

5.4 Summary of chapter

In conclusion, the findings from the quantitative research has shown that for H01 - student perceptions do influence satisfaction at the university (H1) and identified *'reason for undertaking higher education'*, *'influencers on student decisions'* and *'previous educational experiences'* were identified as significant variables that influence satisfaction at university. In relation to H02 - student expectations do influence satisfaction at the university (H1) with *'staff influence'*, *'feedback given'* and *'support from friends'* identified as the significant variables that relate to a positive university experience. This chapter has analysed the key findings from the quantitative research and identified the significant influencers upon student perceptions and how they inform student expectations.

The regression analysis recognised the relationship between the independent variables identified in the hypotheses in relation to the dependant variable 'university experience' to inform the drivers of student satisfaction within the institution. The next chapter will examine the qualitative findings of the research to further explore the key issues identified in the quantitative research of this chapter.

Chapter Six

Qualitative Data Analysis

6.0 Introduction

This chapter uses content analysis procedures to analyse the three semi-structured focus group transcripts undertaken as part of the qualitative research for this project. The chapter will further apply discussions identified in chapter's three, methodology, and four, conceptual framework to further explore and analysis the factors that affect upon the student experience within a HEI. The results are presented thematically i.e. theme-by-theme. The thematic results relate to the key themes of this thesis and apply discussion to the conceptual framework identified in chapter 4. The research themes analysed are classified as, theme 1 - *pre-university influencers*, theme 2 – *student perception and expectations* and theme 3 – *influencers at university*. These themes will allow the researcher to *understand the key influencers and drivers on undergraduate students' expectations of their higher education institution*. Discussion and interpretation of the thematic results will be undertaken and explore the gaps identified in the literature review and examine the qualitative results from this research

The chapter is broken down as follows, section 6.1 identifies the participants of the focus group and explains themes and sub-themes developed to analyse the focus group responses. Section 6.2 explores the key words identified in the focus group by year and groups similarities and differences in responses. Section 6.3, explores the first theme identified of 'pre-university influencers' and looks at the influence of students prior to joining an institution and what determines their choice of HEI. Section 6.4 discusses how the findings have been used to support the conceptual framework of this thesis based on Plato's allegory of the cave philosophy. Section 6.5 will identify the factors that influence 'student perceptions and expectations of their higher education experience', with section 6.6 again applying this theme to the conceptual framework. Section 6.7 analyses the 'wider influencers' that impact upon students during their higher education study'. This is then followed by applying this theme to underpin and support the conceptual framework for the thesis. Finally,

Section 6.9 provides a chapter summary and introduces chapter seven, which undertakes final analysis and discussion of the thesis.

6.1 Content analysis of semi-structured focus groups

The aim of the content analysis is to get a detailed understanding of thesis aims by gaining detailed information from the participants about their experiences of studying at their institution (University of Sunderland). The qualitative data from three focus groups comprising of a total of 17 students, each participant was coded as shown in table 6.1 to distinguish between the student contributor and year of study.

Participant	Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Focus group 3
Female 1	F1F1	F1F2	F1F3
Female 2	F2F1	F2F2	
Female 3	F3F1	F3F2	
Female 4	F4F1		
Male 1	M1F1	M1F2	M1F3
Male 2	M2F1	M2F2	M2F3
Male 3	M3F1	M3F2	M3F3

Table 6.1, Coding system used in focus groups

The video recordings of the focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim (word-for-word) which can be found in appendix 5. Following the transcribing of the semi-structured focus group interviews they were analysed through the computer software package, NVivo, version 11, where it was collected, organised and analysed. NVivo was used as it allows the researcher to sort, match and link key themes to assist in answering the research questions (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). The software allowed for the data collected by the researcher to be analysed, explored and categorised for a more effective exploration of the results. All data collected in the focus group interviews were collated and coded based on word classification identified in the discussions, see figure 6.1 for overview of key words.

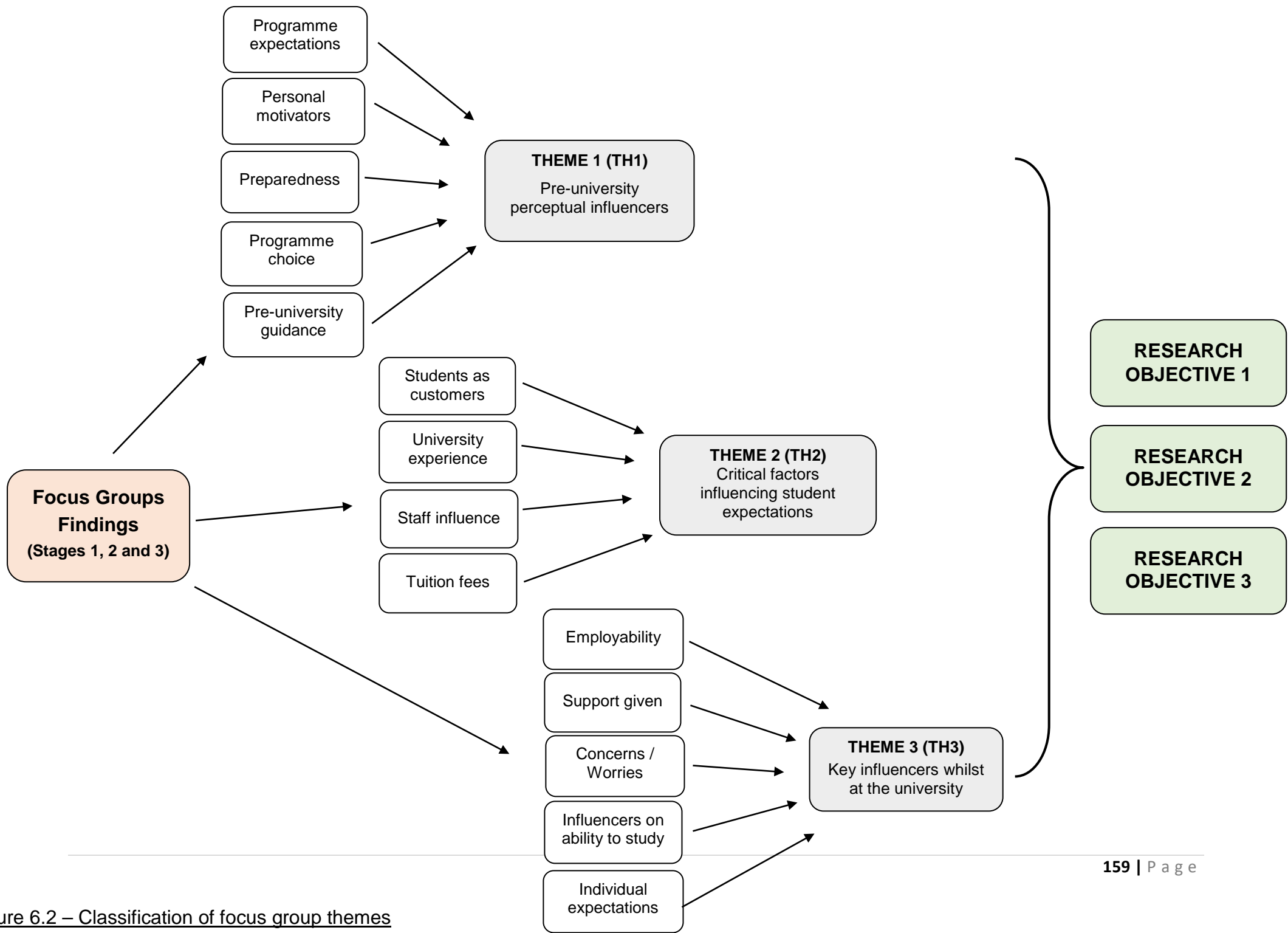


Figure 6.2 – Classification of focus group themes

By narrowing down the focus of these findings it allowed for the researcher to have a greater clarity to key issues and answer the research questions of the thesis. As well as investigate the themes identified in the conceptual framework to ensure that a holistic overview was undertaken.

Theme	Sub-theme 1	Sub-Theme 2
TH1 - Pre-university critical influencers	Internal student perceptual influencers <i>(Fire dimension)</i>	External student perceptual motivators <i>(Sunlight dimension)</i>
TH2 - Critical factors influencing student expectations	Institutional positive influencers <i>(Shadows dimension)</i>	Institutional negative influencers <i>(Shadows dimension)</i>
TH3 - Key influencers whilst at the university	Institutional longitudinal factors <i>(Shadows dimension)</i>	Non-institutional longitudinal factors <i>(Prisoners dimension)</i>

Table 6.2, Qualitative data themes and sub-themes with link to *conceptual framework dimensions*

Table 6.2 further explores the themes emanating from the content analysis of semi-structured focus group interviews classifying these further by identifying two sub-themes for each overall theme. Theme 1's sub-themes are identified as internal student perceptual influencers and external student perceptual motivators. The rationale for this is to further clarify if influencers are from the student themselves or wider influencers such as family or friends. Institutional positive influencers and institutional negative influences were deemed as appropriate sub-themes for theme 2 – 'critical factors influencing student expectations'.

These sub-themes aim to explore what are the key university controlled factors that determine and influence student expectation – positive or negative. The sub-themes of theme 3 are institutional longitudinal factors and non-institutional longitudinal factors, these look to identify the amount of influence control the university has and how much is out of their control e.g. students undertaking part-time work.

6.2 Key wording used in focus groups by academic year



Figure 6.3, Word cloud of focus group year 1 interview

(Key words: think, change knowledge, communicate, thought, personal, constructive)

The word cloud shown above in figure 6.3 identifies the key wording from the first focus group undertaken in October 2014 when students were in their first year of study at the university. As can be seen the key wording themes identified were related to thoughts on the institution (think), the change in their educational experience (change). Other key words identified were knowledge and communication, highlighting how participants felt that what they know about the institution and how this is communicated to them is very important. Other words identified of note in relation to this thesis were lecturers, thoughts and wants. These show that there is some interest in these factors by focus group participants after a year of study but they are not deemed as strong influencers at this point.

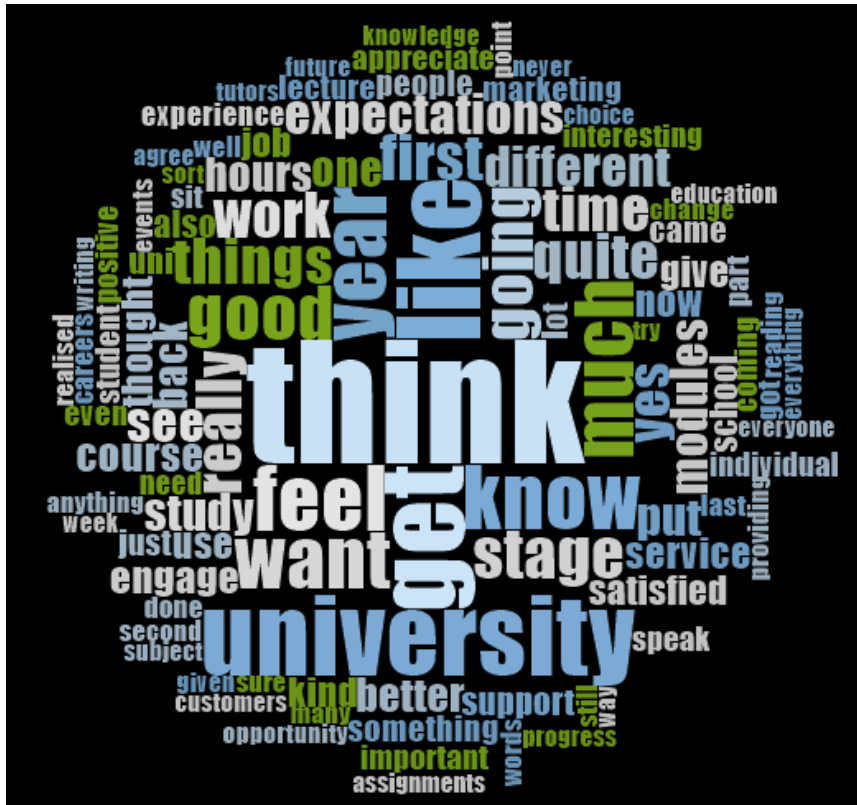


Figure 6.4, Word cloud of focus group year 2 interview

(Key words: think, like, know, get, expectations, university, feel, want, university)

The word cloud above identifies the key wording from the second focus group undertaken in October 2015 when students were in their second year of study at the university. The word cloud from students at the end of their second year shows how the key areas of importance to them begins to change, although what they think of their higher education experience is still identified as a key concern for the participants of the focus group. Interestingly what students *want* from the *university* is seen to be more prominent at this stage and shows that their demands upon the institution have increased. This is supported by the fact that the word *expectation* has become more prominent in the word cloud. At this point of the student journey, the concept of *service* is also identified, this links to the theoretical views identified in the literature review in relation to service quality in higher education and the concept of the student as customer. Both concepts are key considerations for contemporary HEI's and thus need to be understood by the institution. Another word that is more noticeable from year 2 discussions is *work*, this identifies that employability is becoming a more pressing concern for the student participants.



Figure 6.5, Word cloud of focus group year 3 interview

(Key words: get, like, think, expectations, know, feel, work, got, lecturer, customer)

The word cloud above identifies the key wording from the third focus group undertaken in October 2016 when students were in their third year of study at the university. The final word cloud from students at stage 3 of their programme again showed how students' views on key areas of importance changed significantly and became more focussed on what they *get* from their university experience. This shows a significant shift from the previous two years where the main emphasis was what they *think* of the institution. The word *like* is more prominent at this stage of study, this could be due to participants now reviewing and rating their institutional experience and identifying what they have enjoyed about their university experience. *Expectations* was again shown as a key word alongside the term *customer*, this shows that the demands upon the institution is greater at this level of study. This could be linked to the word *work* featuring more heavily as student participants start to consider their job prospects after Graduation. Figure 6.5 below shows the word cloud results in chronological order in order to ascertain a holistic view of how student participants' responses changed over the 3 year period of the research study.

Year 1

Year 2

Year 3



Figure 6.6, Word clouds of focus group interviews comparison by stage

The above word clouds identify how student views have changed over the three-year period studying at the university. As can be seen the key changes to the opinions of the participants are that as they progress through the institution they become more focussed on what they get from the experience and there is a definite shift in the expectations that are placed upon the HEI. Employability becomes a key concern for the students as the focus switches from being a student to becoming a graduate. This is especially true at year 3 when the notion of service and being a customer of the institution becomes more important in discussions. This evidences that there is a definitive change in how students' expectations develop and change during their time at university. The issues identified in the above word clouds will be further discussed by theme, as identified in figure 6.2, and analysed in the remainder of this chapter.

6.3 Theme 1 – Pre-university influencers

Having explored how student participant views changed over the years, the next analysis undertaken was to further explore and test the key themes identified in figure 6.2. Theme 1 of the semi-structured focus groups aimed to explore the student participants' views regarding their early and pre-university experiences. By understanding the influencers on students prior to joining an institution it is possible to identify key issues that impacted upon their initial choice of HEI. When exploring this theme in the literature review, it was identified that this is a fundamental driver which affects the perception of the institution to potential student. Factors within this theme include students' pre-entry views and expectations of quality (Kandiko and

Mawer, 2015). It is therefore important to explore and analysis in order to understand the holistic picture relating to the student experience. In discussions with student participants for this research, this theme has drawn some interesting perspectives to support this view. It was found that some students had a perception of attending university from a young age, and it was actually an expectation rather than a possibility for them.

“... I had a lot of perceptions when I attended a couple of universities since I was sixteen in getting my Bachelor’s degree...” (M3F1).

“My mum and dad had gone to uni, my sisters had gone to uni so it was kind of, not that I was pressured to do it but I’ve always thought that’s what I’d do anyway” (M1F3).

“In secondary school, and they [staff] were pretty much preparing everyone to go to university after you sort of left.... and that’s what made me think about going to university” (M3F2).

The final quote by M3F2 identifies that although many applicants to university have an idea that they wish to attend a HEI, they are influenced, subtly or unsubtly, by external factors. This is often, as in the example above, through their previous institution, (college, school, 6th form or other establishment) and thus plays an important role in the choice of HEI. This influencer was supported by other participants within the focus groups as shown below;

“...my school also shaped me and all the other students too...” (F2F2).

“There was influence but it was more teachers [at previous institution]” (F1F3).

“Yes. Very much. They [college] were very much shaping you into your subject... obviously, they never told you, you have to go. [but] It seemed kind of reasonable to go” (M3F2).

By understanding the decision-making influencers upon students in terms of choice of university will assist HEI's to better target the applicants when producing pre-university content and identifying opportunities for interaction. The influence of previous institutions on university choice is a key recruitment channel for HEI's. Student recruitment has therefore become an ever important consideration for HEI's the institutions' recruitment processes a key area that can be used to identify factors influencing students' choice (Gray and Daugherty, 2004). An institution that has knowledge about the factors that influence students' application and enrolment decisions can increase the fit between the students perceptions and institutions processes (Wiese et al., 2010).

Alongside previous educational institution, another very strong driver of choice of university was the strong influence from parents when guiding their children onto a choice of education. Kintrea et al. (2011) suggests that parents and families play a key role in their children's educational choices and that there is clear alignment between what the parents say they want for the young people and what the young people aspire for themselves.

"I wanted to go into like the NHS or care but I just didn't like it and I didn't want to like do something to do with care so I talked to me dad about it for ages and he just said like why don't you [study] business..." (F1F1).

"My mam and dad wanted me to go. They didn't go to uni, my sister didn't go to uni... They really wanted me to go and when I was a sixth form, it was the thing to do" (M2F3).

"My dad like, [when I was] at sixth form, you should go to university, its better education, otherwise you'll struggle getting a decent job, money and that. He said it widens the scope about jobs and stuff" (M1F3).

This is clearly a strong motivator for students and is an area that HEI's incorporate when marketing their institution / programmes. As identified in the literature review the 'marketisation' of universities (Scott, 1999) is now becoming an ever-important aspect of the HEI's recruitment policy. Thus, managers within the HEI may

consider parents as a key demographic when marketing their institution and indeed target marketing literature specifically towards the parental audience (Chapman, 1981; Vrontis, 2007; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015). Indeed the recruitment policy of universities is vitally important to distinguish themselves from similar HEI's in order to attract students to their institution. As competition in the marketplace increases, universities need to be increasingly aware of the factors that influence the choice of their institution (Stephenson et al., 2016).

“...I attended open day events and yeah that was quite good. When with recruiters all day that was quite interesting and that made me feel more passionate about making a move here” (M5F1).

External recruitment tools such as Open and Applicant Days to the university, are crucial to HEI's when aiming to attract students to the institution. Moogan et al., (1993) explored this and identified that recruitment events have an important influence on students' choice of institution. Importantly it also allows staff within the institution to have the opportunity to interact with prospective students about the university, 'selling' the positives and allaying any concerns they may have. This then improves the engagement of students with the HEI and increases the likelihood of them joining the university.

“The staff at the applicant day were so friendly and answered all my questions” (F1F1).

“I spoke to a lecturer [at the recruitment event] and he explained the programme to me, so yeah, I felt it helped me decide” (M2F3).

An interesting point from the focus groups was regarding students' perceptions of the programme and what standards they had, in the literature review it was identified that there are differing views on students expectations of the university experience. It is acknowledge that the perceived quality of the educational service depends on students' expectations and values (Telford and Masson, 2005; Lenton, 2015). Indeed some further stated (Guolla,1999; O'Neill and Palmer, 2004) that service

quality in higher education is seen as the difference between student expectations of their received service against their perceptions of the actual delivery. Interestingly this was supported by responses in the focus group where students identified a range of emotions on their expectations for their programme, several participants offered concern about what to expect, see below. Bui (2002) identifies that students attending HEI for the first time can be under prepared or fearsome of the experience they are about to undertake.

“...so many things in my head like what is the teaching style going to be like, what’s the students going to be like? Is the exams going to be hard compared to here [previous institution]? You know all these different things...so there are a lot of you know doubts and uncertainties...” (F4F1).

“I think the main thing for me was the teacher and lecturers. How much they would help you and how much time they would give you, whether they would be approachable things like that. That was my main concern...” (F4F1).

This is interesting and shows that when initially entering higher education students feel that there is a gap in their knowledge as to expectations from the university and perhaps clear information has not been given in relation to their expectations. The findings also support the literature that identified there is a mixed understanding among students of their expectations and understanding of the role of the institution in their studies (Longden, 2006; Crisp et al., 2009). Again, this emphasises the need for clear guidance to be given to students in relation to expectations of the HEI prior to them joining in order that a clear and consistent message is given. The university should make appropriate effort to engage with these students and allay any concerns. The management of these expectations will increase the likelihood of satisfying those students (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006) and allow for development of a relationship between institution and student. This relationship will create increased loyalty and value creation for both parties (Shemwell, 1998). Other focus group participants had alternative views and were disappointed with their initial engagement with the institution, citing specifically the challenge of the programme they had chosen and unfulfilled expectations.

“I thought it would be harder than this you know but since I come it’s just too easy. It’s not challenging” (M5F1).

“I think different expectations about the hours we are going to spend at the university. We are spending nothing at all, almost. For me, I thought it would be more hours if I’m honest...” (M1F2).

As was discussed in the literature review chapter of the thesis, perceived quality of the educational experience is influenced by student expectations (Rodie and Kleine, 2000; Telford and Masson, 2005). Thus, managing expectations of students with high expectations are perhaps the most critical factor for HEI’s. By understanding how and why students are underwhelmed with their student experience, especially in year 1, then institutions can further explore these issues. When academic standards, i.e. teaching hours, are linked to expectations, it can often cause a lack of understanding by the student on the requirements of higher education study. Jackson et al., 2000; Marshall and Linder, 2005 support this thinking and discuss how student expectations about their higher education experience are directly linked to the experiences of teaching in the HEI. Being unprepared for the new teaching experience can result in students arriving with unrealistic perceptions and expectations regarding their studies (Mah and Ifenthaler, 2018). Indeed some student participants did identify this themselves and acknowledge that there needs to be a change in their own mind set when studying in a HEI environment.

“I feel that there is an independence and what Damian [focus group participant] spoke of that we have quite not as many [teaching] hours and we only have one or two assessments per module... I feel that this independence and this free space effects the whole process of lectures and workshops” (M2F2).

“You [have] to read much more outside of class. Second year definitely giving you more stuff to do, say this is what you have to do next week” (M1F3).

“In stage 2 there is greater workload than...this time last year, from that you realise you’re going to have to step up...” (M2F3).

As these quotes show there is a change in student views as they move into their final year(s) with the institution. It is therefore fair to comment that as students engage in their higher education experience and their relationship with the institution develops their expectations can change. This relationship has complexities and is influenced by many differing factors, it is therefore important that a two-way interaction between the university and student take place. James (2002) identifies that the higher education process shapes student expectations and helps to clarify the realities of the university experience. This will be discussed further in section 6.4 of this chapter.

Another key theme that came from the focus groups was that of employability and how this was identified as a significant motivator for students when deciding upon their choice to study at a higher education institution. Students identified that they believed studying at university was imperative when it came to future career prospects upon Graduation. Tomlinson (2008) found that possessing some form of higher education credential was recognised as a key consideration for students as it is a key indicator for their future employability.

“I think now it’s quite essential to have a degree, to get a decent job. Everyone does so if you don’t...” (F3F2).

“Nowadays you have to have a degree. I don’t think a degree is essential to succeed, however, it is more difficult to achieve something without a degree” (M1F2).

“I have come to university to get a job when I graduate; I think this is really important for my future” (F1F1).

“In school all my friends have done really well. They have got good jobs now because they went to university so those that always say you don’t need a degree you can do it on experience but actually now it isn’t true” (F4F1).

Scutter et al. (2011) identified that students choose to go to university for improved career aspirations, not necessarily because of interest. This notion of student interest in their choice of programme is a differing perspective and one that was not fully supported by participants in the focus groups. Although there was an agreement that university would allow them to gain employment, participants also identified that other factors were more important to them than a job at the end of their studies. Factors identified included; social experience, personal development and interest in programme. Intrinsic motivators such as academic performance and programme challenge were often seen as key factors in students’ motivation to study at a HEI. (Rawson, 2000).

“I decided to go to uni it was more for the experience and opportunity university would offer me rather than the job I would get later on because I think you go to uni to get a better job and get better paid” (M3F2)

“I like Business as I did that for my A Level” (M2F3).

“Mine was just I did Business at sixth form. With me it was the only one I was good at.” (M3F3).

“I find it is very helpful since I start university here I mean I meet people different culture like say different characters it give me another perspective of life...in the social life like I can interact with different people so it’s kind of an opportunity for development” (M7F1).

Having explored the findings from the focus groups in relation to theme 1, the chapter will now explore how the conceptual framework is applied to these discussions.

6.4 Applying theme 1 to conceptual framework

To support the rationale of the conceptual framework of this thesis it is important to define the relationship between it and this theme. As identified in figure 6.2 earlier in this chapter, this theme explores personal motivators for study, how prepared students were for university, what pre-university guidance was given, why they chose their programme and the expectations of the chosen programme. These topics were identified from the *'fire'* and *'sunlight'* themes identified in the conceptual framework. The justification for this is that the fire and sunlight topics are about exploring pre and early university influencers of students starting university; by linking to these factors, the researcher was able to identify and clarify issues of importance to the focus group participants. The *fire* topic aimed to explore students' thoughts and feelings towards their choice of higher education institution, why they chose their programme and any other factors influencing their decision to study a higher education course. Prospective students have many factors to consider in their decision to study a higher education programme, including; their perception of value, expectations of their learning environment and expectations of future employability opportunities (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013). As was identified in the discussions above, the focus group results clearly identified that students have clear views on their educational expectations, with some very strongly identifying their expectations and how this relates to the value of their experience. Those students who were less clear about the HEI experience and had some concerns about their higher education journey identified that factors such as the environment and availability to teaching staff were of importance to them. Once these fears had been clarified in year one then they felt settled in the institution and began to identify other concerns such as challenge of the programme. The notion of changing expectations is particularly relevant to Plato's allegory of the cave which the conceptual framework is based upon, as with the prisoners in the philosophy there is a lot of uncertainty about the unknown when students first start university. The allegory identifies that prisoners could only see these flickering images on the wall and so make assumptions of what is reality based upon the shadows they see (Juge, 2009). The unknown factors that were specifically identified by student participants in the focus group were generally related to the internal factors of the institution such as contact time, teaching style and facilities available to the students. How these 'unknown' factors are understood by the student will influence their perceptions of the

institution, e.g. if the contact time given to them by teaching staff exceeds their expectations they are more likely to be satisfied and positive about their experience within the university. Similarly, the experience will be negative if the contact time is less than expected. Overall satisfaction is the consumer's general dis/satisfaction with the organisation based on all encounters and experiences with that particular organisation (Bitner and Hubbert, 1994). This topic of student expectations will be discussed further in section 6.5 of this report when the 'shadows' theme will be analysed.

When looking at other initial views from the students there was a strong sense of the importance of being employable when leaving the institution, as discussed in section 6.2 above. This was true from all 3 years and interestingly was more clearly articulated by students at stage 1 and 2, showing that employability is perhaps seen as greater importance to those starting their academic journey rather than those who are close to Graduation. Students place value on securing a good graduate job as a very important factor to them when embarking upon their higher education journey (Dandridge, 2018). When applying these findings to the conceptual framework model it can be seen that these expectations inform the students' views of their institution and experiences within the university. This impacts upon the student (prisoners) as they inform their views and expectations from the university, how these are met will inform their levels of satisfactions and value they give to their student experience Elliott and Healy (2001) support this notion and identify that student satisfaction is based on an evaluation of their educational experience. Secondly, it informs expectation placed upon the institution (shadows) by the student and can create a gap between the two. If these are not understood by both parties, then there is a risk that students individual expectations are different to those set by the institutions. Thus it is important to ensure these are clearly articulated and communicated by the institution to the students. By managing these gaps, institutions can positively impact upon the student university experience.

When exploring the second topic, *sunlight*, that is related to theme 1 of the conceptual framework and again explores pre and early university influencers of students starting university. The sunlight topic was especially concerned with exploring pre-university guidance given to the students and how this shaped and

influenced their decision to study a higher education programme. Gibney et al., (2011) identify that student motivators are often driven by external influencers, these include parental influence (Byrne and Flood, 2005) and previous educational experiences (Christie et al., 2006). By applying these influencers to the conceptual framework, it can be seen which of these factors have the greatest influence on students' decisions to study at their HEI. Once this is clear then the institution will have a better understanding of how to influence these decisions. As discussed, in section 6.2, this is becoming an ever more prevailing concern for HEI's in the ever increasing marketplace (Carasso, 2013). When exploring these influencers in the focus groups the strongest factor was clearly that of family members, especially parents. This is perhaps not surprising, as parental influence is a fundamental factor in decisions made by their children, not only in education but all aspects of their life (Hall et al., 2011; Workman, 2015). Understanding the influence of family on university choice is an interesting concept for HEI's as it allows them a new audience to target when promoting their programmes, thus events such as Open and Applicant Days, where parents often attend, become even more important to the institutions. Plato explored the influence of others in his philosophy and identified that sunlight was the factor that began to show the realities of the situation the prisoners found themselves in (Cazeaux, 2013). Parents and other influencers such as staff at previous institutions are able to advise and give some 'truths' to the student about university study. HEI's can also help clarify student views at recruitment events and provide 'light' towards the prospective student's perceptions of the institution. The final key influencer identified in the focus groups was that of staff at the students' previous institution (6th form, college, school). The guidance these staff (tutors/career advisors) have on the students when applying for their university should not be underestimated. Their role is to advise students on the most appropriate HEI for the student and thus their word can determine where the student chooses to study – thereby providing light to the student as described in Plato's philosophy. Participants in the focus group spoke of how they were guided by these staff, not just which institution they choose but also the programme of study. Again this allows the HEI to understand the role of these influencers and how they can be managed. The above discussions have demonstrated how the conceptual framework of this thesis can identify key influencers on student's choice of university. It offers institutions the opportunity to manage these key factors to ensure a

satisfactory student experience is created for both institution and student. The next section of this chapter will explore the 2nd theme taken from the focus groups, student perceptions and expectations.

6.5 Theme 2 – Student Perceptions and Expectations

The second theme that arose from the focus groups was around the key concern of this thesis relating to what students perceive and expect from their higher education experience. It has been identified in the literature review of this thesis (chapter 2) that undertaking an analysis of student expectations is a valuable source of information for HEI's to understand their learners (Hill, 1995; Sander et al., 2000). When debating the concept of expectations with the focus group participants there were some interesting discussions. One key area that was raised related to how students saw their university experience. The experience within a HEI can often encompass many different facets of the service provided by the institution. Ng and Forbes, (2008) established that the service experience students receive can enhance or detract from their satisfaction levels. Therefore by understanding these different factors universities are able to manage the experience given to their students and thus increasing the levels of satisfaction within the institution. Research has shown that there is a direct link between student satisfaction and the experience they have within the institution (DeShields, 2005; Douglas et al, 2006). When discussing the concept of the university experience with participants of the focus group there were several views on what the expectations were from the students, the social environment was a key driver for some;

“When you first arrive you just think it’s a big social club. That’s why you come for the social side” (M1F3).

“I meet people different culture like say different characters it give me another perspective of...in the social life like I can interact with different people so it’s kind of an opportunity for development” (M7F1).

"I do a lot of hockey, 3 times a week, I go to a gym and I go to uni and I've still got time to do reading, I do research and I think it all sits perfectly how I like it to be" (M3F2).

"...I found I'm more socialising. Aye [yes] it's bizarre. I'm watching films with Americans!" (M3F3)

Across the 3 stages students continued to identify socialising with friends or spending time doing social activities as a key driver within their university experience. The role of friendship within the university experience should not be overlooked with Wilcox et al., (2005) identifying that making compatible friends is essential to students engaging with their HEI and that they provide support and backing throughout their studies. Interestingly the counter view to this lack of friendship support had a direct correlation to student engagement on the programme, especially in relation to their academic expectations. Some thoughts from the focus groups are shown below, these comments show that students felt that if there was no social reason for them to stay and study after or between classes then they were less likely to without their friends.

"When you're not with your friends you just go your own way and go home. It's like having a study buddy [when with friends]" (M3F3).

"There's times in first and second years where you have a big gap and you just go home. If there was somewhere to go and sit it would have been more social" (M1F3).

"I've never really had much of a social thing with the people... You come in for an hour or 2 a day and you say alright to someone and you listen to what the lecturer has to say and you go home." (M2F3).

McKendry and Boyd (2012) identify that students can often see themselves as independent of the university and not engage fully with their higher education experience. The result of which is that these students are often then discouraged from seeking support, have increase anxiety about individual issues and can lead to

withdrawal from their programme of study (Harrison, 2006; Green, 2008). This was supported by one participant, in the focus group, when discussing engagement with wider support facilities, i.e. careers, library, academic advisors, who explained that these services were of no benefit to him.

“I’ve had no relationship with them [university support services] if I’m honest. The only thing is with library staff to hand in assignments. That’s the only time I’ve ever spoken to them” (M1F3).

Interestingly this student also identified that he did not engage socially with the university so therefore it is perhaps no great shock that he also did not engage with the wider support available. He did however add to the above comment stating *“I think some of the work I’ve done would have been better, having been given some extra help on how to use things” (M1F3)*. This is a very interesting point and had this particular student engaged with these services earlier in the higher education experience, then perhaps his views on these services would have been more positive. This shows a correlation with the views of McKendry and Boyd (2012) and therefore is certainly an area of interest for managers within the HEI. This lack of engagement is ultimately linked to course satisfaction and may result in negative perceptions of these services – despite a chosen lack of engagement by the student. Students who did engage with the wider university services found them to be very useful to their learning and university experience.

“I think with careers they are quite helpful and I used to go quite a lot when I was looking for a job” (F1F2).

The Sunderland Futures; it’s really helpful. I’ve had many meetings in one or 2 years. I did my CV. Many things happen during that time but all of my previous experience is presented in a nice form [for future employers] (M1F2).

These ‘added value’ services offered by the institutions staff help to underpin a positive experience for their students and help to contribute to expectations being met or indeed exceeded, as identified by focus group participants below.

“I come back to the support and also the careers, and the academic advisors. I didn’t think this would be offered to us, and I feel that even the tutors and the lecturers give us so much support, they sit down with us and they offer us sessions. I was really surprised about that and I really appreciate that” (F2F2).

“Like the careers thing, individual meetings with your lecturer, your programme leader. Anything like that is very, well, they always seem to be there for you which I thought was completely the opposite. I thought you would just sit on your course and you were going to have to be our own man so to speak.” (M3F2).

The interaction with staff was a common theme that developed through the focus groups. Exploring this further there needs to be an understanding of the role of university staff on student’s expectations. It was identified in theme 1 that students had worries or concern about the support they would receive from staff at the institution with this impacting upon the perceptions they had about studying there. To explore this further it was important to identify how staff interaction, especially academic staff, impacts upon student expectations within their chosen HEI. This subject was heavily discussed in the focus groups and it was identified as a fundamental issue that impacted upon the student experience across all 3 stages of study. A positive perception given was in relation to contact time with academic staff, generally this was seen as very good and students felt that their lecturers were responding to their academic needs. This was especially true of students at the formative stages, 1 and 2, of their programmes, see comments below.

“Lecturers they are really open and they give you as much as they can. They support [you]” (M7F1).

“In school it was, more like give us a minute and I would get back to you and they never do whereas lecturers here just get back to you straight away to talk you and take time to talk to you” (F2F1).

“I studied previous at Northumbria [university] there we honestly cannot communicate with the lecturers a lot speaking with them, whereas over here [Sunderland university] the lecturers are more friendly and I can communicate” (B5F1).

I think that you can talk with your tutor, about the assignment and other points” (M1F2).

“With the support from the teachers. Sometimes when I’m struggling, I can get private time with your tutor to explain how to get things done to get through. Here it is much easier. So yes, I’m satisfied” (M2F2).

These responses support the concept of tutor support and how it can enhance their academic performance and overall satisfaction within the institution. It has been identified that the most important factor related to learning was if students felt they had received a valuable teaching experience (Marks et al., 2016). Smimou and Dahl (2012) analysed students’ perceptions of quality teaching and found that the ability to hold the students’ attention; interaction and lecturer interest were seen as key factors that were perceived to be of value. This was supported by participants of the focus group who identified that their experience was improved when staff engaged with them, offered support and brought enjoyment to teaching sessions.

“Like the one [module] by Mark [lecturer] was absolutely brilliant; you would stay awake the whole time because he is interactive” (F4F1).

“Its nice you can have a friendly word with your lecturer, and workshop tutors and yes, I’m satisfied” (F2F2).

“He [lecturer] gives you examples every time. He tells you what he’s done in his life” (M3F3).

“With university and what [support from staff] we receive, I’m very satisfied I think” (F2F2).

Marks et al. (2016) identify that students with greater satisfaction might perform better and decrease the population of students who choose to transfer out of the programme or to another institution. This was supported in the focus groups as the student quotes above demonstrate, student participants identified satisfaction when they feel their needs and expectations have been met by the staff within the institution. Interestingly, the point made by Marks et al. in relation to satisfied students being less likely to leave the institution was also supported by the participants of the focus group.

“I’d say it’s [staff support] made a massive difference to my experience at university. I was thinking of transferring [to another university] after the first year. After first year I didn’t want to because speaking to friends there [at other university], they said you get absolutely no time with your lecturers at all. At least here you can email someone not every day but when you need to and I quite like that. It gives me a lot of confidence as well. You feel quite appreciated by whoever you want to speak to” (M3F2).

“Especially with the support from the teachers. Sometimes when I’m struggling, as I have a few friends studying in Newcastle [university], it is really difficult to get private time with your tutor to explain how to get things done to get through. Here it is much easier” (M2F2).

In recent years HEI’s have understood the need to make attempts to reduce the number of students leaving the institution and ensure a high retention on their programmes. Satisfied students who have their expectations met by the university are less likely to leave and thus meeting the retention figures of the institution. DeShields et al., (2005) identify the blending of student goals and institutional commitments affect retention within the institution. Thus, it is important to match the student’s motivations and the institution’s ability to meet the student’s expectations. When exploring expectations of teaching further it was interesting to see that participants of the focus group identified tutors who firstly engage them but also challenge them as being very motivational. Students continue to be highly motivated

to learn in their chosen field (McInnis et al., 2000) thus a challenging teaching environment is seen as a positive to student groups.

“He [lecturer] gives you the homework tasks where you look at the case studies and that and then you discuss them all session. Just listening to the way he talks and stuff, he says he’s done certain things and you learn from it” (M2F3).

“If you weren’t listening or you hadn’t read it you were knackered. I think it was good because, he would always go ‘we did this last week’. He’d then have a go at you if you hadn’t. It made me want to go every week and read everything“ (F1F3).

“I didn’t want to be embarrassed as there were other people who always did go and then there were people who didn’t have a clue or did go. But, you wanted to be more towards the others who did know“ (F1F3).

“I like the lectures where the lecturer gets involved with the whole class, discussing the subject in depth. It feels like you are learning from their knowledge and that is a good thing” (M1F3).

Interestingly at stage 3 (final year) of the programme there was a noticeable change towards the demands placed upon teaching staff by the students. This could be due to the significance of this year in relation to the degree classification and student participants noted that they needed greater support to meet their needs.

“There’s been so many times you’re in a for a 2-hour thing and you get sent away for an hour to do a presentation and you just spend your time listening to other people saying the stuff you’ve just said and not getting anything from the person.and then you go into the seminar, they give you a speech for 10 minutes and then send you away you come back and you speak to them. I’d rather get for 2 hours, you throwing stuff at me” (M2F3).

“You should be able to sit down with someone at the start of each academic year and say you want a 2.1 then you can get the guidance throughout so you would know how to achieve that. If the lecturer of the module knows you’re setting out for a 2.1 they can help you along and tell you if you are going to get one.” (M3F3).

“You hand in a piece of work. You get a grade and that’s the last you hear from it unless you go them. They don’t call you in and say we’re disappointed with this. You could have done better. The feedback you get from some of your work is not even helpful sometimes it’s like they just give you your grade and have done with it” (M1F3).

Therefore, students’ expectations are ever increasing and affecting their views of their university experience. The literature review explored the notion of the student as customer and identified that students are now able to use their expectations as reference standards for satisfaction judgments (Temple et al., 2014). Thus, student expectations of their institution are changing and they are now more likely to judge the quality of teaching in terms of ‘value for money’ (McRae, 2018). There is also a widening distinction between students who wish to be seen as ‘achievers’, students who want to make the most of their educational experience, and those who simply wish to do the minimum to pass their qualification (James, 2002). The focus group identified that students within the HEI did want to achieve and as a result, expectations of their university experience were high. This was particularly apparent when students discussed the number of hours they were expected to attend at the HEI and expectations on teaching staff in terms of engagement and communication.

“We’re not spending a lot of time in university. We spend 10 hours a week, if that. It may be 12 hours, I don’t know. I do think there is a lot which you are meant to be doing outside of university, which I know people don’t do” (M3F2).

“You can accept being in 8 hours a week when you’re actually in you feel you’re getting something out of it” (M1F3).

“You get some [lecturers] where you go in and you don’t say anything, no one says anything, the lecturer is just constant, this is this, this is this” (M2F3).

“[Lecturer name] I’ve had him twice and I’ve got him this semester. I’ve had nothing from him, not academic, nothing. I’ve just got the assignment from him and I’ve just wasted 8 weeks” (M1F3).

These quotes support Afolabi and Stockwell (2012) view that students wish to engage and participate in the wider educational process and not simply be directed information by their tutors. Indeed the notion of how much communication students receive from their tutors was heavily discussed in the focus groups, with assignment feedback being seen as a very important influencer on student satisfaction. 1st year students identified concerns with the feedback they received from their tutors and explained that this was an area that was uncertain to them.

“The first assignment we handed in we had, we didn’t get any feedback and now the next assignment is next week so we would have like the feedback maybe we resubmit our last assignment before we get the feedback” (M7F1).

“Also different types of feedback like me and Haley [fellow student] did the same question and we did the referencing in exactly the same way and one lecturer was like you haven’t referenced it properly and another lecturer was saying you have done it perfectly. But we did it exactly the same way so you think what I have done wrong?” (F2F1).

“I got 94% and when I told him [lecturer] why not 100% his feedback was Ali [student] you are not God. So what I am going to do with that feedback? None of his colleagues would explain if you get 93% why you not get the 7%?” (M5F1).

“Feedback is very important. Cos if you know what you have done wrong next time you don’t do it and you improve the point” (M5F1).

This view continued into the following years at the institution and by stage 3 was still seen as an important factor, as detailed below.

“I think sometimes especially by second or third year to be able to go back in and have a word [with the lecturer]; they say you could have done better here, so you can take that through but they just wash their hands of you sometimes. You just check your grade online and the comments they leave sometimes don’t really help you” (M1F3).

“Last semester, I hadn’t got a clue [with an assignment] for a while. I didn’t have a problem asking [some lecturers] after class. [But] there were a lot of them [lecturers], I’d ask them in class to give a brief answer and they’d kind of fob you off. I’d never felt comfortable...” (M2F3).

Perhaps there is some fault that needs to be appropriated to the institution in this case due to these expectations not being managed in the early stages of the students’ university experience. It could also be that as the importance of the situation increases, i.e. in final year students are more conscious of their degree classification and therefore expectations from students rise. This continues to contribute to the view that HEI’s need to treat students as customers as they believe they are entitled to an efficient, high quality service (Williams, 1993). Svensson and Wood (2007) argue that students can see themselves as a “customer” of their institution and make perceptions of the relationship they will have with the university based upon this. The notion of ‘students as customers’ was raised in the focus group and students identified that although they had service expectations they did not necessarily see themselves as a customer of the HEI.

“I didn’t see myself as that [customer] until the phrase was used. It makes sense as they [university] are essentially providing a service to us. That service, people come and use it based usually on recommendations made

by other people. Providing they give us a good service, we'll give them good feedback" (F3F2).

"I don't know about a customer but I definitely think it's a service and it's the give and take between the student and the university is quite important" (M3F2).

"I do agree with that but I think it's the reality that we are the customers, but what I think is a little different. From my experience I see that most of the tutors are so genuinely happy to teach that I don't really see them as performing a service" (G2F2).

"Like they've said we are the customers but it doesn't really feel like it. It's more a friendly environment" (F1F2).

"I've never felt like a customer. You probably are in some way" (M1F3).

Sharrock (2000) underpins these comments and identifies that calling students customers obscures the fact that 'going to university' is not the same as going to a restaurant or buying a watch. Other student participants agreed that they were not customers but believed that the onus was on them to fulfil their own responsibilities and not a responsibility of the university to 'hand them' a degree qualification.

"I think customer is probably the wrong term because if you go into a shop and you're a customer you get stuff done for you. As a student, you've got to do so much for yourself. I wouldn't say customer was the right word" (M1F3).

"You're the one doing the work whereas when you're a customer you're paying someone else to do the work" (M2F3).

This is an interesting perspective and supports Sharrock (2000) who states students cannot just be given what they want, instead they must consume their education by actively co-produce it. Staff should not just feed them information but also challenge

their thinking, engage them with ideas in order to assess their learning. Interestingly, this also came out in the focus groups where some participants identified that they felt like their service expectations were not been met by the institution and as such their 'customer' expectations were unfulfilled.

"I feel like I am but I never thought about it in that way. You are paying for a service. I don't know, like, I work in retail and you get customers who you prefer and customers who you don't prefer. I feel like it's similar in uni. If you're one of the people the tutors prefer, you're treated better. It's the same with customers if they aren't very nice with you or they are not very nice in general, you get a bit fobbed off" (F1F3).

"If it [the university] was a hotel I wouldn't go" (M2F3).

"You're not treated like a customer. You just get ripped off every month. You don't get anything out of it and they charge you £3 for a coffee. You've got to pay for printing" (F2F2).

"I think it's Alan [lecturer] who says, you're the customer, don't forget to ask if you need help" (M2F3).

These can be portrayed as very negative comments to the HEI and thus lead to unsatisfied students with a negative perception of the institution. However despite this it can be argued that although students have some dis-satisfaction attached to the service given to them, they do not complain or take the issues further. This could be different if they were described as customers by the institution rather than a student of the institution, as expectations could raise further. The argument that if you call students customers, charge them full fees, then fail them, there's a fair chance that they'll sue you—especially if the university falls short of their expectations (DeShields, 2005). Indeed M2F3 supported this by stating, *"if it [the university] was a hotel I wouldn't go"*, thus showing that if service standards are not met, students will raise their objections to the institution. This is of particular concern when students are giving feedback via surveys both internally and externally to the university e.g. module or NSS questionnaires.

Ultimately, the notion of a customer in higher education is important but only that it draws attention to the university as a service provider. Desai et al. (2001) argues that as students are consumers of a service provision (within the institution) they have needs and wants, it is therefore important that these are understood and met in order to provide an improved educational experience. This was supported by focus group participants as identified in the above quotes. A number of authors agree with this approach and suggest that implementing and adopting a customer orientation approach in academia in order to assess students' perceptions of the institution's commitment to understanding and meeting their needs (Hatfield and Taylor, 1998; Browne, 2010). Ng and Forbes (2008) discuss the impact of service on HEI's and identify that the service experience students receive can enhance or detract from their satisfaction levels. Therefore, as identified in the literature review (section 2.4) of this thesis, service levels experienced at HEI's are the influences on students' perceptions and expectations of university and how this affects their actual experiences within the institution. When exploring how students identify with the service they receive within the institution, the participants of the focus group highlighted the relationship with their lecturers and often deemed that a negative experience from staff also can lead to a negative experience of service within the institution.

“Out of all the lecturers I've had over the last 3 years, there are some that I feel I can never ask them anything, and then there's some that I know better and feel comfortable talking to. One of the modules I did last year: he [lecturer] terrified me, and I had no idea what I was doing for that assignment, but I wouldn't go and see him. There were a couple of lecturers I felt I couldn't go to which has obviously affected my grades. Now I feel I wish I just had asked” (F1F3).

“[A lecturer] helped me loads doing my dissertation because I thought I need at least 65 in my dissertation, so then I worked towards getting a really high 2.1 but if I hadn't {spoken to the lecturer}, I would have had no idea what to aim for” (M3F3).

“If you turn around and challenge him [lecturer], he’s like, who you talking to, you’re like I’m just trying to get some help kind of thing, and then you feel like he’s going to mark you down” (M2F3).

The above statements identify how behaviour of staff can greatly impact upon student behaviour and the service experience they receive. Cronin and Taylor (1992) offer the view that perceived service quality is strongly affected by current performance and the impact of previous experiences. In this sense, how students feel they are being treated by staff within the HEI (positive or negative) at that current time will greatly influence their levels of satisfaction with the institution. This is particularly relevant when institutions are gaining feedback from their students in relation to programme and wider university feedback to identify problem areas that may have occurred e.g. a negative encounter with a staff member can result in negative perception (feeling) by the student. Bolton and Drew (1991b) identify that perceptions of service quality form a view of current satisfaction towards service quality. Clearly, the views expressed by the participants of the focus groups have identified some negative experiences of teaching based upon their experiences with lecturers at the institution and these have impacted upon their experience with F1F3 identifying that *“there were a couple of lecturers I felt I couldn’t go to which has obviously affected my grades”*. M2F3 also identified how a member of teaching staff had a strong effect on his behaviour *“If you turn around and challenge him [lecturer]...you feel like he’s going to mark you down”*. These are strong statements and show how there is a direct correlation between student behaviour and the influence of their lecturers. These findings support Hill et al’s (2003) view who state that student satisfaction is influenced by the interpersonal relationships between students and lecturers.

When defining influencers on student satisfaction, one of the factors identified in the literature review of this thesis was that of the impact of ‘The Browne Report’ (2010) on student expectations and the resulting increased tuition fees. Browne (2010) identified that current students see the rate of satisfaction with the standard of teaching as an important factor when making decisions about entering higher education. Indeed as HEI’s continue to raise tuition fees for their programmes, students will have an ever-increased consideration regarding the service provision

offered by the institution of their choice. When discussing the issue with focus group participants they were asked if they believed the service they received was appropriate to the tuition fees paid.

“Not at all. I think it’s ridiculous [the tuition fees]” (M2F3).

“We [are] only there for 15 hours, is that value?” (M3F3).

“...Then you go into the seminar, they give you a speech for 10 minutes and then send you away you come back and you speak to them. I’d rather get for 2 hours, you throwing stuff at me. That would be better value” (M1F3).

The comments raise further debate in relation to how satisfaction of students is met by institutions, albeit, arguably student tuition fees are a market force rather than a conscious decision by the university. The above comments from the participants were all taken in their final year of study and thus highlights that the expectations of contact time and ‘value’ remain very important themes for them. To explore this further the focus groups asked the participants about their own feelings towards their programme and university experience to identify the impact of these external influencers towards their satisfaction levels within the institution. Some themes identified here were in relation to programme direction and support, personal motivators and expectations. The quotes below have shown that students in their second year of study felt that their programme had helped them to settle within the higher education environment and allay any fears they may have had.

“[My programme] I think it’s quite good as it’s helped me find what I want to do. In the second year like I said the modules are different so it helps you find what you want to do” (F1F2).

When I initially came here I was really worried that I wouldn’t be good enough to just proceed. But in my first year I saw that it was quite easy as Damian [fellow student] said, and I appreciate that, and adapt to university living and also living outside, in a different country for most of us. As part of the transition to the second year, I can see the positives as well and I can

see I'm not as scared anymore, because I was really worried in year one when the first assignments were in and I was so lost" (F2F2).

Therefore, it could be argued that the institution has provided these students with a safe and secure environment to develop and grow as higher education learners, thus creating a positive environment for them. This view was not taken by all, with one participant identifying that he felt the institution could have been more challenging towards their academic performance.

"I feel that the uni should be saying you should be aiming for this, this and this to get this grade or if you want to aim higher" (M2F3).

This example of personal expectation of performance was also explored further and the consensus from the participants was overall, they were happy with their performance within the institution but interestingly most identified that they could improve their performance further.

"With university and what we receive, I'm very satisfied I think. I'm not satisfied with myself. I could do better. It's also hard to juggle work and university and I can relate and also having to tend to yourself, which there is that but university wise it's fun and I'm satisfied and it's much better than I expected" (F2F2).

"The first year I'd rate it about 3 as I didn't have a clue what I was doing to be honest. There wasn't much help there or anything. Then I got better for this year and I'd give it a 9. Much better than I expected" (M2F3).

"I've done well at my own personal level but I could have done better if I'd applied myself more. So, I'm at 50/50 [on my own performance]" (M3F3).

"I think first and second year I was really pleased with how I did. Especially second year. Then I think the first term I dipped. But I feel like I've picked myself back up. I am pleased and I will be gutted if I don't get what I wanted" (F1F3).

"I think in our class there are expectations within certain [friendship] groups. There's loads of different groups and you always expect one group to do really well and one group to do not as well. Last year, one group, you always expected them to get firsts, if you were anywhere near them, you were clever" (F1F3).

This shows that HEI's need to ensure their curriculum is challenging to learners but also offers encouragement for them to fulfil their own potential and achieve their goals. This is especially true in the final year of the programme where grades count towards their degree classifications. The views of students in this research has shown that the demands on the institution have increased as the students reach their final year of study. This may be linked to their focus becoming clearer on the final grade and how this will influence their future careers. James (2000) identifies a key consideration for institutions is to provide support, challenge and independence to their learners without lowering the standards of the university and leading to dissatisfied students. Thereby in summary, it can be seen that although students do not see themselves as a customer of the institution it is important for HEI's to take aspects of this concept and apply to their provision to ensure student needs and expectations are met.

6.6 Applying theme 2 to conceptual framework

When relating this theme to the conceptual framework of this thesis the discussion further explores student personal motivators for university study and defines what are the key influencers on their experience within the institution. Particular attention was paid to how these favours negatively or positively influenced student expectations and the subsequent experience they have. These topics were identified from the '*prisoner*' theme in the conceptual framework. The justification for this is that this topic is concerned with identifying students own thoughts, curiosities and feelings towards their university experience. The *prisoner* topic in Plato's allegory of the cave philosophy identifies that the prisoners are rationalising their own identified thoughts compared to the realities of the world. Essentially this is what students are doing in this theme; they are reviewing their actual experiences

and judging if these are deemed satisfactory to them. Dandridge (2018) identified that student's place value on their university experience and rate the factors that are personally most important to them. The discussions in section 6.4 of this chapter have identified that students have definite feelings towards their educational experience and the expectations of the service they will receive. Students were articulate in relation to their satisfaction with the institution and where value is gained. As students moved through the years of their programme it was clear to see how differing factors influenced their expectations throughout their time with the institution. When students were in their final year they became very critical in response to the performance of staff and the support they are given. In comparison when the role of staff on their performance was discussed in the earlier groups it was not seen as negatively. The reason for this may be linked to the understanding of students of the importance of this final year. In years 1 and 2 there is not the conclusion of stage 3 and instead the students were more interested in other factors of the student experience e.g. social aspects. Thus placing less pressure/expectation on the institution, indeed when in stage 1 students identified that they had good relationships with staff and valued their teaching experiences.

This increased demand is a clear area for monitoring by the institution and counters views of some researchers (Pratt and Alisat, 2000; Elliott, 2002; Kift, 2003) who deem that it is the early months of university life that influence expectations of the student. The findings from this research show that the final year is actually when students have the most challenging views towards the university especially in relation to the support and guidance from teaching staff. Student expectations of the teaching experience have been identified as areas where expectations do not match experiences (Brinkworth et al., 2009). The notion of changing expectations relates to Plato's allegory of the cave conceptual framework as once the prisoner is freed from the cave and brought into the open they adjust their eyes to a new reality. The freed prisoner is then able to see beyond only shadows and see their own reflections in the water outside of the cave. After learning of the reality of the world, the prisoner could see how misrepresented his views inside of the cave were (Judge, 2009). This can be applied to the student journey as after they have joined the university and allayed any initial fears or concerns (as discussed in section 6.3) then they begin to re-evaluate their view of the institution. These 'new' expectations will be based on

the student's ongoing experiences with the university and may cause them to reconsider those initial perceptions (identified in theme 1 of this chapter). These changing perceptions impact upon the views of the service provision delivered by the institution with Oliver (1980) suggesting that consumer satisfaction is determined by judgements of the consumer on the basis of comparing the actual performance with expectations.

So experience is clearly influenced by the support and guidance given to students by university staff but it was also important to identify what other factors impact on perceptions of the students. The social environment was identified as important to participants, especially in relation to peer support/friendship. Identifying to Plato's philosophy where the prisoners had support of their peers whilst inside the cave, once they left to go on their own, they felt lonely or isolated. This is true of the social setting of university where participants identified that they feel safer and secure alongside their peers (Sojkin et al., 2012) who offer them support and friendship at the HEI. Wilcox et al. (2005) supports this and identifies that compatible friendship provide support and backing to students during their studies. Plato's prisoner concept identifies how upon leaving the cave enlightenment is realised by the prisoner who understands the realities of their own situation rather than that imagined with their fellow prisoners within the cave. This was true of students in the focus group who identified that they had undergone their own personal reflections with their performance within the institution. Many recognised that they had not always performed to their full ability and indeed it was not until their final year of study did they understand the importance of managing their own learning. This shows that although they understood the university to have an influence on them through teaching, facilities etc, the destiny of their performance was their own. These changing personal reflections are an interesting finding for HEI's who could use these to further explore and manage student performance and experience within the institution. Indeed students identified that they would see the intervention of the institution in managing their performance as beneficial and of benefit to them. This is an example of how value could be given to the student and institution easily and effectively. The positive experience will ensure that expectations of students can be met and create a satisfactory student experience. The student learning experience is important when retaining and satisfying students (Remedios and Lieberman,

2008). It can also help manage the gaps discussed earlier in this chapter between student expectation of the institution and the actual performance they receive. By ensuring these factors are discussed and articulated between both parties, the likelihood of a positive student university experience increases.

6.7 Theme 3 – Influencers at University

The final theme which was identified in the focus groups related to what wider influencers' impact upon students during their higher education journey. Having defined the pre-university influencers on students in section 6.2 of this chapter, it is important to also consider the key factors that impact upon them during their time at the institution. Some of these have been identified and discussed in 'theme 2 - student perceptions and expectations', section 6.4 of this chapter, however the research will further explore additional factors that were seen as significant by the participants of the focus groups. Douglas et al, (2006) identifies that the student learning experience and student satisfaction is derived from both academic and social aspects from their university environment. Yeo and Li (2012) identify that a students' overall learning experience and satisfaction is enhanced by provision of effective support services provided. Participants in the focus groups who identified that support from additional services, such as the library, was beneficial to their studies supported these views. Notably this was mainly true when students were in their first year at the institution and becoming familiar with such facilities.

"I think the facilities of teaching like libraries and computers the opportunity is quite good. It's quite good like for example if you like specially online like e-books and journals and stuff the accessibility of information is quite... very good point to get information" (M7F1).

"For me it is alright. Because I get the benefit of it and when I do my assignments or research and I am doing it around here and when I get good results from it is positive for me" (M1F1).

Latterly in stages 2 and 3, the participants again identified the role of teaching staff in their academic journey and explained how support from lecturers was important to their educational development.

“Now we know how it’s going and the structure, so even though it’s getting harder and the assignments are on different topics and different fields, not fields but modules, we have this structure to go off. We know there will be a brief and if we decode it, as William [lecturer] likes to say, that we have the support and we know how it goes. That’s a big part” (F2F2).

“You know if I have an issue I can talk [to the lecturer], whether you know the answer or not because I know that I can [talk to them]” (G1F3).

“When the lecturer sat us down after class to show us [the online support tools]. No one [previously] actually said you can get a load of useful stuff from this” (M1F3).

The importance of support from staff was shown when discussing how students evaluated their time at the institution. When participants spoke about their first experiences of the institution many expressed that they had been uncertain even fearful about what to expect. These concerns ranged from a fear of loneliness / interaction with peers, study based concerns to doubts over their own ability. Clearly these are issues that linked to Plato’s allegory of the cave and will be further discussed in section 6.7 of this chapter. Mah and Ifenthaler (2018) identify that despite suggestions by others (Appleton-Knapp and Krentler 2006; Forrester 2006; Walker and Palmer 2011) that actually students are often unprepared for entering the higher education environment.

“I was scared. When I first came like to university like I was so shy like I never thought I could sit here and talk to new people” (G1F1).

“My main concern was going back to university as a mature student at my age with kids and married...” (M3F1).

“For me at first, I was afraid of writing assessments. The ones I’d done previously were 300 words or 400 words. But once I understood how to write that, my writing skills are much better at this point, and my revision skills, so I can see progress and also with the knowledge” (M2F2).

“I was most nervous about was I was not sure that I’d come out with a degree and know anything of what I’m doing” (M3F2).

“When I initially came here I was really worried that I wouldn’t be good enough to just proceed” (G2F2).

“When I came here and I realised I’m here and I’m on my own, it was kind of like really scary. I feel like the first 8 months, I struggled a lot” (F1F2).

Therefore it can be confirmed that there is a certain amount of uncertainty and trepidation from students entering their chosen HEI and that these formative weeks are pivotal to the setting of their subsequent expectations for the remaining years of study within the institution. Thus, these are important considerations for the institution and highlight the importance of staff relationships with their students and the offering of wider services in establishing a beneficial service to their students. The obvious reason for paying so much attention to student involvement and engagement is that there is a direct correlation between student success, retention, achievements and satisfaction (Kuh et al., 2007; Trowler 2010). Alongside the importance of understanding the internal factors that have an influence on student’s ability to study, HEI’s also need to be aware of the external factors that affect upon their academic performance. One factor that was raised by participants of the focus group was the balance between academic study and a part-time job to financially support themselves during their studies. Cooper et al., (2002) found that students at university worked because of financial necessity (Callender, 2008).

“It gives you a good chance for your studies and work which you don’t have in my home country. If you study you study for 8 hours a day, so there’s a chance to do extra work” (M2F2).

“You talk about work/study balance. I work that much I feel I can’t engage myself that much to do my course. But then it’s you don’t have a choice really” (F3F2).

“I’ve had to work all the way through uni as I didn’t have the financial support” (M2F3).

“I was working 40 hours a week” (M3F3).

“I was alright until November gone, working and studying and then it just got too much for me doing all that in a week so I actually quit my job” (F1F3).

“Especially working in retail, I don’t know where anyone else worked but they just expect so much of you. You just cannot because me personally, third year, it was so hard compared to the other 2 years. I feel like I just sailed through the other 2 years. Then obviously when I got my grades in January, which weren’t what I wanted, that made me more focussed on not working and just trying to pull my grades back up” (F1F3).

“I was working at the time and was running the night shift all through the weekend and on Wednesday nights and I was doing an 11-hour night shift and coming to uni and doing all the uni work. I got to the point where I was like I can’t take this, I need another job” (M2F3).

These quotes show how many students within the HEI are working alongside their studies and this is having a significant impact upon their ability to concentrate fully on their studies. It was found that students have often been working the equivalent of full-time hours whilst also studying full-time. This therefore can be seen as a significant influencer upon their university experience and one that institutions cannot necessary control but do need to be aware of. Many theorists support this thinking and have found that although some students identified that part-time work

was beneficial to their studies, the majority were reluctant to work (Curtis and Shani, 2002; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). If given the option students would prefer not to work stating that they would leave their paid employment if they could afford to do so as they identified that working had a detrimental effect on their academic studies (Curtis and Williams, 2002). A focus group participant who had not worked agreed with this and stated that he found this was beneficial to him and allowed for full concentration on his university studies and offered a more favourable study / life balance.

“I think I’m probably the only person who’s not worked throughout my 2 years at university. That’s given me quite a lot of time to engage with my course so I’m satisfied because I can allow myself a lot and taking my days off to do uni work. To do the reading, I can have days off” (M3F2).

The realities of the current higher education marketplace mean that institutions now need to accept that their students will have interests outside of their studies and offer them the opportunity to better manage their life balance. This could be through better timetabled teaching, effective support systems and efficient online platforms. Robotham (2009) identifies that the growth of student employment is forcing HEI’s to reconsider their interactions with their learners and has eroded the concept of a full-time student. This thinking supports the earlier discussion on ‘students as consumers’ (Ford et al., 1995). Morley (2002) claims that the current higher education marketplace means that students are no longer recipients of knowledge but purchasers of an expensive product. HEI’s therefore need to be aware of the importance of external employment to their students, and where possible cater to these needs through the provision offered to them. It was also identified that employability was a rationale for students undertaking part-time employment during their studies, as detailed below.

“I’ve had to work all the way through uni as I didn’t have the financial support. I know I’m a lot more employable [now] but it would have been better to do a placement” (F2F3).

“I did this 20 days internship. It was an opportunity I was hoping I was going to get when I came to university. It’s extra points when you are looking for a job” (M1F2).

Moreau and Leathwood (2006) identify that rather than reflecting a sense of struggle, students’ emphasised the positive consequences of working, such as increased confidence and skill development alongside the obvious financial gains. However the counter view is that the amount of paid employment undertaken by students external to their studies can impact significantly on their ability to attend classes. Callender (2008) supports this view and identifies that term-time working has a detrimental effect on students’ final year marks and ultimate final degree result. It was also identified that the more hours students worked, the greater the negative effect. The lack of attendance by students working full-time does not only have a negative effect upon them, it can also impacts upon their peers who find that their classes are not always full. This was supported by students in the focus group who acknowledged that fewer students in their classes had a direct impact upon their learning experience.

“What annoys me is lack of attendance with some.... which affects my group work which stresses me out because I have life outside the university and I have to study for my workshops and attend sessions” (M3F1).

“I think the uni, obviously it’s not their responsibility but how much people attend and how much people put into their course reflects in their final dissertation; that affects their statistics. It also makes my experience less positive” (F3F2).

“You do go online afterwards. Me being in is pointless, as you’re not getting anything from being there. I think this is another reason why people don’t bother [attending classes]” (M1F3).

The final quote above is an interesting one and identifies the motivation to attend classes, by deeming their classroom experience a negative one there is less desire to attend themselves as they deem a lack of value in attendance.

This quote is from a student at stage 3 of their programme and is perhaps even more concerning based on discussion earlier in this chapter (section 6.4) relating to student concerns about the experience they receive within the institution. There is a juxtaposition between the discussion around a negative teaching experience and the lack of motivation to attend. These differing drivers to lack of attendance are obviously significant for HEI's and have a strong impact on the student experience offered. Massington and Herrington (2006) identify that there are also clear benefits for students who engage and attend their classes, however, changes in the way students learn, are taught as well as assess and use technology are recommended if HEI's wish to effectively manage these student requirements.

6.8 Applying theme 3 to conceptual framework

When exploring the 'influencers at university' in relation to the conceptual framework of this thesis it was important to identify the relationship between the philosophy and this theme. As identified in discussions above, this theme explores how and what are the key influencers whilst at the university and how student's expectations are influenced by this. In relation to the conceptual framework, the '*prisoner*' theme will be applied. The rationale for this is that the prisoner theme explores how the prisoner reacts to their new surroundings once free from the cave and learns of the reality of world. After learning of the reality of the world, the prisoner could see how misrepresented his views inside of the cave were (Juge, 2009). This is relatable to students in their university experience, where after their initial perceptions have been explored they will form new opinions and views on the institution. Theme 1 explored the influencers on students' pre-university influencers and how this informed their decision to study at a HEI. Many new students are often not familiar or have incorrect knowledge with what might be part of their university programme (James, 2001). Theme 2 then analysed students' expectations regarding the key influencers on their experience within the institution and identified influencers upon their satisfaction with the university. The aim of theme 3 was to further analyse the influencers upon the experience to define if these are internally or externally focussed and identify how the HEI can look to manage these effectively.

The findings in section 6.7 of this chapter has found that students have many pressures on their time at the institution. These related to both internal factors such as their own concerns about their ability to study. It was identified that support received from university services was beneficial to them and allowed for the settling of some concerns e.g. help with writing assignments. Another factor that was identified as an influencer upon students' ability to study was the classroom atmosphere, specifically how a lack of attendance by other students impacted detrimentally on the ability to engage in classroom discussions and debate. Rodgers and Rodgers (2003) found that there was a strong correlation between classroom attendance and academic performance. These factors can be seen as unknowns to students once they have started the institution as they would have no preconceptions of what to expect until they have experienced these situations. As with the prisoner exiting the cave in Plato's philosophy, this is when expectations and perceptions of their service experience can change.

The main external influencer identified by students was the demands on them to support their studies through part-time employment. Participants identified that there was a necessity to them had they had no other means of supporting their studies. Naturally as identified above this has impacted upon the levels of satisfaction within the university and their own experiences. Trowler and Trowler (2010) identify that drivers of satisfaction often fail to take into account the contribution that the students themselves make towards their own learning experiences and programme satisfaction. This can be argued to be accurate in the case of students who undertake significant work alongside their studies, as they involuntarily often put the work and financial benefits ahead of academic study. This was especially true of student's in stage 1 and 2 of their programmes who identified that they were often working up to 40 hours per week in their jobs, effectively full-time alongside their studies. Callender (2008) acknowledged that the greater number of hours worked, the greater the negative effect upon students studies. The prisoner dimension explores the realities of existence in a new situation, as students do upon their time at an institution. The key point identified here is that as well as influencers within the university there are also significant factors outside of the institutions

environment that can influence behaviour of their students and their satisfaction within the HEI. Having confirmed these key drivers upon student expectations they will be used to further develop the conceptual framework developed for this thesis in order that the research questions can be answered, further discussion on this will be undertaken in chapter 7.

6.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented and analysed the qualitative data collected via three semi-structured focus group totalling 17 student participants across a period of three academic years. NVivo Analysis tool was used to analyse the data, where three key themes were identified from the findings and applied to the conceptual framework of this thesis. The common discussion across the qualitative focus group results is that student expectations have many drivers that affect upon the student experience within an institution. The three themes explored in this chapter have identified that there are influencers that run throughout all years of the students programme. One such influencer that participants identified was staff and their approach to teaching. It was identified there was a direct impact between lecturers attitudes to the satisfaction levels and perception of value by the students. Other influencers were more noticeable in specific years, i.e. the uncertainty of expectations by the institution was identified as being more relevant when students were in their first year of study. Whereas in the final year of study, students' were more demanding upon the university and placed greater demands on the service they received.

The next chapter presents conclusions and recommendations based on findings from the mixed method data findings, the key literature identified to ensure the research objectives of the thesis have been met, and research questions answered. This is followed by an analysis of the limitations of this study and identification of areas for further research. The thesis concludes with a personal reflection from the researcher to explore the journey taken during this thesis.

Chapter Seven

Discussion of findings

7.0 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is two-fold, firstly it draws conclusions from the discussion of findings in the quantitative and qualitative chapters and secondly it identifies fundamental factors that explore the overarching aim of the thesis - to *identify a framework for higher educational institutions to understand and manage the needs and expectations of their students*. The conclusions will explore the *key influencers and drivers on student's expectations of their higher education institution* and identify if these change over their time at the university (RQ1-RQ3). Section 7.1, analyses the key findings from mixed method analysis and applies these to examine the conceptual framework developed for this study to identify the critical factors relating to the drivers of expectation upon the university experience. The understanding of the relationship between the internal and external drivers in the framework developed for this thesis will identify the key factors by academic year to establish if a change takes place (RQ3).

Section 7.2, discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the holistic framework, by evaluating the significance of the key findings in the context of the thesis' general and specific contributions to knowledge. Section 7.3, critically assesses the extent to which the research objectives have been achieved, and key research questions answered as well as identify limitations of the study and areas for future research. Finally, Section 7.4, provides a personal reflection of the researcher's PhD experience over the duration of the thesis.

7.1 Analysis of conceptual framework developed for thesis

When looking to explore the key drivers of the conceptual framework it is important to reflect upon the findings of the mixed method analysis to identify which factors were deemed relevant to the study. The following sections of the chapter will explore the critical influences of each to further define and examine the key influencers upon the dimensions of the framework.

7.1.1 Analysing the 'fire' dimension

Findings from the mixed method analysis identified that there are external and internal influences on students' *perceptions* of their university experience, this dimension of the framework looked specifically at the internal influencers. The quantitative analysis identified that the internal drivers upon perception were statistically significant in shaping student perceptions. The key themes identified in relation to this dimension of the framework were 'reasons for undertaking higher education' and 'previous educational experiences' which both showed a correlation to the impact upon students' university experience. Interestingly in relation to 'reasons for undertaking higher education', the response from those studying at year 2 of their programme deemed these factors as the most important for them, whereas those at years 1 and 3 did not rank them as significant. The rationale for this could vary although the literature suggests that students appraise the 'value' of higher education and influences on the perception of their learning experiences at their institution through experiences they have (Naidoo, 2003). Thus it can be argued that at the start of their first year at the institution students have not yet fully engaged with the university and as such not gained a substantial experience to gauge their perceptions. In relation to 'previous institutional experiences', years 2 and 3 were seen as statistically significant for the internal influences on students' perceptions of their university experience. Further analysis of this dimension can be undertaken via the qualitative findings from the research where it was identified by the focus group participants that there was an importance placed upon their early perceptions of the institution and identified an initial 'gap' in their knowledge about the university at year 1 and the expectations placed upon them (Crisp et al., 2009; Nadelson et al., 2013). This could support the quantitative findings that showed participants as being unclear as to their initial expectations of the institution as they have not yet 'experienced' all the institution has to offer. As the student progresses through their programme these experiences begin to be further formulated and they are then able to gauge the influence of past experiences and their rationale for undertaking their higher education experience.

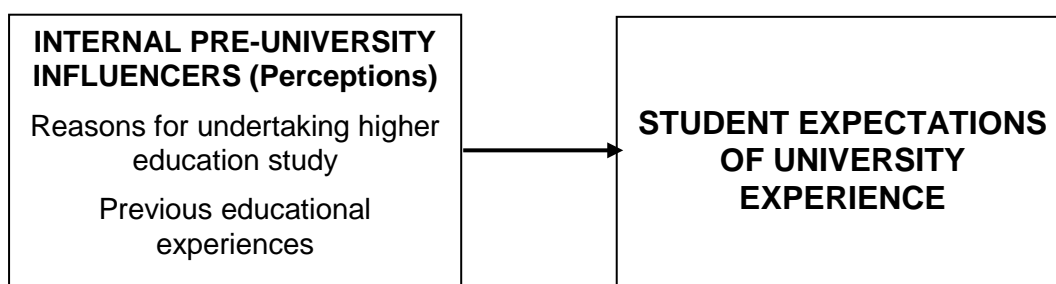
This was supported by the qualitative responses from students at towards the end of their 1st year of study and as they began to formulate a positive or negative experience based upon their prior expectations. For example some year 1

participants identified that they *expected* the experience to be 'more challenging' or that they 'expected more teaching hours'. At year 2 participants began to express a greater understanding of their own personal university experience and as such their expectations of the institution began to develop further and they showed an understanding of their own 'independence' and 'internal motivators'. Students in their final year (3) identified a greater burden of expectation on themselves to perform and acknowledged that they found the management of workload a key factor in their university experience. It can therefore be seen that the relationship dynamic between the institution and student develops throughout their time at the university, with students at year 1 having an expectation of the institution whereas by year 3, there is a greater expectation from the student regarding their own performance. Marshall and Linder (2005) support this point and identify that there are a range of differing expectations of students throughout their university experience.

As identified in the qualitative chapter of this thesis, a key perceptual driver for undertaking the university experience was future prospects, be that employability, subject knowledge or self-motivation, that is to say students had an expectation of improving themselves by undertaking a higher education qualification. These internal drivers underpin student expectations of their university experience as has been demonstrated in the data collected for this thesis. Therefore, how these student perceptions are managed by the HEI directly influences the satisfaction of the university experience. Student satisfaction is based on an evaluation of the educational experience (Elliott and Healy, 2001). The findings of the research has also identified that there is a relationship between student perceptions and the expectations that they place upon the institution (shadow dimension of the framework) by the student. If these perceptions are not effectively managed then the students individual expectations will differ to the service offered by the institution and therefore increase the chance of a negative university experience. This supports the findings of Cronin and Taylor (1992) who in their SERVPERF model identify that satisfaction of a service experience directly correlates to the perceptual expectation of the institution. Therefore the dimension of this framework will enable institutions to effectively manage any perceptual gaps that exist between student and university in order that the HEI can positively impact upon the student university experience.

How these perceptual influencers impact upon student expectations is a key focus for this thesis and therefore identifying specific drivers that can allow institutions to develop their practices to manage their student population is a key objective (RO1). Thus an understanding of the participants' perceptual views before starting at the university and how they change during their academic experience is a fundamental factor in achieving the research title of this thesis and allow the researcher to establish the *key influencers and drivers on student's expectations of their higher education institution*. Zeithaml et al. (1990) identify that there is a direct correlation between customer expectations of a service with their perceptions of the actual performance, thus impacting upon the quality of experience received. Therefore the conclusion drawn from this research shows that HEI's need to understand the changing dynamic of their students as they progress through the institution and ensure that sufficient information, guidance and support is delivered at the appropriate period of university study. The results of this thesis identify that upon initial arrival at the institutions students require a greater amount of support and guidance to inform them of the 'ways' of the university. However this initial support needs to change with the student journey and as students become independent the role of the institution is then to support in terms of growth, development and achievement towards their degree classification.

Having analysed the fire dimension of the conceptual framework, it has been accepted that 'reasons for undertaking higher education study' and 'previous educational experiences' are significant influencers on students' internal perceptions of their expectations of the HEI. These perceptions have a direct correlation to informing the expectations of the university experience and as such there is a need to update the framework to reflect these key factors as shown below. The title of this dimension has also been updated to better reflect the dimension, it is therefore renamed as *internal pre-university influencers (perceptions)*.



7.1.2 Analysing the ‘sunlight’ dimension

The second perceptual influencer identified in the mixed method were related to the external influences on students’ perceptions of their university experience. This dimension of the framework will explore the factors that are deemed most influential in regards to students’ external influencers. The quantitative research identified that ‘influencers on student decisions’ were seen as a statistically significant factor that impact upon student perceptions of their higher education experience. Findings from the qualitative data collection supported this and showed that students identified that the influence of others impacted directly upon their choice of university. The most prominent elements identified were the influence of family, especially parents, with students acknowledging that these groups directly influenced their decision making process. Other key perceptual influencers were staff at the students’ previous institution which was recognised as an important external influencer that shaped students’ views and perceptions of their chosen university. As with the internal drivers of perception discussed in section 5.2.1, the quantitative research identified that year 2 was statistically significant in relation to ‘influencers on student decisions’. The qualitative findings developed this further and identified that these external influencers clearly articulated a *perception* of the university and was seen as a significant, if not sole, influencer upon the student decision making process. This was true across all stages and not necessarily limited to year 2 with general feedback identifying that parental influence was the reason for their choice and others stating that advice from previous academic staff influenced their perceptions of potential HEI’s. This underpins the dimension developed for the framework and supports the notion of external influencers upon student perceptions of the university experience.

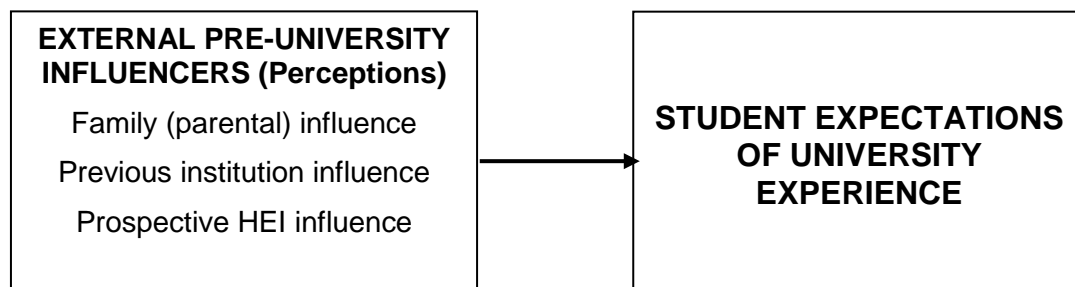
As identified earlier in this chapter (section 7.2.1) was how internal perceptual influencer’s impact upon programme choice, the same is true of external influencers where the influence of parents and previous institutional staff have a strong influence on perceptions of students (Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Johnston, 2010). Hossler and Stage (1992) support this by identifying that parental encouragement increases the likelihood of the prospective student undertaking a university qualification. Others who may have a strong influence on the student decision making process are those who are not in a student’s immediate family but who still have an influence on

decisions made by the student (Johnston, 2010), e.g. current/previous institutional staff, careers advisors. Participants of the qualitative focus groups identified that family and previous institution were influential in their decision making process and identified that they influenced their choices positively. Therefore universities should consider this a key area of importance for them when building relationships with students before and during their time at the institution. By understanding the perceptual decision-making influencers upon students the university will be better prepared to engage and inform the student with appropriate marketing literature and identifying suitable opportunities for interaction. The nature of the interaction with the institution may change during their period of study but the influencers remain consistent with students in their final year of study still identifying parents as a strong influencer on their decisions. However once the student has been at the university over a period of time their perceptions may change and become expectations e.g. staff influence, this will be discussed and explored further in the next section of this chapter.

The final reflection relating to external perceptual influencers is the university itself, this is specifically linked to how the institution promotes themselves to the prospective student. The findings from the research indicated that there was an impact on the student's decision to study based on their perception of the institution and how this influenced their quality of the university. It has been identified that students' perceived quality of their educational degree informs their expectations of value (Telford and Masson, 2005; Lenton, 2015). Therefore the promotional literature, interactions (through recruitment events such as open days) and other recruitment activities used by the institution should ensure an honest reflection of the likely experience which students will receive. This is not only important at year 1 where early perceptions of the institution are being developed but throughout the university experience (as shown in the quantitative results). The rationale for this is that these early perceptions inform expectations that will remain with the student throughout their time at the university. Students are asked to rate their university experience throughout their programme and these rankings act as a guide to the levels of satisfaction with the university, quality of their programme and other decisive factors relating to the university experience. Perhaps the most important of these surveys is undertaken at year 3, where students undertake the National

Student Survey, which defines the student experience and compares the university with competing institutions (Sabri, 2013). The framework developed for this thesis therefore plays a key role in allowing the institution to manage student perceptions of the university experience in order that realistic expectations of the HEI are made by the students.

The above analysis of the sunlight dimension of the conceptual framework, has shown that ‘influencers on student decisions’ and ‘reasons for undertaking higher education study’ are significant influencers on students’ external perceptions of their university experience. As with internal perceptions there is a link between perceptions of the institution to the expectations of the experience received. The framework has been updated to reflect this, see below. The title of this dimension has also been renamed to *external pre-university influencers (perceptions)*.



7.1.3 Analysing the ‘prisoners’ dimension

The prisoner dimension relates to the *expectations* of the student experience, specifically this dimension will explore student’s own expectations of the institution based upon their perceptions (internal and external) as identified in the sections above. Findings from the mixed method analysis showed that students derive their expectations based upon their perceptual influencers. That is, they make a judgement based upon these perceptions against the actual experience received to define how satisfactory this is to them. Thus there is a value placed upon the service they receive based upon factors which are of most importance to them and their university experience (Nilsen, 2009; Fredrickson, 2012; Dandridge, 2018). The findings from the quantitative analysis identified these factors to include ‘academic staff influence’ and ‘feedback given’. Staff influence was seen to be of significance at year 2 of students’ university study whilst year 3 was the most important period for

feedback received. The rationale for this can be clarified when looking at the qualitative feedback which showed that student's expectations of feedback increased significantly in their final year due to the importance of this period of study in relation to their degree classification. Comments from the focus group identified there was an increased expectation upon academic staff in relation to their response to student needs, including feedback, contact time and staff personality. In year 1 and 2 there were constructive views of these areas but it was in the final year that students were more willing to criticise staff performance, even rating staff on their performance i.e. critical of certain staff who were not meeting their service provision needs. Expectations of the teaching experience is a key area identified where expectations do not always match the actual experience received (Brinkworth et al., 2009).

The notion of service quality was discussed in detail in the literature review chapter of this thesis and identified that service quality in higher education is the difference between student expectations of their expected service against their own perceptions of the experience and how this influences satisfaction (Guolla, 1999; O'Neill and Palmer, 2004; Tan and Kek, 2004; Douglas et al., 2008). As students' expectations increase, then the perceptions of their service provision also rises meaning institutions need to improve the holistic offering to their learners. This research identifies the role of staff as a key factor in this service provision and thus a negative experience with these staff will impact negatively upon the university experience (Bates and Kay, 2013). Increased service expectations has given rise to the notion of students as customers (Kamvounias, 1999; Pitman, 2000; Douglas et al., 2006; Svensson and Wood, 2007) as the entitlement to a high quality service is directly linked to this concept (Williams, 1993; Wilkins et al., 2013). The research findings have identified that there are expectations placed upon the institution regarding the service provision they receive, however, students did not identify themselves as customers of the institution. This supports the view of several theorists (Sirvanci, 1996; Desai et al., 2001; Hussey and Smith, 2010) who identify that institutions treating students as customers is not the right approach for HEI's to take. There are fundamental differences between customers and students as students do not relate to the idea that they are customers of university and instead simply engage and participate in the wider educational process (Sirvanci, 1996; Afolabi and Stockwell, 2012). This is true of participants of the research undertaken

in this thesis where it was acknowledged that students' felt there was a mutual relationship between themselves and the university with several identifying the concept of shared benefits. By providing the students' with a satisfactory service the university will benefit in terms of feedback given by the 'satisfied' students in terms of feedback given e.g. positive NSS scores.

As identified earlier the research has identified that staff engagement was seen as a significant influencer upon the university experience and as such is a fundamental part of the service experience delivered. As has been identified participants in the focus group expressed a strong emotion that the interaction they had with academic staff within the institution positively or negatively impacted upon their experience. Therefore it could be argued that the university indulges these needs and ensures all expectations are met. However as identified by Emery et al. (2001), this could create the wrong culture within the institution whereby academic staff feel pressurised into adopting a 'customer-orientated' approach to their role. The dynamics of the student-tutor relationship is paramount to the achievement of a successful 'working' relationship but it is also important to ensure there is a leading figure in the relationship, Helms and Key (1994) argues this should be the academic staff member rather than the student. If academic staff / the university adopt an approach that the 'student is always right' this may increase student satisfaction, but may increase the notion of students of being more entitled to pass their course and receive good grades even if undeserved (Svensson and Wood, 2007). The findings of this research identify that although the demands of the students do increase over their time at the institution, there is not a correlation to their expectations on passing the programme. It was identified by students that they believed they were responsible for their own learning and that it was not the obligation of the university to 'give them' their degree qualification. Sharrock (2000) supports these findings and identifies students should not be given their education but instead must actively co-produce it. The role of staff should be to challenge student's thinking and engage them with knowledge to assist their learning.

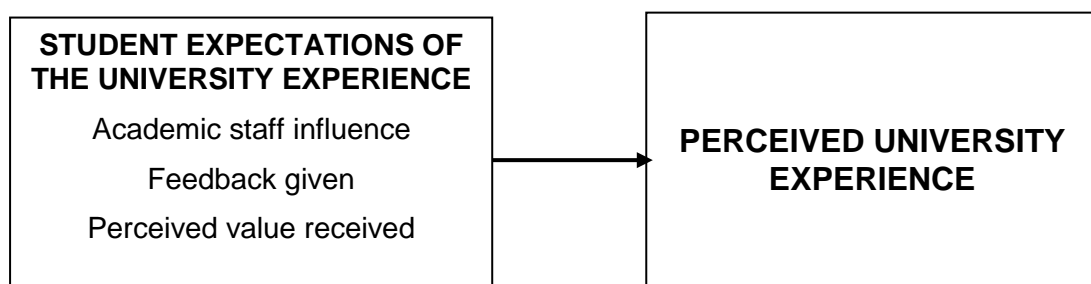
The research findings have also identified the importance of feedback that is given to students from academic staff. The quantitative research identified that this was statistically significant at stage 3, with comments from the qualitative research

supporting the importance of feedback at this year but also identifying that students at years 1 and 2 deemed tutor comments as important to their learning experience. It was identified in the literature review (Dana et al., 2001; Hill et al., 2003; Krentler and Grundnitski, 2004; Dandridge, 2018) that students identify quality of feedback as being one of the most important factors in relations to satisfaction of their university. The expectation of high quality feedback therefore relates to a satisfactory university experience, if the feedback expectation is not met by academic staff then a negative correlation to the overall experience at the institution will be given. When exploring why the research identified year 3 as being most significant can be explained by analysing the qualitative findings. Student participants identified that the assistance of academic staff and the feedback given at this stage was directly relevant to their degree classification. For example, one student identified how a member of staff had given time to discuss her work to assist in achieving a mark over 60 for the module, which she did after submission of the final piece of work. This therefore can be seen as a positive experience for the student and will correlate to their service expectations being met. The opposite scenario is also true, i.e. a negative experience in relation to feedback will lead to expectations not being met. The research findings showed that lecturers who did not give effective feedback or were difficult to approach meant that students were unsatisfied with the experience given. Consequently this underpins the quantitative findings that showed the significance of staff feedback upon the university experience. It was also noted that as dissatisfaction with a service increases then more prominence was given by student participants in relation to other factors, for example tuition fees. Indeed the qualitative findings showed that the respondents were very strong about the service they received when it linked to their own ability to succeed at the institution. This relates to the concept of value with the university experience, indeed students at year 3 of their programme clearly identified this as a significant concern for them, especially in relation to fees they pay for the service they receive. As such this is a key area of concern for the HEI and thus is a key part of driving student expectations of their institution. The following section of the chapter will explore these internal drivers towards university expectations further.

In the first year of study within the university it was recognised in the research that students were seen to have many concerns and uncertainties regarding the

experience they were to receive at the institution. However as they progress through their programme of study these personal drivers and perceptions were formulated and their expectations of the university became more formalised. Therefore the role of staff in managing these expectations and creating value become critically important, a consistent approach and message will guide students to the service standards delivered by the institution. An inconsistent approach by staff means there are discrepancies in service standards and thus this will impact upon student expectations (Kuh et al., 2007; Trowler 2010). This was found to be true in the qualitative findings where student's identified that their expectations were defined by the academic member of staff they were dealing with. Some identified that certain staff were helpful and supported their learning while others less so. This inconsistency in staff performance therefore directly relates to the satisfaction of the university experience and thus is a key area for HEI's to manage.

Analysis of the prisoners' dimension has found that the role of staff is a significant factor in the satisfaction of students' university experience and as such informs the framework regarding the drivers of expectations. Based upon the discussions in this section, this dimension had been updated to better reflect the nature of this dimension and the impact upon the actual university experience, see below. The title of this dimension has also been renamed to *student expectations of the university experience*.



7.1.4 Analysing the 'shadows' dimension

Having explored the key influencers on student expectations of their university experience (prisoners) it identified the role of staff in the satisfaction of the university experience. To further explore this it was important to identify other institutional factors that influence student expectations of the university experience. As such the shadows' dimension will explore key institutional influencers upon the student experience. Findings from the qualitative research identified that satisfaction with their university experience is enhanced by the support from wider institutional services received e.g. library provision. Satisfaction with the student learning experience is a consequence of both academic and social elements of the university environment (Douglas et al, 2006; Yeo and Li, 2012). Participants from the qualitative research identified that support received from wider university services such as the library, were beneficial to their university experience. This was generally true across all stages and a positive engagement with the wider university services was more likely to increase student satisfaction of the university experience. Although it is worth noting that some students did identify that they had never engaged with this university provision and thus it is not a holistic view of all students. However, an understanding of the role of wider staff upon the student experience is therefore noteworthy and is an area that the researcher has identified for further research upon completion of this thesis.

The findings from the quantitative research explored the importance of the influence of social factors on the university experience where it was identified that 'support from friends' was seen as a significant influencer by students at all years of their programme. However the importance of social activities whilst at the institution were not seen as significant. This was supported by the qualitative findings where participants identified that their friendship groups influenced their engagement with their studies and expectations of the institution. Johnston (2010) identifies that friendship groups form a strong influence upon student whilst at the institution. Wilcox et al. (2005) furthers this by identifying that making strong friendship groups improves student engagement with the institution and provides a support on their decision making process. It was identified in the focus groups that the opportunity to interact with their friends outside of class time increased the likelihood of them undertaking other activities within the university e.g. study for modules, attendance

at other faculty events. Those who did have such strong friendship groups identified that they were more likely to go home and not engage with the institution after classes. Therefore it has been identified that HEI's need to create environments within their institution to encourage students to socialise within the campus before, after and between their classes. It was acknowledged in the literature review that students who do not fully engage with their HEI are more inclined to see themselves as being independent of the university and thus may be more likely to withdraw from their programme of study. Consequently the support of friends can be seen as being a positive influence on the university experience had by the participants and thus is an area of importance for this research.

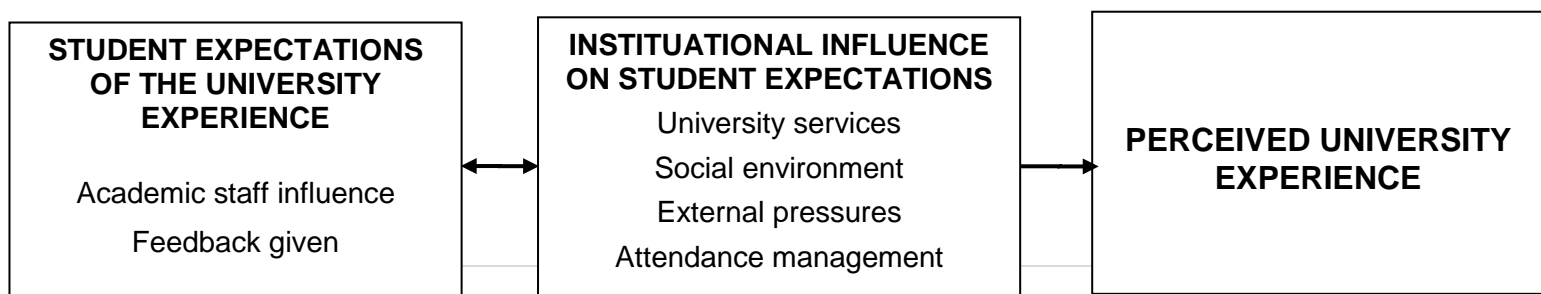
Another factor identified by student participants in the qualitative research and related to student engagement was the conflict many student's had between their academic study and a part-time employment in order that they can financially support themselves throughout their academic studies. Cooper et al. (2002); Callender (2008) found that there was increased financial need for students to work whilst at university. Consequently institutions need to be aware of the impact of this upon their students as clearly there is a fine balance supporting their studies and the impact upon academic performance. Part-time work therefore can be denied as an important influencer upon the university experience but one that is outside of the university's control. However it is important for the HEI, to support where possible, students with this, for example how does the university respond to student timetable change requests or additional support for classes missed due to work. This links back to discussion in the section 5.2.2, 'students' expectations of the university experience' (previously prisoners' dimension) where it was identified that academic staff had a strong influence upon the university experience. Therefore the key consideration for the HEI is to ensure staff are effectively engaging with their student's to ensure they are offering a supportive environment for those who work whilst studying.

Indeed working whilst studying has been identified as a beneficial experience for students as it increases their employability after Graduation (Curtis and Shani, 2002; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Curtis, 2007). Findings from the qualitative research supported this with several participants identifying that they were in a better position

to gain employment upon Graduation due to their part-time work experiences. There was however an indication by some, especially in year 3 that part-time work was a distraction from their studies and in some cases student's had needed to quit their job to fully concentrate on their studies. The fact that this was identified by students in their final year of studies is important for this research and correlates to discussions identified in the quantitative research. It was shown that the expectations of the 3rd year group changed and became more focused on achievement of their qualification (see section 5.2.2), whereas at earlier years perhaps the end aim for the student was not as clear to them. This was supported by several theorists (Curtis and Williams, 2002; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006) who identified students would not work if it was financially viable to do so as it is acknowledged to have a detrimental effect on their academic studies. This was supported by the focus group participants who identified that not working throughout their studies meant they could better focus on their academic studies. These external factors consequently impact on the students' expectations of the service received from the institution, if they feel that the university is not providing them with adequate support they are more likely to perceive this as a negative student experience. Cassidy-Smith et al. (2004) identifies this as disconfirmation paradigm where dissatisfaction arises from service expectations not being met i.e. if students expect support and don't receive it then satisfaction with the experience will be negative. Similarly there may be an impact on the wider student group if, due to work commitments, students do not engage with their programme of study i.e. leads to poor attendance on a module. This could therefore lead to a negative correlation amongst other students in the peer group, indeed this was supported by the qualitative findings where participants identified that fewer students in their classes had a direct impact upon their learning experience. This clearly articulates the impact upon the university experience but also sets a negative expectation around the service provision offered by the HEI, i.e. the expectation of a quality service drops due to previous experience. It was also identified by participants that this led to a lack of motivation by some students to attend classes themselves by deeming their classroom experience not valuable. This was identified strongly by students in the final year of their programme and relates directly to creating a positive or negative experience of the university experience.

Understanding the drivers that encourage a lack of student attendance are valuable measurement tools for HEI's to manage the university experience and therefore is a key element of the framework developed for this thesis. As identified in previous discussions, the shift towards providing a satisfactory service and efficient service to their students is now a key strategic concern for universities (Pitman, 2000; Svensson and Wood, 2007). This is especially true when tuition fees continue to rise and students often have the greater 'power' in their relationship with the institution and as has been identified the service provision offered by the institution needs to meet expectations. Qualitative findings identified that the expectations of participants and perceived value of their service were directly linked to their tuition fees. It can be argued that this is a market force linked to policy changes in the sector (see chapter 2) rather than a deliberate strategy by the university it does significantly impact upon student expectations of the university experience. The qualitative findings identified that this was most relevant to students in their final year of study and identifies that 'value' of the university experience is a significant factor in impacting upon the expectations of their university.

Analysis of the shadows' dimension has found that there are several significant institutional factors upon the expectations of the student university experience. These have been detailed in the discussion below and are reflected in the updated dimension *institutional influence on student expectation*. The research has identified that university services such as the library, the social environment created for the students, external pressures i.e. part-time employment and student attendance management were all seen as key factors influencing this dimension. As such it can be identified that there is a correlation between institutional influence and student expectations of their experience, as such the relationship between the two dimensions has been identified below. The updated dimension will be added to the framework to give a more accurate view of the institutional influence upon the actual university experience.

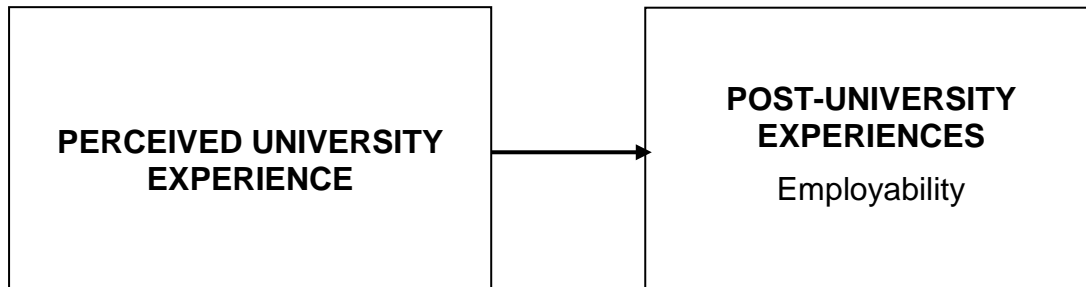


7.1.5 Analysing the 'exit' dimension

The final dimension to consider in relation to the conceptual framework is the exit dimension, essentially this looks to identify how the university experience influences future career / study opportunities for the student exiting the HEI. It also allowed for an opportunity to explore if there was a relationship between student expectations and their end goals upon completion of their degree programme. This research did not focus on 'what' students achieved upon Graduation as it was not an objective of the thesis, however it did ascertain the motivators for study and therefore a correlation can be drawn upon 'why' they undertook a higher education programme i.e. their motivators to achieve. The findings from the qualitative research identified that employability after Graduation was seen as a key reason for undertaking a higher education programme, with student participants acknowledging career aspirations as a significant driver when deciding upon their decision to study a course at university. It was recognised that a higher education qualification is seen as a fundamental requirement in relation to future career prospects. Having a higher education credential is a definitive reason for undertaking higher education and the benefits it brings for future employability upon Graduation (Rawson, 2000; Tomlinson, 2008; Sabri, 2011; Scutter et al., 2011). Therefore it can be identified that employability is a key driver for students attending university as it has been identified that there is an expectation that this will increase their prospects of employment post-university.

Institutions therefore need to be aware of this fact when engaging with current and prospective students to communicate how the institution supports employment prospects through opportunities offered e.g. careers service, employability opportunities such as internship/placement schemes. By ensuring this information is clear it will ensure HEI's have advised students appropriately in relation to this key driver. However it is worth noting that the institution cannot guarantee students graduating a job upon leaving the institution and as such there is not a definitive link between university study and employment. This is an area that has been identified for further research upon completion of this thesis and will be discussed further in section 7.4.

Based on the discussions above the exit dimension has been renamed as *post-university experiences* to be more reflective of the relationship between the university experience and the post-university expectations.



This section of the report has further explored the dimensions of the conceptual framework and identified the key drivers within the dimensions based on the mixed method data collection undertaken in this thesis. The titles of these dimensions have been re-evaluated to be more appropriate to the research findings, as such an updated conceptual framework is identified in figure 7.1 below. **Alongside this, as in chapter 3 of the thesis there also needs to be an understanding of the student self-reflection during the framework. This is identified in discussion in this chapter that clearly shows as familiarity and understanding of the university environment is gained then so too does student expectations. This is especially true in the latter stages of study where the importance of successful completion of modules to achieve a satisfactory degree classification drives increased expectations upon staff. This realisation of these expectations, it could be argued, is due to students reaching a point of enlightenment in terms of their understanding of what is and isn't expected of their university. As such the framework reflects this through relevance to the known factors that drive their satisfaction within the institution.**

Unknown ----- *Student reflective journey through the framework* -----> *Known (enlightened)*

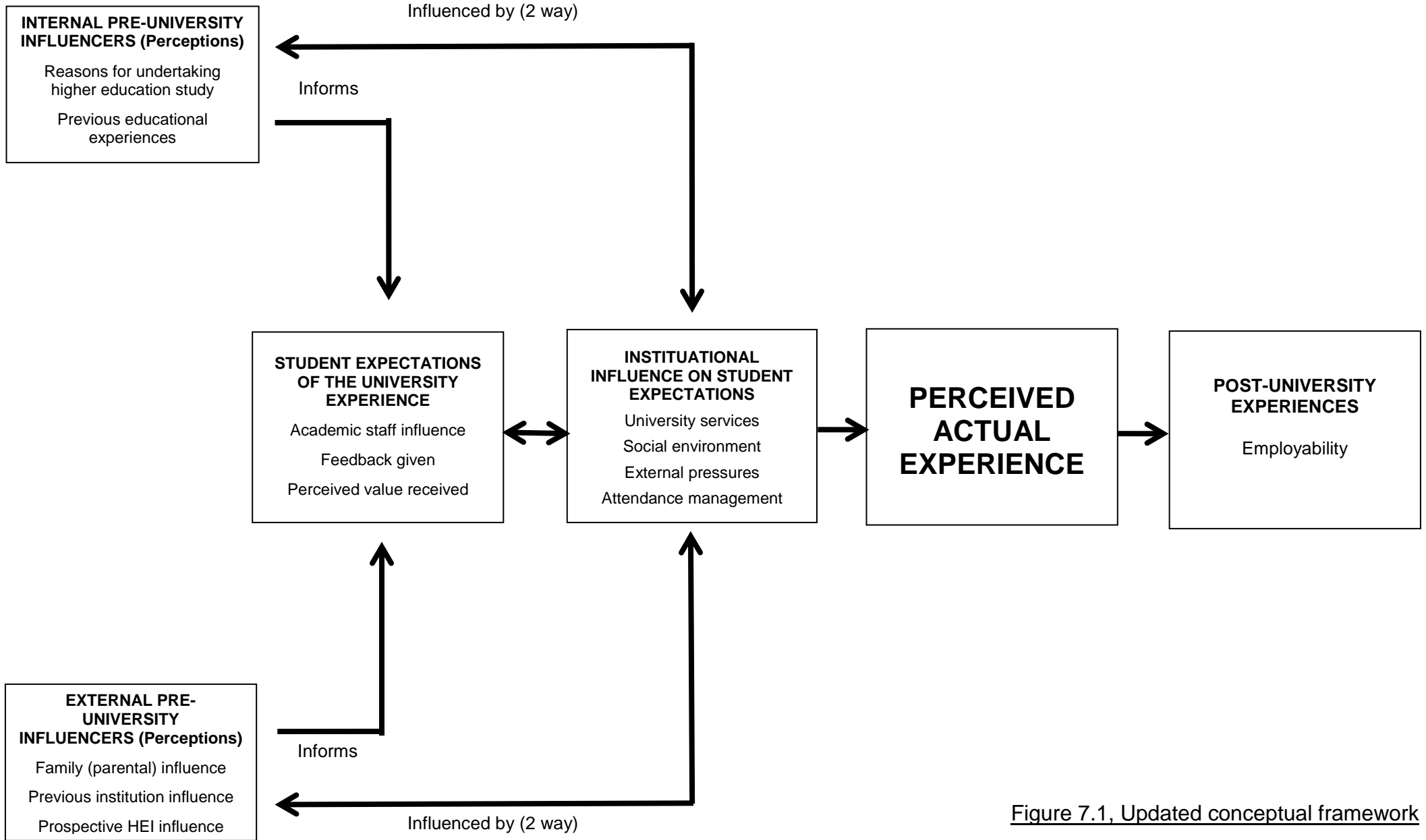


Figure 7.1, Updated conceptual framework

When examining this updated version of the framework in relation to the original framework developed for the thesis (see chapter 3, figure 3.1), it can be recognised that there are some clear differences between the two. The key differences identified are that there is greater clarity regarding the dimensions based upon the research undertaken in this thesis. For example, the perceptual influencers have been defined as internal and external influencers which show that students own thoughts and motivators influence the expectations they placed upon the institution as well as external factors that include family and previous/prospective institutions. Student expectations are heavily influenced by staff within the institution and have a significant impact upon their satisfaction of the service provision given by the university. The expectations are also informed by the external and internal perceptual influencers. Institutional influence on expectations was found to have a direct relationship between student expectations, how these factors are managed by the HEI therefore has a direct influence upon satisfaction within the institution. The key driver for students post-university (after graduation) was found to be related to employability which was also recognised as a perceptual influencer upon the expectations of students within the HEI. Therefore it has been shown that the updated conceptual framework above is a more appropriate tool for the management of the university experience. It was also identified that there are differing critical influencers depending upon the year of study, this is a key finding from this research and will be discussed further in section 7.3.

7.2 Theoretical and practical contributions of the conceptual framework

The framework developed in this thesis has been established that there are theoretical and practical implications in relation to managing the drivers of student expectations to achieve a satisfactory university experience. As such these will be further explored below.

7.2.1 Theoretical contribution of the conceptual framework

The theoretical contributions of the framework are based upon the four dimensions developed, i.e. internal pre-university influencers, external pre-university influencers, student expectations of their university experience and institutional influence on student expectations. The dimensions have been informed by the literature review and pilot interviews and underpinned by the findings from the mixed methodology

which identified the significant influencers on student expectations. Therefore the first theoretical contribution is that the research has identified the key dimensions that impact upon satisfaction with the student university experience. These dimensions are related to the concept of service quality in educations (Zeithaml et al., 1990; O'Neill and Palmer, 2004; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Yeo, 2008; De Jager and Gbadamosi, 2010) but are further developed to ascertain the student view of these theories, i.e. the perspective of the student in their engagement with the institution and the definition of a satisfactory service to them. The second theoretical contribution is that the research has been undertaken on a longitudinal basis and therefore the identified dimensions have been tested across the three year academic period. Thus the findings of the research establish that the dimensions are influential across all stages of the academic experience although some elements are more relevant to specific years as defined in the quantitative chapter. This will be further explored in section 5.4 of this chapter. Finally the framework has explored the current gaps in the literature by establishing a holistic view of the university experience and drivers upon student expectations. This is an area that has not been covered by previous studies and therefore the research undertaken for this thesis has been able to make a fundamental contribution to the field of study

In summary, the research has undertaken an analysis of the student journey and identified key drivers of expectations upon the student experience based upon the conceptual framework identified based upon Plato's philosophical viewpoint. The literature research has identified the influencers upon student expectations of higher education. This research has therefore built on and tested this existing knowledge as well as identifying new theoretical contributions based on the research findings. The outcomes from research will contribute new knowledge to the field of study and the framework developed be adapted as best practice for the sector.

7.2.2 Practical contribution of framework

Having identified the theoretical contributions of the framework it is also important to establish the practical contributions. The identified dimensions have shown that there are clear influencers on student perceptions (H01) and expectations (H02) which can be understood by the HEI. The benefit of this is by recognising these drivers upon the university experience, institutions will be better placed to firstly

understand student expectations and secondly make attempts to effectively control and manage them to provide a satisfactory student experience. It has been identified that prior to joining the institution student perceptions (H01) can be influenced by internal and external influencers. For the HEI it can be identified that both are prevalent but perhaps the external influencers are those which the institution can have the most control over. This is due to the ability to influence student perceptions through their externally facing activities such as recruitment events, marketing literature, and engagement with 'feeder' institutions i.e. 6th forms, colleges etc. By creating effective communication messages the institution is better able to manage and control the perceptions of the students. There is also the ability to provide some influence on another key driver of student perceptions, family/parents, who were identified as having a key role in the decision making process of students. Thus when marketing the institution it is important they are aware of the messages delivered to both students but also family influencers.

Student expectations (H02) were identified as being influenced by the perceptual dimensions as well as students own views towards their expectations of university. A key influencer identified in the research was the role of staff involvement in the university experience, therefore clearly this is an area that the institution is able to control (within reason). For example setting effective guidance regarding feedback given to students within the institution is important to managing student expectations i.e. what is the expected timescale for having assignment feedback returned. There is also a need to manage how this feedback is delivered consistently by the staff within the institution, it was identified in the qualitative research that there was often inconsistencies in how and when feedback was delivered and indeed how much time academic staff gave to students. Therefore the university needs to be aware of this and ensure that there are effective systems in place towards establishing consistency in the approaches to staff engagement with students as well as how the importance of this theme is communicated to their staff. Managing staff influence towards service standards therefore has a significant impact upon student expectations and the university experience received. The second significant influencer upon student expectation was identified as the drivers with the institution itself, the qualitative research identified that provision of university services, social environment and how the institution manages attendance as key factors in creating a

satisfactory student experience. Consequently it is imperative that the institution understands and where possible applies these factors as a guide for making decisions within the HEI so that they can create the most effective environment for managing student expectations. Therefore the research has established the key drivers which positively impact upon the university experience and has established that the framework developed can be seen as a tool to gauge student expectations for HEI's within the higher education sector.

7.3 Critical assessment of research questions

This section will critically assess if the key research questions of the thesis have been answered, followed by an identification of the major limitations of the study. Finally the section will explore the areas identified in the research that require further discussion and research post doctorate. The thesis title is '*an investigation into the key influencers and drivers on student's expectations of their higher education institution*' with the overarching aim for the research to '*identify a framework for higher educational institutions to understand and manage the expectations of their students*'. From the research undertaken it can be established that these have been answered through the identification of the four key dimensional drivers upon student expectations of the university experience. These dimensions have been applied to the framework in order that the overarching aim is answered. Looking at the specific research questions it can be identified that research question 1 (***RQ1 - What are the key drivers upon student choice of HEI and do these influence their perception of the university?***), and its related research objective (*RO1 - to identify the drivers and influencers on students' choice of university and evaluate how student perception influences satisfaction at the institution*) has been critically reviewed in chapter 2 which identified that key drivers upon student perceptions of their university experience. These included the influence of close family members and friends, the prospect of employment after Graduation, the pre-enrolment marketing of the institution, prior academic experiences and perceived quality of the institution. These influencers informed the development of the conceptual framework for the research developed in chapter 3 and identified the influence of perceptions on student expectations of their university experience. The framework was tested by the mixed methodology through quantitative questionnaires and qualitative focus groups. The results of the research identified that there were external and internal

pre-university influences upon student choice of institution and that these initial perceptions inform the development of the setting of their expectations within the institution.

When examining research question 2 (**RQ2**) - ***What are the key drivers upon student expectations of university?***, and the related research objective (RO2) - *To identify the drivers on student expectations and identify the influence upon the university experience.* The critical analysis of the literature in chapter 2, identified the satisfaction of the university experience was informed by students own expectations of the institution, with the role of academic staff seen as a key driver. Prior experiences and perception of value with the educational experience were also seen as significant. When undertaking further research into the topic through the quantitative and qualitative research (chapters 5 and 6) it was defined that the influencers upon expectations were two-fold, firstly there are the drivers upon the students own expectations, these were informed by the perceptions they had of the institution (RQ1) as well as their experience of the 'service' offered by the university staff. Secondly, there are institutional drivers on the expectations of students which are factors that the institution has an element of 'control' upon and that include the wider university services, the social environment within the institution, the management of external pressures that impact upon student behaviour e.g. attendance management procedures.

Finally research question 3 (**RQ3**) - ***Do student expectations stay the same during their time at university or change?*** and the related research objective (RO3) – *to identify if student expectations remain consistent or change over the period of their academic study.* The research findings (chapters 5 and 6) have identified that there is a change in the expectations of students over their period of study at the institution. The importance placed upon the key influences identified in the research show that there are different expectations of the 'service' received and that these change over their time at the university. Therefore by understanding which year of study these factors are most significant in the student journey, HEI's can establish procedures to effectively manage the expectation of their students. The conceptual framework developed has been further adapted to show which factors were classified as most significant influencers for each dimension on the

university experience by year of study (see appendices 8 - 10). Also identified is the method of research collection the factor was identified by the participants. This is particularly useful to note when looking at how student expectations change as the quantitative research findings were undertaken at the beginning of each academic year with the qualitative discussions at the end of the academic year. It is noted that there is a change in students' views on the university experience when exploring the quantitative and qualitative research findings. This can be due to students' understanding changes as they progress through the years but also due to the fact that the quantitative questionnaire is structured in nature whereas qualitative focus groups allow for a more discursive approach and thus more opinions are raised. To define the findings of the research further a colour scheme has been used to define which results were based predominately upon the quantitative or qualitative results.

It has been identified that there is a strong importance placed overall on year 2 in relation to all dimensions of the research. It shows that this year group has been identified as a significant period of study in relation to the expectations placed upon the university. When considering the reasoning for this it can be identified that students at this stage are no longer 'new' to the institution and are in a better position to reflect upon their first year at the university, they have also had chance to better formulate expectations of their university experience and can begin to make judgements on their satisfaction with the service provision they have received. This also clarifies why year 1 was not identified as a significant stage in the research. In the qualitative research findings it was recognised that when students first start at a HEI they often have uncertainties and differing perceptions of what to expect from the university experience. These have been based upon the external and internal influencers identified in this research i.e. parents, previous experiences etc. As the process of engagement with the institution develops over the year then greater clarity is given to these early views and how they are met by the university. Over this time the expectations of students will also develop based upon their own understanding of the higher education environment e.g. the importance of independent study, and thus again underpins the importance of the findings at year 2 of study.

At year 3 the expectations of students again develop where it has been acknowledged that their focus shifts towards the end of their studies and the importance of their classification and future career prospects become more pressing concerns. At this stage it could be explained that they are 'institutionalised' and have a more accepting tolerance around what is perceived as less important issues of their experience. However the fundamentally important factors to them are strengthened which increases the likelihood to criticise the university over perceived poor service e.g. lack of appropriate feedback or staff engagement. The students at this year group began to assess the value of the service they received and thus began to 'judge' the institution against their actual performance expectations. This is therefore a critical stage for the HEI's when the expectations from these students need to be carefully managed by the institution to ensure that they receive a satisfactory university experience and in return provide positive feedback to the HEI when asked about their experiences (i.e. NSS) over the period of study. In this research it has been identified that feedback from staff in regards to academic performance is a significant factor for students at this stage, therefore HEI's need to put strategies and processes in place to ensure this is provided. For example the institution could advise academic staff to be more specific to students in regards to what is seen as feedback e.g. summative as well as formative. They could also hold feedback sessions where students are invited to discuss feedback given on assignments rather than simply reading feedback on the assignment front sheet. These relatively minor changes to the procedures undertaken by the university could result in noteworthy positive experiences upon their students experience within the institution. Therefore by understanding the most important factors to their students university experience at each year of study the HEI is able to effectively manage the expectations to ensure a positive experience is given.

7.4 Conclusions

As has been described above, the thesis has explored the key factors that influence satisfaction with their university. A conceptual framework was developed and explored the key drivers that influence the perceived university experience to allow HEI's to better understand the needs and expectations of their students. It has been identified that student expectations change over their university journey and as they become more self-aware and enlightened then their expectations can increase. This was especially true of their views on engagement with university staff and how this impacts upon their experiences and satisfaction within the institution. As such the greater ability by the HEI to manage these factors will be of benefit to them, not just in meeting student expectations within the institution but also how this is reflected in survey results undertaken by the students. By increasing satisfaction, universities will benefit from positive feedback and allow them to effectively and favourably to prospective future students.

Therefore, the discussions in this chapter have evidenced how the three key research questions (RQ1-RQ3) have been answered and demonstrated that the related research objectives have been accomplished. In terms of achieving the research title of the thesis to *investigate the key influencers and drivers on student's expectations of their higher education institution*, it has been identified that there are significant drivers upon student expectations of their university experience throughout their study at the institution. These are informed by the students' initial perceptions of the HEI and alongside how these influencers are managed by the institution. The conceptual framework has classified these dimensions to inform the relationships between student perceptions, expectations and the actual university experience. The next section of the chapter will discuss the potential limitations of the study, as well as identify areas for further research.

7.5 Limitations of the study

The potential limitations of the study can be related to four key questions; 1. Is the use of a mixed methodology appropriate for developing the conceptual framework of the study? 2. Is the framework holistic enough to assess the student experience across the students' study at the institution? 3. To what degree is the conceptual framework developed in this study authenticated? Finally, 4. What are the views of academic staff in relation to the management of student expectations?

7.5.1 Limitations of mixed methodology

The decision to use mixed methodology for this study was informed by the longitudinal nature of the research and the need to test student expectations at the beginning and end of each academic year studied at the institution. When undertaking a literature search on the most appropriate methods, it was identified that this approach allows the researcher to gather both philosophical assumptions and to test this using appropriate methods of inquiry. Essentially the data collection design allows the researcher to identify truths that exist both using the testing of hypotheses and the measurement of relationships between variables. This research therefore used both a quantitative questionnaire survey as well as qualitative semi-structured interviews on university undergraduate students. The findings of this resulted in the successful development of a conceptual framework as set out in chapter 4 of this study. One limitation of this is that the data collected was all taken from student participants at one higher education institution, and therefore application of the framework at other universities would be beneficial. Although this is mitigated slightly as the pilot interview results were from an alternative HEI and thus add substance to the results from the mixed method data collection.

A second limitation is that the questionnaire developed for the research was used throughout the three-year research period and not adapted in any way. Although this was essential for consistency in the data collection, it could be identified that some questions were not as relevant towards the end of university study as they were in year 1. However this did not significantly impact upon the data findings and the information gathered allowed for conclusive identification of key drivers on student expectations. It is therefore recommended that the framework is further

tested by application to the sector to correlate that the issues identified in this survey are relevant to the management of student expectations with a HEI.

7.5.2 Holistic nature of framework

When ascertaining the holistic nature of the developed framework it has been identified that the research has examined the key influencers upon the student experience across the three-year period of study and looks at pre-entry perceptual drivers through to the actual university experience undertaken. There is also some identification of the post-university experience although this has not been significantly tested in this research due to a lack of access to these participants. Therefore it can be shown that the framework has conclusively identified the student journey by establishing the pre-institutional perceptual influencers as well as the drivers upon expectations whilst at the university. It is also identified which periods of the academic experience had most influence upon the overall university experience. To further improve the holistic findings of the research it is suggested that further analysis be undertaken in relation to post-university experience and the relationship between the frameworks developed for this thesis.

7.5.3 Validity of the holistic framework

The literature review of this thesis identified that there was no clear framework to group the key drivers upon student expectations and the implications for the university experience. Although models existed in relation to student satisfaction and the quality expectations of students, the relationship between these differing elements were not clearly defined by a framework to allow HEI's to manage their students' experience within the institution. Nor did the existing theories look at the student journey across a longitudinal perspective of their studies. Therefore, one key emphasis of this thesis was to develop a framework that integrates all of the differing drivers upon the university experience. To achieve this, the developed framework is based upon four underpinning dimensions, internal pre-university influencers, external pre-university influencers, student expectations of their university experience and institutional influence on student expectations. Despite these strong philosophical and theoretical foundations, a limitation for this study is that the developed framework has not as yet been validated through appropriate testing to reveal the extent of its robustness. The research has accomplished its

overarching aim and met the set research objectives therefore answered the research title and research questions. To further underpin these findings an area for future research is to further test the holistic frameworks (at each year) developed in this thesis within the higher education sector to ascertain the viability of the findings.

7.5.4 Academic staff perspective

The final consideration in relation to potential limitations of the study is that the framework developed has focussed upon the view of students in relation to their academic experience and therefore not sought to ascertain the thoughts of academic and wider service staff on their role in the management of student expectations. The research has identified that university, especially academic staff, have a significant influence upon the positive or negative expectations of students within the institution. Therefore this is an area that could be further developed in order to better define the dimensions identified in the framework and add the university staff perspective to the findings. Thus the final recommendation is that the views of wider staff within the university are sought to identify their influence on the university experience. This research would be used to further develop the key findings of the thesis in relation to the identified dimensions and further strengthen the framework developed. In summary, it has been identified in this section that there are some limitations to this research and some areas for further research have been identified. Despite this it can be argued that the research findings are still significant. This thesis has undertaken an analysis of the undergraduate university experiences and identified drivers upon this by undertaking quantitative research of 176 undergraduate students by questionnaire and qualitative research of 17 student participants via 3 focus group over a three-year academic period. The results from this has allowed the researcher to identify a framework that provides a wide-ranging analysis of the influencers on the undergraduate student experience and therefore can be identified as being a fair representation on the demands upon HEI's across the higher education sector.

7.5.5 Areas for future study

Based upon the above identified potential limitations of the study, the following have been identified as further areas of study for researcher post-doctorate.

1. Research into the views and perspectives of university staff, particularly academic staff, to identify their perceived role in defining student expectations within the institution. The findings of which would be applied to the conceptual framework developed for this thesis to provide a further perspective on the drivers upon the university experience
2. Undertake further analysis into post-university experiences of graduating students to define what, if any, role the dimensions identified in the conceptual framework play in students' future employability or study. This will allow for further clarification in regards to student's 'exit' from their institution and if they felt the experience was of value to them.
3. Further testing of developed framework in the higher education sector to underpin the dimensions identified and identify that there is a relevance and use for other HEI's in managing their student expectations and university experience.

It is hoped that the above areas of further study will be undertaken by researcher himself to continue the research that has been undertaken to date. This will allow for further development of knowledge within this field of study in order that the framework can be refined where necessary and explored with different perspectives. The final section of this chapter is below and will reflect upon the researchers' experiences throughout the doctorate, by identifying challenges as well as successes during the PhD journey.

7.6 Personal development: reflection of the researchers PhD experience

My reflection upon the experience of completing this doctorate it can be identified as a rollercoaster of emotions, both in terms of the thesis itself but also my personal life. Whilst undertaking the doctorate I have changed job role twice, moved house twice, been married and most importantly had a son, a busy period of my life. Therefore my research has peaked and troughed depending upon these life events. The initial rationale for me undertaking my PhD was career development, at the time I was teaching higher education programmes at a further education college and wished to progress my career into the higher education sector. As identified above I have been successful in this goal and therefore the motivation to complete the thesis changed to a personal motivator. The ability to undertake research into an area of interest and add significant contribution to knowledge was the key driver for me to complete the research. A significant challenge throughout my PhD has been time management and to be truthful at times, motivation. I would have 'peaks' of productivity and then 'troughs' of non-productivity, often this was linked to my changing personal circumstances identified above. This included taking a year's leave of absence when my son was born in order to support my wife. However I did persist with the thesis throughout these difficulties and can now acknowledge that my consistency in managing these issues was the key to the eventual completion of my doctorate. Having appropriate support throughout these periods, especially the low points, was therefore very important to me and I would like to thank my wife Carley and wider family for their constant belief in me. I must also place on record my sincere thanks to my supervisor Dr Seema Bhate who has been a constant support and motivator throughout my research, who helped me set and manage deadlines and establish a programme to plan ahead and ensure that suitable timescales were in place for the achievement of my research objectives.

The subject area of the thesis has been influenced by my academic interest and job roles which have been brought together towards the thesis topic. Initially I was interested in the marketization of higher education but as my research developed I realised that the real passion I had was towards the 'student journey' and how satisfaction within the institution is influenced. The subject matter has meant that I can apply my research to my roles as programme and module leader within my own institution. The practical benefits of this is that I feel better placed to emphasis with

and understand my learners needs and as such believe I can be more effective in my role.

As identified above there have been many challenges during the doctorate and these have required me to search deeply into my personal ambition, motivators and abilities to meet these head on. At times I did wonder *'is it worth it?'* or *'why am I putting myself through this?'* especially on occasions when my wife and son were enjoying a walk in the park on a sunny day or socialising with other friends and family members. It was true that I did on some occasions think *'I'm going to quit!'* then upon reflection at a later date I would think no, I will achieve this, not just for myself but also my family. Thus my internal motivators have been intrinsically linked to succeeding for my family, as well as myself. Other challenges were related to my changing job roles and my tendency to put 'work first' over my PhD studies and not always 'finding the right balance'. To try and mitigate this I began assigning myself designated study days when I would put my studies before work. I found this strategy extremely useful and made me more self-disciplined to successfully complete tasks and research for the thesis. I also found the analysis of my quantitative data a challenge as at first I really struggled to 'get my head' around what was required, however after persevering and reading many texts as well as having discussions with colleagues I was able to appreciate how the numbers and statistics were able to tell a story about the data. Once this 'clicked' with me it suddenly made sense and I was able to identify key themes in the data.

During the Doctorate I was able to present a conference paper at the Academy of Marketing conference with the early findings of my research. This was a very worthwhile experience and allowed me to present my initial findings to other academics and receive constructive feedback on this as well as my presentation style. One of the disappointing aspects of my research was that I did not get the opportunity to present my research at further conferences throughout my Doctorate, there are many reasons for this but predominantly relates to the difficulties in balancing work, research and family life. It is however a key aim that upon completion of the thesis I will look to publish the findings of the research in relevant journals and conferences. Additionally the doctorate has allowed me to further expand my understanding of the influencers on student expectations and how these

theoretically and practically impact upon the university experience. As identified earlier these have allowed me to more clearly understand and make attempts to apply the research findings to my job role. I have, where possible, used the framework developed in the research to effectively manage student programme issues within the faculty and improve the student experience.

Finally, looking forward I will continue to develop the findings from the research and identify further areas for development. This will allow me to continue to build and develop my understanding of the topic and enable me to focus on developing the themes identified further. I also hope to turn this research into academic publications with the aim to make the findings further known to those in the relevant academic fields. In summary, my journey throughout this doctorate can be summarised with the follow quotes.

“It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.” Confucius

“Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.” Joshua Marine

“The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.” Winston Churchill

“By making yourself a life-long learner you’ll keep discovering new and exciting things about yourself and others.” Rachel Robins

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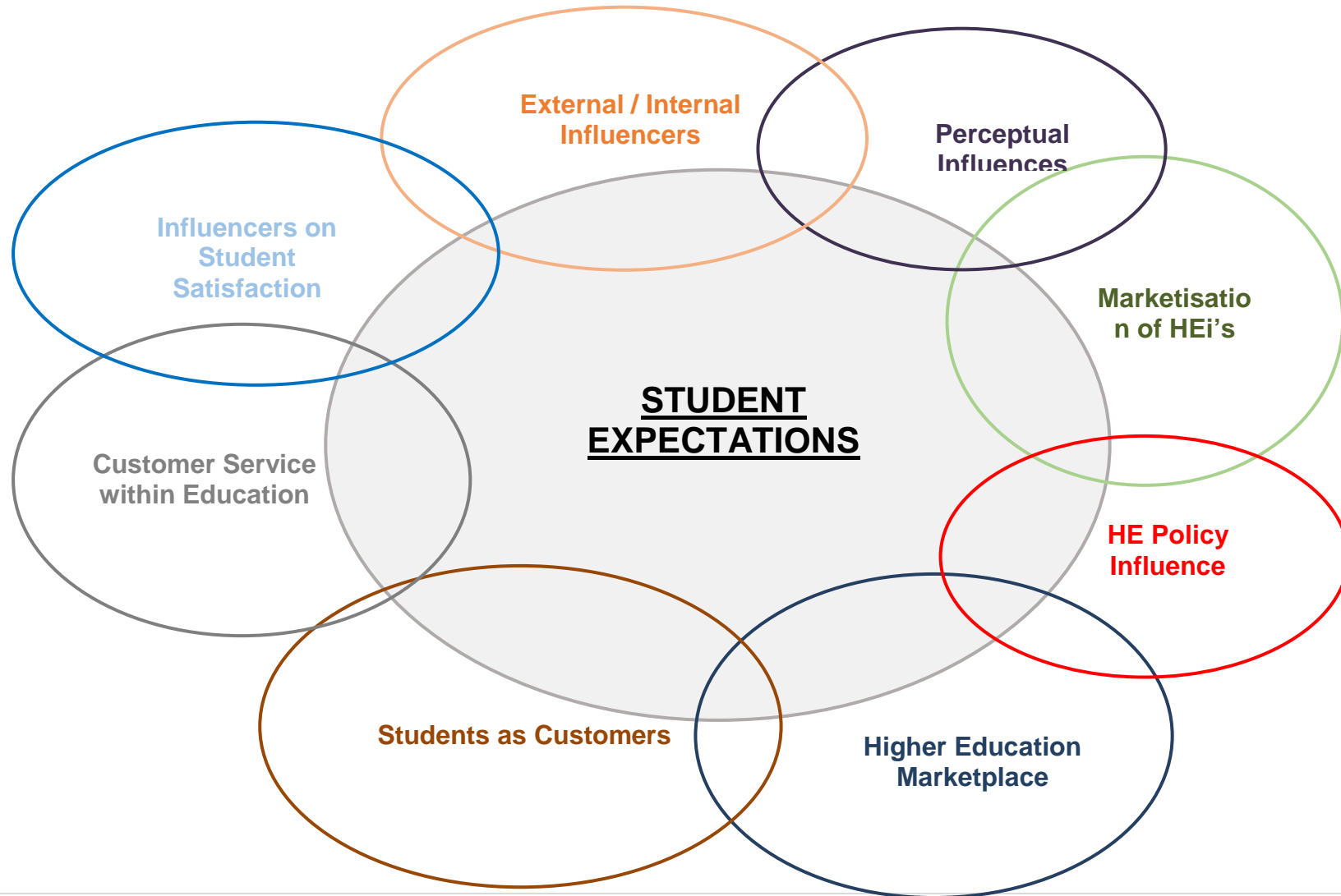
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APPENDIX 1

Initial literature search focus



APPENDIX 2

Transcript of pilot interviews

Interview 1

INT	So, the first question I've got is when you were initially thinking about studying at university, what made you think about coming to university?
P1	I've always assumed that I'd come to university just to get qualifications and you get more money after. I think when I finished school, I still wanted to take learning. There were different degrees that I wanted to do but I just started this one.
INT	So that was always in your own mind that you wanted to go to university.
P1	I kind of assumed I was.
INT	Are you the first person in your family to do so?
P1	Yeah, the first one straight out of school. I've got family who've done it like the past few years, like in their mid-forties but I was the first one out of school.
INT	Even though no one had done it before you were always quite clear in your head?
P1	My mum and dad wanted me to do it as well.
INT	So, when you were looking at your universities, I'm assuming you looked at a few different ones. What were the kind of most important factors for you choosing?
P1	At first, I wanted to do a different degree. I went to this fair and I kind of was I choose to go to Stirling that's when I wanted to do Economics and stuff. This was probably my last choice and it was my last option but I put it down because it was local. I wanted to go to Bradford because it had a really good School of Management and then Huddersfield and I put Leeds down to fill up my choices. Then these got back to me.
INT	Was there anything in particular. Was it a location reason or was it a course reason?
P1	It was location. I was kind of late in and I didn't go to any universities. My cousin works at Bradford so that's why I wanted to go there because she contacted me and said you can come here. It wasn't until after I'd done all the statement and everything and sent everything in, and I got accepted but Bradford, I went before I applied.
INT	So, you were kind of late in to the process.
P1	Bradford was the only one I went to see before I actually picked where I was going to go. That's why Bradford was my first one. I went back after I picked it and I didn't like it. When I went the first time it was with my cousin. The second time it was everyone I was going to be with.
INT	Different feel for the place?
P1	Definitely.
INT	OK so it was kind of location but also, I guess...
P1	It's a good management at thingy but I didn't know this one was good. I'd never really been here.
INT	I guess in a sense it was kind of going in, not full of information. The decision was kind of landed for you.
P1	Yes.
INT	There's no right or wrong way to do it as long as you ended up where you kind of want to be. So, before you came to university did you have any kind of set expectations?
P1	I thought it would be harder. Because I'm doing Foundation its not been that much of a jump like I thought it'd be. It might be because I'm doing different stuff to what I've done before like Business; I've always done Sciences but it's more like facts and figures rather than things and stuff.
INT	Did you have any kind of 'this is what I'm getting myself into' or was it...
P1	I've had an interest in Business, I liked it. I knew about it and stuff but I'd never studied it.
INT	Away from the programme you didn't have any expectations about what university life was it was just kind of see what it's like when I get there which is fair enough.
P1	I felt like it would just be an extension of school but I'm here a lot more. I'm not in halls and what not.
INT	So, it's just a continuation of your journey.

P1	Yes.
INT	So, from those initial expectations I guess and you kind of mentioned this, are they different to what thought. When you arrived here was it different to what you thought?
P1	Yes, I think because with our group it's small isn't it. You know you have in your mind about a big lecture theatre. I think if you don't, like live in here, the smaller the groups, the better. If you're in a big theatre you probably won't make many friends. It's easier, definitely in small groups.
INT	It was easier to settle than you initially thought.
P1	Yes, it's a lot easier to make friends than I thought.
INT	That might be due to the nature of the size of the group. I suppose as you progress through, groups will change. Any other kind of general perceptions that you had, have they been kind of agreed with or not. You know things like the libraries, things like the social side of it.
P1	It's really good socially here. You've got the Student Union. The library is big and posh here. The whole place is.
INT	I suppose different institutions are going to have different...
P1	There's different kinds of people. You know if you go to Huddersfield it's more local. If I went to Huddersfield there'd be people there I went to high school and primary school with. Here there's nobody I know.
INT	Do you think that's a good or bad thing?
P1	Good. I kind of like being by myself. If I'd gone to Huddersfield there'd be people I went to school with and we'd be on the same course, same class. I'd have been stuck with them.
INT	You've stepped out of your comfort zone in a way.
P1	Part of me didn't want to move too far away. If I'd known what it would have been like I would have done.
INT	You are actually, next year, moving away so in a sense you've, over this year, that's something that I guess has changed?
P1	That's the side of small groups. You get close to people.
INT	During your first academic year, which you've now finished, what do you think have been the main kind of factors that have enhanced or given you a good feeling about your studies. What have you really enjoyed? What have been the positives?
P1	I like Accounting. I like, I've got a lot better at essay writing. I couldn't write before but you know when your referencing it's a lot more proper isn't it. Now I can write a proper report. It's a lot better than what it was like at the beginning.
INT	Did you learn that through kind of study skills?
P1	Yes. Like Wendy's.
INT	That's what it's there for. Again, it's this idea that you're coming here to improve yourself.
P1	Writing at university level is completely different to writing at school level. A lot.
INT	There's a big change in expectations and also in the way in which you have to approach that. Anything else, have you been involved in anything else in university and around campus?
P1	I wish I had of done but I think it's like because I'm at home a lot. If I'd have been closer I might have joined societies. I like being at university when I'm here.
INT	Maybe some opportunities in the next 3 years you'll have? Looking at kind of relationships with staff at the university, you mentioned you've worked with Wendy. I know she's kind of a tutor, do you think you've built relationships with staff?
P1	Yes, I think again because it's small class sizes, it's a lot more hands on. Like if in big lectures they wouldn't know your name, would they?
INT	You found that because of the groups sizes, and not wanting to put words in your mouth, you've especially been able to engage with teaching staff and tutors.
P1	It's not that easy to email someone you don't know.
INT	What about wider university staff, whether it be administrative staff, careers advisors...
	I don't know the careers advisors. You recognise faces at the desk.
INT	Would you say the strongest relationships you have; who are the strongest relationships you have?

P1	You! Wendy. I email Wendy a lot.
INT	The teaching staff?
P1	Yeah, Andy and Dave.
INT	So, the purpose is that, because of the nature of the course I guess, you do develop strong relationships.
P1	Yes.
INT	With teaching staff and tutors and perhaps other support areas of the university.
P1	Yes, definitely.
INT	So, moving on slightly and slightly changing the tack. Have you come across the term student experience before?
P1	What's the term mean?
INT	It's used: when I've been doing some reading. It's a terminology that's used quite a bit about the student experience. If I could, I'd like to know your understanding of that term. What does it mean to you?
P1	For me it's like proper and fully immersing yourself in it. Like as in moving. You know, kind of seeing it as your base. For me it's kind of somewhere that I go for a few days a week. Whereas I think if you live here, you're like part of the uni and everything. Societies and going to the gym every day.
INT	Do you think it's like part of the whole university?
P1	Yes, like staying here.
INT	If I said to you, University of Leeds has a great student experience, would that be something that attracted you to the university or would that just be something that...
P1	I think it's one of the best-selling points. It's just like being here all the time and studying all the time. I can just go down to the library. You can sit in your room but if you sit in your room, I won't do it. It's stuff like that.
INT	So, you think it's like to kind of the whole experience.
P1	Yes, I think you should be full time. If I'd have known that, like if anyone said to me should I move out, I'd have said definitely.
INT	Looking at your past, I guess you've kind of touched on this, looking at the last year you've just had with us. You were saying I guess, some of the negatives were that you felt because you've lived away from university you perhaps haven't been involved as much as you would have liked.
P1	Yeah, definitely.
INT	...and think that is something that you might look to change in the future.
P1	That's why I am changing it next year. It's something I want to do.
INT	To try and get involved more. On the flip side, so this year when you've been living at home, do you think you've had any positive experiences like anything positive that's impacted on having a good experience.
P1	I think I've done quite well because of the small group. I've made quite good friends. Where when you're in big groups, you don't really talk to people. I would just talk to one person whereas in a small group I just talk to everyone. Like we'll go out.
INT	So, the social kind of....
P1	It helps you know if you've got someone to go and sit if café like or we'll go and sit upstairs.
INT	That's peer support. The more that you can, do the better, as it does help. It also helps you realise that everyone's in the same boat. It's wanting to get through this together. The last little few questions I wanted to ask was about how you kind of see yourself within the university. If I asked how you see yourself within the university; do you see yourself as a student, as a member of the university, as a customer of the university, what do you see yourself as.
P1	Well a member, yeah. I think it's a big community here like. Because of union you get...
INT	Do you think there's a distinction between being a member of the university or being a student at the university?
P1	Like part-time students, they're students but they don't just come in...
INT	I know what you mean. They might come in study and leave?
P1	Yeah, rather than go and use the facilities.

INT	So, you think you kind of get more of the student experience...
P1	I think it's the being in the city too, it's a student city. I think if you've time to be a student you can be a student anywhere. I went to Subway and she was talking to me and saying what are you doing. I'm like, I'm up road.
INT	Excellent. So, you do see yourself as a member of the university. Again, picking up some of the literature that I've been reading. Some of the literature suggests that students are actually seen as customers of the university. What do you think about that?
P1	Satisfied so far in...you read so much about students not being satisfied. It's kind of like, I think it's alright for me cos it's half price but if next year is full price and it's not as many hours it's a bit, it's like...
INT	Can you see that notion?
P1	Yes. You've got to keep them happy. It's not like school where you know you get it free and people are investing to come here so they need to be, come out happy.
INT	Do you think if you were classed as a customer of the university, rather than being classed as a member or a student, do you think you'd have different expectations?
P1	Yeah, I think I'd be a bit more like.... I don't know I think as a member you get treated well anyway. But customer it's like, it means I have to be satisfied with what I'm getting. I am but the price is a bit...this year has been alright because you get it half price but next year it's full price, it's like...
INT	Do you think price is kind of a key factor for you?
P1	Yes. I think like some courses you get a lot more hands on teaching. Some you don't get as much and you're paying the same price it's like a loan for my lessons but you know...
INT	I know what you're saying. It's that kind of balance between...
P1	Maybe you could pick more electives. I'd have picked more. A lot more credits. So, if I do fail that module.... I can get it somewhere else.
INT	It's interesting as you say, that idea of price has a, it's kind of an issue. Do you think that the price impacts upon quality of the service you receive?
P1	I don't know. I suppose there's cheaper uni's isn't there. I wouldn't know if they were better or not. It's been good anyway, it's quite hands on. But, I don't know.
INT	Final question and leading on from that student as a customer notion. Some theorists also say that students should get some kind of academic product from their studies. A lot of them have stated that your programme of study is your product that you buy from the university, so do you agree with that or do you disagree or what's your thoughts.
P1	I suppose you're not buying it. It's got a lot more to do with you than the university, you know what I mean? They can only give so much and if they could you all they can you have to give all you can.
INT	So therefore, do you think it's possible to buy a product from a university.
P1	I don't know it's not like I'm buying it. It's not like they're giving me a bit of cash...
INT	It's not as straightforward as an interaction of buying a degree?
P1	Yeah, it's not as if I'm buying a degree.
INT	Do you think there are other considerations in your time at university?
P1	Oh definitely. If that did work, it'd be a lot easier.
INT	But there's a lot more to the university experience and people would argue that you don't, it's not about buying, it's as you mentioned before it's about getting involved,
P1	I think it's a proper community and it's fully immersing yourself and not just going home every day.
INT	Some issues there with that one? Finally, the last little bit is, any other comments you had about generally your first year at university?
P1	It's been a lot better than I thought it would be.
INT	Looking forward to another 3 years?
P1	Yes, definitely.
INT	Excellent. We'll call it a day then.

INT - Interviewer

P1 - Participant 1

Interview 2

INT	So, I'm looking at university and how you firstly found out about university and secondly about your experience at university. So, can I just ask the first question. What actually attracted you to study at university?
P2	Well really it was at GCSE where you get to the stage where you're talking to guidance counsellors and it's what to do next and it was more a generic choice to begin with. They say do you want to do a career where you manage people. At that time, it'll be university. There are so many other ways; so many different paths to get in but for me, university was the right choice. I was doing alright in my studies so I carried on to sixth form which at the time was told it was the classical path to university and so forth.
INT	So, did you feel, in your mind were you clear that university was the route for you.
P2	Well, I'm actually the first one in my family to go to university so it was more a 'see if I can do it'.
INT	So, a bit of a challenge in a sense?
P2	Yes.
INT	Excellent. So, when it came to your decision, yes, I'm interested in going to university, you had some advice and guidance from schools and colleges, so what were the kind of factors you were looking for when you were choosing your university.
P2	When you're first looking you go for what is closer, what is now, distance but when you start looking at things you realise that maybe.... I nearly went to Plymouth which is miles away, it's a lot different from here which is about 40 miles from where I come from. It's more really what you can get. I did as well as I could in my exams but you're limited by your own abilities, so Plymouth was wanting 3 C's and the course I'm on now originally wanted 3 C's but then it was lowered to a C and 2 D's. And then you couple that in with what the place as a whole can offer you, and a C and 2 D's for what this university offers was just too good to pass up.
INT	Was it to do with the, you've already said location wasn't a great issue, so was it the programme, the actual entry requirements. Was that the ultimate?
P2	I would put it down to a matter of convenience of what I can get out of this. The programme itself is such a brilliant idea it gives me the opportunity to get a degree from quite a high standard university for the lower grades and that really did appeal to me. The subject itself; I decided that sometime in sixth form I wanted to go into accountancy. When I got the letter about this and one of the routes was accountancy it just all fell into place really.
INT	Great. Before you arrived at university what would you say were your expectations of it.
P2	I have no idea really. It depends who you talk to. I don't have many older cousins or anything like that so I can't say what was it like at university. I had friends who had cousins and family and some of it and depending on the personality it was either oh, you are working and working and working or is was it's easier than sixth form which is quite a common thing when people are describing university, which I'm going to disagree with!! The social side of it has always appealed. I'm from quite a small family and this is really given me chance to be social but at the time I was quite anxious and didn't know what it was going to be like. But when it all folded into place, maybe it helps I'm in a class with quite a small number of people so you get know those people and I have been in a few lectures where there are quite large classes and you think wow this is quite intense but I suppose you get used to it and get into it. You're either going to be someone who just sits there and gets on with it; what is a really is an academic focus or you could be at the other end of the spectrum which is I want to meet everyone and do every society. Within that respect, university can offer plenty, depending on what personality you are.
INT	There's plenty, kind of, to delve into if you wish but equally you can kind of sit back. Ken said you didn't have a great deal of expectation before arriving, so when you actually arrived here, what were your first kind of thoughts?
P2	Well we did start really easily with our open days. It was talks and it's the same in every aspect of education you've been in. The first week it's to ease you in. It gets quite formulaic after a while and you get to know what people are going to be doing and that's fine. Then you get to the actual lessons and some of it was quite interesting. I did not expect to enjoy it as much as I did. I was taking interest in some of it but the way it just falls in with your life, it's such a different experience. You don't see it coming. I didn't go to college, I went to sixth form so the freedom, it was more of a school environment for a lot longer, but with university the freedom is insane to what you got.

INT	I suppose there's a lot more reliance on you being an independent, self-sufficient person whether that be in your studies or be in your personal time. Do you think that the kind of general perceptions you had about university, have they been met or have they indeed changed?
P2	I don't know really because I was saying about the social side, you do get the impression that...there are certain websites and they review the university about nightlife and teaching and if you focus on each individual bit they're all different but it's difficult to explain really. The nightlife, especially as I'm living in halls, that is your own life now. It's what you're doing. My perceptions of that are this is really where it starts. This is really where you're in charge now. That's where I get my enjoyment from, choosing how I'm going to manage what I'm doing.
INT	So, it has given you, I guess, personal discipline in a kind of sense, in picking and choosing what you are going to do, which is good to hear. What about the actual programme itself. How has that, you know the wider programme, not just necessarily what you've studied, how has that been in relation to perhaps what you perceived before you joined. You mentioned before about more freedom, I guess than at college. Would you say that's your main noticeable difference?
P2	Oh yes, certainly. For some subjects you get about 10 hours of lectures and then it suggests that you do 90 of independent study. You look at that to begin with and you think that can't be right. But then when you get into an exam for the first time and you look at these things and some of the broad range; it's not just covered on the slides. You've really got to know the subject and that that's what separates it from any other education because it's about you knowing it off by heart. It's what you're becoming an expert in this subject. You're not just learning the syllabus and passing the exam, this is becoming part of you now.
INT	During the first year, as you've gone through the whole university experience now. What do you think have been the main factors that have enhanced so you've got to have your day to day coming in, lectures, seminars, is there anything else around that that's helped you as a first-year student?
P2	The addition of online teaching. The amount of the syllabus that is accessible. You log in with your university password and you've got, in some subjects, all your lecture slides and then you've got recommended reading and then that's so easy to go onto the library website and find it and then you can go and get it. It's very expansive and it just helps so much.
INT	So that's been a real use that kind of additional online support on top of...
P2	I can't see that...I can't imagine before that system got put into place. Going to lectures and copying down notes at 100 mph that's quite hard to imagine because not only have you got to be taking this in and writing it down at the same time, you've actually got to be making sense of it as well. It's there to look at later. You can't just look at your lecturers slides as they haven't been printed off. You've just got to take what information you can in that one hour that if you've got it online you can go back and you can piece it together.
INT	You say that's quite a useful tool. So, thinking a little bit more about the idea of enhanced study but also the kind of relationships you built with people within the university. You've built relationships with your peers as you mentioned earlier. What about your relationships with the staff.
P2	With the staff it depends on the teacher really. They've all been really friendly. I feel like if I did have a big problem I can come to them about my work, about anything. The real feedback I can take, the official feedback is when you have tutorials or when you have assignments and you get that feedback, that's the main relationship I see with that.
INT	I guess, there's the teaching staff, with whom you come into contact a lot. Have you had much relationship with the wider, you know things like administrative staff or careers advice, or Student Union staff. Have you come into touch with others much?
P2	I haven't really had much of a chance really. I'm not saying I've been prevented it from it but from how I've done it. I've sent emails here and there about careers, the internship I wanted to look at and someone got back to me straight away. They were very helpful; very informative. Everyone is willing to keep you up to date and in touch and you've just got to go out there and find them.
INT	That's fair enough. I guess there's awareness that that's there but would you say the interaction between teaching staff and personal tutors is perhaps the key issue. That's fair enough. There's a question here, there's a term you may have come across. Student experience – have you come across that term.

P2	It does sound familiar but I may have it in the wrong context.
INT	It's used quite a lot in academic research. I'd just be interested to hear if you have any understanding of what you'd interpret the term of student experience to be.
	The life lessons that you've got from university. That's as blatant as the experience you've had as a student and what you can take from that. There may be some broader issue?
INT	No. I mean I guess in a nutshell that's what it's about. It's about how you enhance your time as a student. This is quite a well-used term and it's interesting just to hear from you how much you think that helps if someone is saying to you, come to university and have a great student experience; would you take that as red or would you still look at other factors?
P2	I suppose it would be quite a comforting thing to hear. It's quite a broad statement, it's 'you'll have fun here' it's not what's specifically is the student experience. I mean it could be a society, it could be how easy it is to go to a lecture and take in that information. There's so many factors. I suppose if you hear the experience is good from other students it may be more comforting than just some official statement.
INT	That's a fair point. Perhaps not necessarily from the institution but from the others who have experienced it. It might be a useful thing.
P2	Anyone can say the service we provide is great for you but you need like reviews basically but not from the actual place itself.
INT	I know what you're saying. From your experiences this year what do you think has been the most positive on your university experience this year.
P2	Learning how important having work experience is. It's really taught me this year that the more you think about it, you can't just wait until you've got your degree. You can't just leave it, you need to get out there and do other things as well. The bare minimum of going to lectures and doing your assignment, to get that experience and that benefit you need to have life experience. Student experience is fine but you need to integrate it with everything else.
INT	Are there any negatives you've had this year, in your university experience?
	I'd have to think about it. I mean, it has been an extremely good year, it's gone so fast.
INT	If you don't, you don't.
P2	Sometimes I feel like it's probably going back to how much you need to know. There can be some real curve balls when it comes to the final exam. Communication may not be clear with what you're doing and what turns up in the end. It's all well and good, you've got the tutors who are brilliant and say this is what is going to be on the exam, they are the ones who have probably been involved with it and something comes out completely different, but I suppose that more to separate the 2.1s from your firsts.
INT	Perhaps yes, but I think the point you're making is about the communication. There could be an element there of are you being communicated to widely enough about those. At the very start whether it be an explanation of what they expect or if it's the actual revision element of that. I think that's a valid point. If I said to you now, how do you see your role within the university. Are you a student, are you a member, are you a customer, what do you think you are?
P2	I'd say I see myself as just a university student. I'm there, I'm just going, I'm just getting on with it. This is a big help in my life and I'm attending with the other students...you get what you put into it. If I started joining societies, and even applying to run to represent my class, that's when you start becoming an individual and more of a personality within the university. As my first year has gone, I've laid back with societies and things like that as I thought how much I need to focus on studying but I've learned after this year, that maybe getting involved is the best way of going about it.
INT	I mentioned before about the student experience. There's another term people are starting to throw around in academic circles that students are beginning to be classed as customers of the university. Do you think, do you see yourself as a customer? Would your expectations of the university change?
P2	I can see that. Obviously, there's been the rise in tuition fees and maybe the rise in tuition fees is irrelevant but it's the reason the course I'm on exists, so I'm one of about 4 people who can say this has benefited me in some way. I mean one year for a normal student; this year I'm paying 9 grand, the person before me that was their 3 years at university. That is one year's difference but that is £27,000 so you do start to look at, this lecture is 2 hours a week, is this giving me something or am I just turning up and listening to someone say there's the PowerPoint. You probably criticise it more because you're going to be

	paying it back for a long time.
INT	That is a more than valid point. So, if you weren't classed as a student and you were classed as a customer, perhaps taking away the fee increase, do you think your expectations would be different as you would be classed as a customer over a student or would they be the same?
P2	Customer suggests, you'd be a bit more entitled. You'd be 'I'm paying for this so this should be top quality'. Student is you're attending this institution and then you're going along with it. You've applied to this institution and you've kind of already got an idea of what it's going to be like, through research when you're going to uni and you're paying for that no matter where you go. If I go to Plymouth I pay £9,000; if I go here I'm paying £9,000. I'd expect £9,000 worth of teaching and some people go in for an hour on a certain day and they do question is this worth my money. But in the end if that's what's become you need to access this degree, it's not a nice thing to be tripled but it becomes a necessity. It's so competitive to get a job and even with a degree you need other things and paying that money, you don't have to pay it back until you earn a certain amount, which some people forget, they say this is £9,000 it's way too expensive but it's barely noticeable in a way. Obviously, there's still a lot of money coming out of your pocket, eventually.
INT	It's a way, it's an attitudinal way of how you look at that fee.
P2	There's so many perspectives to look at the fee. I mean if you just look at it blatantly, this is my 9 grand, this is what they're teaching, I'm not happy with it or I'm not happy that I've been forced to pay this £9,000 that's understandable that is, £9,000, but this £9,000 may help you get a job that eventually will earn you £100,000 a year. Then you're paying just a fraction of what you earn and then it would be seen as a good buy then.
INT	Excellent, really well surmised. The final one from me. I mentioned there about the student as a customer. If we were looking at it from a customer angle, what would you say is the product. What is the product you are purchasing with your hard-earned money?
P2	Certainly, the quality of the teaching. The degree that is judged on it's merits from which establishment you use. This is a Russell university so if you get that degree, that's brilliant. If you put that on a CV that's going to look really good. As a customer you want that experience. You want it being taught to you in a manner that you don't have to fight against everything else to get the best you can. You want the teaching to really help you along and that definitely is quality.
INT	I think the quality is right whether you're paying £9,000 or £1,000 quality should be forefront but it's interesting to hear that. Is there anything else you'd like to add?
P2	I can't think off the top of my head.
INT	No. Well all I'll say is thanks very much for your time.

INT - Interviewer

P2 - Participant 2

Interview 3

INT	Thanks for coming along. The first question I'd like to ask is thinking not specifically about this university, but more about wider, what attracted you to study at university?
P3	University. I think when you say university it opens up so many doors. You're setting yourself up for a better future.
INT	Is it for you about kind of progression on to something better? Is it a stepping stone or is it something that you wanted to do?
P3	I think you need to have a degree. The job market is so hard right now it's not very good, so I think it's really important that people actually get a degree so they can set themselves up for a good future.
INT	So, it's about trying to make yourself competitive I guess.
P3	Yes, I think the quality of a degree is something you can dispute from different universities. But I think university in general, I really think a degree from any kind of university is kind of a good thing to have on your CV.
INT	That point I guess, moving on to another question is when you were thinking about choosing universities what were some of the factors you considered, kind of important to you?
P3	I think for me, the first thing I did was looked on The Guardian rankings. I looked at best universities for management and best universities in general in the UK. I looked at specifically Russell Group universities. I got told the difference and did the research online, the Civic 6 and everything and I think the better the university you go to, the better the reputation to open doors for you to get a better job in the future.
INT	So, you recognised that there's a distinction between the universities and you wanted to go to one that is perceived as...
P3	I live in Bradford and the university is the University of Bradford. While it's a good uni for certain things like Management, I wouldn't recommend it because I looked at the rankings, looked at feedback and because I know Bradford myself, it wasn't somewhere I'd like to go with the people that go there, without being horrible.
INT	No, that's interesting to see isn't it. It's the kind of differentiation between....
P3	I did go to Huddersfield for about a month. I didn't like it. It didn't feel like university for me. It was just in the middle of this town centre. Opposite the university were clubs. It didn't feel like a university atmosphere at all. I just didn't like it. I didn't like the course. I didn't like the atmosphere. I didn't like any of it. I then went to the University of East Anglia I enjoyed that even less. It was too far away from home for me. That's when I got into the Russell Group. Somebody told me what it was. I didn't understand it but did research.
INT	So, you kind of had a few experiences before deciding on hopefully the right one. What were before you came to university, I guess before you first experienced it. You've had a couple of experiences. What were your expectations of what a university was.
P3	I think the required teaching sounded much harder and much greater. I think when it comes to university more control falls to the student. You've got to be the one who wants to work hard. Be there on time. I think many people talk about the social aspect of university. You get to meet loads of new people, and you get to join loads of clubs and activities. I think for me it's more just getting yourself more educated and becoming more independent...broaden your horizon a bit more, than you do when you go to do your A Levels.
INT	Bearing those expectations in mind before you went and now you've actually been; you've had a few different university experiences. I think, thinking especially about the experience you've had at this institution, have they been realised or have they changed, from what you first thought you'd expect to what you've actually got?
P3	I think at this institution, it's better than what I thought it was. The level of teaching is really good. You get so much support. That's really important. Because I'm travelling not far from home as well I still have that comfort of being close to home. I think looking at this university, it's kind of made me realise that because of the quality that goes into it, it's a better university at the same time.
INT	Your expectations were met and, in some cases, actually exceeded. What particularly was better than you thought?

P3	I think because I've been to several, a couple of universities, the teaching and level of support has been at this institution, one of the best I've seen. The quality of the teaching...yeah.
INT	That's kind of a big thing, the support side. During kind of your first year, that you've just completed. If you can look at what has, kind of, for your expectations of teaching standards and things like that, been met, has there been anything over and above that has enhanced your studies while you've been here? Have you been involved in any wider engagement with the university?
P3	I haven't so much for the first year. I'm trying to think.
INT	If there isn't anything, that's no problem.
P3	I don't really know what to say for that one.
INT	Some people for example, might have been involved with the student rep scheme or they might have been involved with a club or society or they might have been involved with working on a particular project with some people. Often in the first year you might not have those experiences.
P3	I haven't done most of that for the first year. I've been involved in the interviews and things like that but I haven't been involved in a club or society as much. I've been settling in to my first year. I did go to a knitting club once.
INT	During again, this first year, do you think you've built any relationships with staff within the university whether that be staff you've had a lot of contact with or wider staff.
P3	I think definitely for the first year, I realised here, that's different to other universities, is that you get to have a close relationship with tutors which is really important because if you need help or support, with your course, you don't feel like tentative to ask them because they're there. I think in that respect, I think I've built relationships quite well with all the tutors.
INT	What about the wider university support team. The administrative staff, the careers advice, Students' Union – have you had any engagement with that and if so, have those been important to you.
P3	I haven't had so much engagement with reps. I think when it comes to the employment aspect, when we were talking to Libby, she was on our groups presentation/interview panel, I think that's probably the only one where I'd call it like a relationship.
INT	So, do you think the main relationship has been with the teaching staff.
P3	Yeah, I think I've had relationships with some of the LC staff helping with financial support. I was satisfied with that. I haven't had many problems so I've never booked into anything else as I haven't needed any support.
INT	Teaching support has been, just by the nature of the programme, has been your main contact but you may have used some of the others. When I've been going through it and looking at research, and indeed wider reading around the Higher Education market, there's a term thrown about quite often called student experience. I'm interested to know 1: have you heard of that and 2: what your understanding is of that term.
P3	I've heard of student experience. I'm not really sure of what other people mean by that but to me, it probably means the experience of the life of a student, experiencing, not just academic life but the personal lives. Especially those who come from home, get into student accommodation, getting jobs in different cities and meeting different people.
INT	I think that's a nice way to surmise it. Basically, it's about your whole student experience.
P3	I think it's most crucially about developing yourself as a person. With that experience it really does change you when you finish your degree.
INT	So, taking that into account and a little bit of self-reflection from yourself, can you think of any factors that have positively impacted on that experience for you this year.
P3	I think for me it's meeting different people from different countries, from different backgrounds, from different cities. Learning about how they got on this course, where they come from, what made them do it. What made them want to study Management. People on my elective courses are from China, Japan, different countries and I think when you experience different cultures, it changes you as a person and your opinions on other people. I think doing Management as well and knowing you're going to be mingling with different people, it gives you a good vision on life in general.

INT	I would agree with that. What about the flip side of that. Are there any factors that could be perceived as not as enjoyable or negative that's impacted on the student experience for you?
P3	I think a lot of people in their first year, when they move from home into dorms, I know a lot of people either they like it or they absolutely hate it. It's either a you like it or you don't kind of situation. Because I lived in accommodation at University of East Anglia, I enjoyed it but not as much. I think the accommodation side, depending on you as a person, you can really enjoy it or not.
INT	It's part of that settling in.
P3	Yes, because sometimes it can be quite distracting. Sometimes it can be good because you get to meet other people and they're on their own so you don't feel like you're the only one. Then you can have problems when you try to concentrate in your first year because people think the first year is not as important. It's like enjoy your first year but sometimes that can have a negative effect for the following years.
INT	That's fair. It's a fair point, the issue of moving away, settling into a new city.
P3	It's freedom. You like to be free and independent, sometimes you get carried away with that though.
INT	When you talk about you and how you fit in with the university. How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as a student, a member of the university, a customer of the university?
P3	Seems like a student. I feel a part of the university and feel proud to be part of the university. I feel good to show my student card with the University of Leeds on it. I think, I don't see myself as a customer although you are paying for it. You do have that sense of belonging because you've got tutors who want to be there and support you. You come here and learn what you have to learn and then you go because you'll always have these links that you take with you when you leave university. Whether it be your friends, other people who you've met at work, all your tutors.
INT	I think that's a good point actually. You mention kind of a customer, I might ask you a question about that in a second but the university experience is hopefully more than just sitting in a class.
P3	Yes, it's much more than that. It's not just a case of you come, you pay, learn what you have to learn then go, that's it. You meet loads of people. I think everyone generally enjoys university, the experience. You feel part of a family.
INT	It's nice that you mentioned there, recognition of your institution as in Leeds, in this case. You feel loyalty? Is that the right word?
P3	Yes. I think definitely from my past experiences, like University of Huddersfield. It didn't feel like a university. There was no sense of community, no sense of...you know like at the University of Leeds there are so many events going on to try and get all the students together, you didn't have that there so here you feel like you've got somewhere to go, something to do.
INT	Just picking up on that idea of students being classed as customers. You kind of said you didn't agree with that. Can you see how people may perceive that?
P3	I think people think you are customer because you are paying for it. In a sense its not like you purchase something and then just go. You take much more than that. I don't think it's right as a university to see their students as customers. I don't think it's healthy for a student to see themselves as a customer. Although you are paying for your education, I think it's important that you recognise the fact that you are here to learn and to progress and to experience those different things as well.
INT	If people who do, because some theory states that students are a customer, they believe that students are paying for a service, do you think if you were classed, identified as a customer rather than a student of the university do you think your expectations from the university would change or would they remain the same?
P3	I think if the university recognised me as being a customer, then I'd expect them to, like they say the customer is always right, I'd expect them to cater for all my needs, but I think as a student you feel more attached. As a customer you don't feel attached but as a student you feel attached, as a student you feel a part of what the university is trying to do. You help them, they help you. As a customer, I don't really like that term for a student.
INT	I don't either. It's a good point you make. If you're a customer it's kind of I'll buy that and I'll take it away, so being a student, a member of the university, there's a lot more to it than that. Kind of last question from me. Some theorists have taken on this idea

	of students as customers, have stated that academic product is your programme of choice so the programme you're studying on some people class that as an academic product. What's your thoughts on that? Do you think it's just about the programme you're studying on or is actually university experience a lot wider than that? I think you've kind of touched upon it.
P3	So are you saying that people see you as a customer that...
INT	What they are saying is that you are almost buying your programme of choice, which ultimately is buying your classification of degree.
P3	Ah right OK. I don't really agree with that because I could spend 9 grand a year at University of Leeds and not actually walk away with anything unless I actually put the effort into making it work. It's kind of a strange theory really isn't it.
INT	That's the idea isn't it. You're paying the fee, whatever that is, but that doesn't guarantee that you're going to walk out with a first. There's a lot more in the process.
P3	I don't just see it as buying a product. I'm not buying a management degree. Although you are paying for the education I don't think that even though you are paying for it you are guaranteed to come out with something. You're guaranteed to come out with a product. You can guarantee the product as having experience and building relationships but you can't always guarantee you are going to get a first because you have to put that effort in. I don't really think you should see a degree as a product. It's something that you should want to do as you want to obtain it for yourself. With a degree it's not just getting your Management degree for example, with a first and going for a job, you build relationships with people. Networking and make links with the university, the contact with your friends, I don't just see it as a product.
INT	There's a lot more factors that contribute to that.
P3	Also, you go into a store you buy something, you go. There's no need to worry about relationships with sales staff, you just go and get what you need. Whereas at university, you're obtaining much more than that. It's not just you get your degree, and you go, its meeting people and developing yourself as a person and helping people to develop as well.
INT	Finally, did you have any other comments about how you found your first year at university?
P3	I've really enjoyed it. I think it's one of the best universities I've been to and I'd recommend it to everyone. I really would. I've enjoyed my time here and can't wait to finish, not finish, do my second and third year! I can't believe we've got 3 or 4 months off until September. I've really enjoyed it.
INT	Excellent, thank you for your time.
P3	You're welcome.

INT - Interviewer

P3 - Participant 3

APPENDIX 3

Top 100 words featured in pilot interview transcript

Word	Count	Weighted (%)	Similar Words
think	189	4.22	believe, considered, guess, mean, means, reason, suppose, think, thinking, thought, thoughts
university	130	3.59	general, generally, universities, university
like	131	3.51	like, liked, probably, wish
get	166	2.85	arrived, becoming, beginning, come, comes, coming, develop, developing, experience, experiences, get, getting, going, make, making, obtain, obtaining, receive, started, take, taking
kind	83	2.29	kind, kinds
know	113	1.95	experience, experiences, know, knowing, learn, learning, live, lived, lives, living, recognise, recognised
just	88	1.73	fair, good, hard, just, right
student	59	1.63	student, students, students'
year	62	1.49	class, classed, day, days, year, years
lot	66	1.42	loads, lot, much, set, setting
first	47	1.14	beginning, first, initial, initially, started
different	41	1.12	difference, different, disagree, dispute
wanted	46	1.12	need, needed, needs, required, want, wanted, wanting, wants, wish
people	40	1.11	people
experience	85	1.04	experience, experienced, experiences, experiencing, feel, feeling, see
going	78	0.91	belonging, fail, fit, going, last, leading, leave, live, lived, lives, living, move, moving, sounded, started, travelling, work, worked, working, works
really	40	0.91	actually, really
support	50	0.90	back, friends, help, helping, helps, keep, live, lived, lives, living, support
good	66	0.87	depending, effect, full, good, healthy, respect, right, skills, sounded, well
study	57	0.83	considered, learn, learning, read, reading, report, studied, studies, study, studying, take, taking, work, worked, working, works
one	30	0.83	one, ones
yes	30	0.83	yes
see	81	0.80	considered, control, figures, learn, learning, look, looked, looking, meet, meeting, project, realise, realised, see, seeing, understand, understanding
better	28	0.77	best, better, improve
big	44	0.76	bad, big, expect, expectations, give, gives, giving, great
price	27	0.75	price, term
involved	47	0.74	ask, asked, engage, engagement, interest, interested, interesting, involved, need, needed, needs, required, take, taking

customer	26	0.72	customer, customers
degree	34	0.72	degree, degrees, level, levels, point, points
got	26	0.72	got
feel	57	0.67	feel, feeling, look, looked, looking, notion, opinions, sense, touched
groups	23	0.64	group, groups
school	24	0.59	educated, education, school
buying	21	0.58	buy, buying, purchase
course	29	0.58	class, classed, course, courses, nature
staff	21	0.58	staff
expectations	51	0.55	ask, asked, bearing, carried, expect, expectations, look, looking, required
quite	20	0.55	quite, rather
time	20	0.55	time
went	20	0.55	went
come	39	0.54	approach, becoming, come, comes, coming, fair, falls, following, seems
relationships	19	0.53	relationship, relationships
teaching	29	0.52	educated, education, learn, learning, teaching
something	18	0.50	something
picked	27	0.48	choice, choices, fill, option, pick, picked, picking, take, taking
done	17	0.47	done
talk	17	0.47	lecture, lectures, mouth, talk, talking
definitely	17	0.45	deciding, definitely
bit	18	0.44	bit, second
change	16	0.44	change, changed, changes, changing
thought	31	0.44	considerations, idea, opinions, reflection, thought, thoughts
yeah	16	0.44	yeah
next	16	0.43	following, future, next
location	31	0.43	local, location, place, positive, positively, positives, set, setting, settle, settling, situation
take	35	0.42	accepted, assumed, assuming, carried, choose, choosing, considered, engage, engagement, fill, issue, issues, leading, take, taking
home	22	0.41	base, family, home, place
might	15	0.41	might
things	15	0.41	thing, things
part	19	0.41	contribute, leave, part, started
enjoyed	18	0.40	enjoy, enjoyable, enjoyed, enjoys, use, used
important	23	0.40	crucially, grand, important, mean, means
small	17	0.40	little, small
saying	27	0.40	read, reading, saying, stated, states, suppose

member	14	0.39	member
person	14	0.39	person, personal, somebody, someone
make	44	0.38	build, building, clear, give, gives, giving, make, making, name, qualifications, realise, realised, take, taking, work, worked, working, works
put	25	0.37	investing, place, positive, positively, positives, put, set, setting
last	31	0.37	close, end, ended, final, finally, finish, finished, last
away	13	0.36	away
bradford	13	0.36	bradford
product	13	0.36	product
question	14	0.35	head, interview, interviews, question, questions
initially	21	0.34	found, foundation, initial, initially, institution, institutions, open, opens, started
anything	12	0.33	anything
much	22	0.33	much, often
paying	18	0.32	bearing, give, gives, giving, pay, paying
always	11	0.30	always
societies	11	0.30	club, clubs, societies, society
try	11	0.30	effort, essay, try, trying
side	18	0.30	faces, positive, positively, positives, side
proper	16	0.29	proper, right
mean	26	0.29	base, close, hate, mean, means, way
satisfied	18	0.28	comfort, fill, meet, meeting, satisfied
factors	10	0.28	factor, factors
Huddersfield	10	0.28	Huddersfield
management	10	0.28	management
stuff	10	0.28	stuff
tutors	10	0.28	tutor, tutors
writing	10	0.28	write, writing
mentioned	12	0.26	credits, mention, mentioned, name
looking	29	0.26	aspect, depending, faces, look, looked, looking, seems, sounded
also	9	0.25	also
guess	18	0.25	guess, surmise
maybe	10	0.25	maybe, perhaps, possible
programme	9	0.25	programme
sit	9	0.25	sit, sitting
finished	17	0.24	closer, completed, completely, cultures, end, ended, finish, finished
help	14	0.24	help, helping, helps, service
well	18	0.24	comfort, considerations, well
actually	19	0.23	actually, realise, realised

APPENDIX 4

Quantitative Questionnaire

Research project into the perceptions and expectations of undergraduate students attending university

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire; it is part of a research project that is exploring students' perceptions and expectations of university. You are under no obligation to answer this questionnaire but your opinions would be most appreciated.

Your name is not required for the research and all data collected will remain anonymous. The information you provide will be used only for this research.

I also hope to conduct formal interviews and focus groups over the coming months, if you would be interesting in volunteering to take part in these please leave your name and contact details below (if you are not interested please leave this blank).

NAME:

EMAIL:

TEL:

Thank you for your time, it is greatly appreciated.



Graeme Price

Please answer the following question as honestly as possible. Circle appropriate answer.

About You

1. Are you?

- a) Male
- b) Female

2. How old are you?

- a) 18 -20
- b) 21 – 25
- c) 26 - 30
- c) 31 or over

3. Did you relocate to attend university?

- a) Yes
- b) No (if no go to Q4).

3a. If yes, where did you relocate from?

- a) Overseas
- b) North East
- c) Other area of England (please state)
- d) Other area of UK (please state)

4. What are your current living arrangements?

- a) In halls of residence
- b) In a shared house with other students
- d) On my own
- e) With my parents
- f) With other family
- g) Other (please state)

5. Are you the first member of your immediate family (parents / carers / siblings) to attend university (i.e. are you the first in your family to study for a degree qualification)?

- a) Yes
- b) No

6. Having a group of close friends is important for support at university.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. Do you feel that your school / college adequately prepared you for university study?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. I find the prospect of studying at university (you can select more than one answer):

- | | | | |
|-------------|---------|--------------|--------------|
| Exciting | Scary | Apprehensive | Motivational |
| Interesting | Tedious | Empowering | Intriguing |

9. My school / college gave me the necessary skills to be prepared for university study.

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. It is important to have structured interests outside of academic study (e.g. sports clubs, societies, structured social groups).

- Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very unsatisfied and 10 is extremely satisfied, how satisfied do you expect to be with your University experience?

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. Compared to your academic performance at school / college, how have you performed at university?

- a) Much better
- b) Better
- c) About the same
- d) Worse
- e) Much worse
- f) Not sure

About your programme

13. What were your main reasons for choosing your programme? (you can select more than one answer)

- a) Continue in an area already studied
- b) Did not get first preference
- c) Expectations of family and / or friends
- e) Gain entry to another degree program
- f) Improve job prospects / earning potential
- g) Interest
- h) Recommendation of teachers / careers advisors
- i) Visit to a university for an activity or information session
- j) Other (please state)

14. How much time **per week** do you usually spend studying **per module**?

- a) 0-1 hours
- b) 2-3 hours
- c) 4-6 hours
- d) 7-10 hours
- e) 11-15 hours
- f) Over 16 hours

15. It is important for me to attend most lectures.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. Participating in group work during class time will assist my learning.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. Participating in group work outside class time will assist my learning.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

18. What is a reasonable time for having your assignments / work marked and returned to you?

- a) Less than 1 week
- b) 1-2 weeks
- c) 3-4 weeks
- d) 5-6 weeks
- e) 7+ weeks

19. Having easy and convenient access to my lecturers and tutors outside of face-to-face teaching will be important to my learning.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

20. University lecturers will provide all the materials I require for my learning.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

21. Having lecturers who are enthusiastic about teaching will be important for my learning.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

22. How much of your University lecturers working time do you think they spend preparing, teaching and assessing classes?

- a) Less than 10%
- b) 11-20%
- c) 21-40%
- d) 41-60%
- e) 61-80%
- f) 81-100%

23. Feedback on my submitted work will be important to my learning.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

24. Feedback on drafts of assignments / work will be important to my learning.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

25. I will spend more time seeking out extra information on class topics I find interesting.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

26. Contributing to in-class discussions will be important for my learning.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

27. I see myself as a capable student and expect to do well at University.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

28. Any other comments?

.....
.....

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

APPENDIX 5

Transcript of focus group interviews

Focus Group 1

INT	We are now live. So the purpose of this just to recap, is nothing to do with my role, module leader role and teaching role; it all about my own person research so just to briefly surmise I am doing...my PhD research is on student expectations of university so I am trying to look at what influences students to come to university and what shapes their experience while at university. Okay? So what I would like you to do now is kind of an open debate so I would like you to put your hands up or whatever and I would try to come round each and every one. Ok? So before you started university what perceptions did you have before you started university?
M3	It depends on... what kind of erm...in which time period cos as mature students maybe for me I had a lot of perceptions when I attended a couple of universities since I was sixteen in getting my Bachelor's degree but due to external circumstances that prevented the completion of my Bachelor's degree, every time I start a subject I used to have this vision of what to expect in the university.
INT	So what was that expectation? What did you think about the university? What was the initial perceptions?
M3	It's usually about dreams. Hopefully how I can pass everything. I am not looking to get an A mark where it's more suited to use in my erm? What do you call it? Imagination to be created in anyway. But then I get impacted by the truth of education in universities where I studied marine science in a certain university and I found out that the lecturers had this idea of it's their way or the high way. So if you don't follow their methods where mostly it was marine science but it was directed towards marine physics. I am really good in mathematics and I know how to calculate anything in 2 steps or 3 steps at most whereas I was failed calculus because I did that when he wanted me to do it in 7 to 10 steps.
INT	So did that experience influence your perception about places?
M3	No. because that demotivation stayed for 2 years of failing calculus and then when I went to the US to undertake my engineering degree in aviation and aircraft maintenance, I found out it's the other way round where they were guided towards respecting my knowledge of mathematics. And I attended 2 months and then the lecturer requested me to attend in his office and did a small test for me and I passed it and the simply word was you no longer need to come to my classes, I would give you an A mark.
INT	Ok different spectrums. Ok I would come back to that but just opening up again what type of.. was it pride or.. do you have any thoughts about what it would entail? Did you have clear expectations? Clear thoughts about what it's all about or was very...unclear? Any thoughts?
F1	No I was scared
INT	Scared? What were you scared of?
F1	Of getting lost
INT	Scared of get getting lost? As in around campus?
F1	Yeah. And being by myself.
INT	That obviously didn't hinder you. So your main kind of thought initially was unsettling? Anyone? Anyone have same feelings?
F4	I think the main thing for me was the teacher and lecturers. How much they would help you and how much time they would give you, whether they would be approachable things like that. That was my main concern cos I know it makes such a huge difference because....
INT	So the impact and influence on the teaching staff?
F4	Yeah and also the teaching style as well were they boring or are they going to be interactive? Like the one by Mark Winters was absolutely brilliant; you would stay awake the whole time because he is interactive so...
INT	So involvement was an issue as well?
F4	Yeah
INT	Ok. Excellent. Any other thoughts?
M5	I thought it would be harder than this. It's too easy.

INT	Too easy?
M5	Yeah
INT	Ok so what was your perception?
M5	I thought it was harder than this.
INT	So your perception... did that influence you prior to join a university... you know... your expectation prior..
M5	Year prior I thought it would be reasonable standards but when I came here now I thought it was easy
INT	So your concern was around difficulty
M5	Yeah I wanted something difficult to you know...test myself (Laughs)
INT	Ok and that was kind of your initial... what you thought
M5	Yeah
INT	Any different experiences?
M7	I would say I relate to this as an opportunity. I would like to describe it as an opportunity. For example in my country, its like erm... you getting into university is like you climbing the Everest Mountain. It is as hard as that. This is like...to be honest about it. And after I came here and I see the opportunity over here is much much easier. So I take this opportunity as erm... for my future goal which was how I was as in...always thinking about it. And always see the benefits and erm... improving your own personality. So I find it is very helpful since I start university here I mean I meet people different culture like say different characters it give me another perspective of...in the social life like I can interact with different people so its kind of an opportunity for development. Its opportunity
INT	Ok. Any other thoughts? Anyone?
F2	Well, when I got here, I was expecting it to be more like a school environment cos I just came straight from school but it was just totally layback and different. It was a good surprise because the school I came from was a very strict school, you couldn't get away with anything and coming here and doing things on your own accord rather than be forced to do something it was a nice surprise.
INT	Ok so it was positive. So again your initial perception about university was very structured and ...
F2	Yes everything was totally structured: you going to have this time to do this and this time to do that here you can do what you want and where you want it as long as you hit the deadline. And also the fact that teachers and lecturers were willing to talk to you. In school it was ,more like give us a minute and I would get back to you and they never do whereas lecturers here just get back to you straight away to talk you and take time to talk to you
INT	Ok. Excellent so the teaching staff they erm...
F2	and the environment itself
INT	Excellent. Ok. So moving on from that and just erm... I suppose thinking again about pre-university if you could pick some influences some things that influenced you to come here so kindly touch on that a bit as in your own personal circumstances but let in some external influences that affected you coming to university.
M3	It's a chance...as I said before it a chance as I didn't have a choice as I never had a chance due to personal circumstances so this is my chance to prove to kids that never had chance in education. It's something we always wanted and it's going to help get me a job when I go back.
INT	Yeah so the fact of a job. Ok what about again kind of wider influences such as careers at 6 th form I don't want to put words in your mouth but like family, you know was there any main drivers was there erm... or was it personal...
M5	There's erm activities by universities card that's open days event and yeah that was quite good. When with recruiters all day, that was quite interesting and that made me feel more passionate about making a move here.
M3	Do you mean how we were influenced to choose Sunderland university itself or was it...
INT	Well obviously you all are at Sunderland so yeah in that sense so what... you know, there might be various reasons for why you came to Sunderland but what thing, why, what made you want to come to university that's more of what I am interested in
F2	Being the first person in my family to actually go to university. No one had being and weren't

	really bothered if I did go but I was determined to go and kind of do something else
INT	So it's kind of erm..a personal achievement..
F2	Yeah cos they kind of had very good jobs without actually going to university as long as you can do the job and stuff it's not just about having a degree but I was like, but it gives you more chances to like actually broaden your opportunities so..
F4	For me it was two thing, erm... I worked for lots of marketing, marketing claims companies, HP Microsoft, Packard bell and to progress in them jobs they always require erm..degree. they didn't say what it was just any degree 2.1, 2.2 and will turn me down for that reason it doesn't matter how much experience I had I thought it was a flawed system and I even said that... and also the other factor was family and friends because my dad is a PhD doctor, my brother is a medical doctor and my other brother doing dentistry so I wanted to be....
INT	For the family?
F4	Yeah
INT	So you wanted to I guess emulate the family.
F4	Yeah. Friends-wise as well, in school all my friends have done really well. They have got good jobs now because they went to university so those that always say you don't need a degree you can do it on experience but actually now it isn't true.
INT	Excellent. Thanks. Any thoughts?
M7	When you look around yourself for example, you see the people who like erm... has nice cars, nice jobs and erm...things like that so this is how they get it through education. Education, as much as you do education you get the higher points, and the power. The power means for example if you are related with cultural things for example the people who works in factories their kids follow their routes and the people who are educated their kids follow their own routes so like she said earlier she is the only person to do or the first person to do University education so me erm.... It was like this, related to my dream I was always tried to find myself in the kind of erm,...in this perspective when you get graduated from university so automatically people respected you. So when you go for example for job interview, or whatever you do in social life or anywhere, when you are a graduated person people tend to look at you completely different. They believe that kind of...
INT	The perceptions of others I guess was a bit a driver of how you behave
M7	Yeah. Like I said it is...if the opportunity available then we can take the opportunity, why not? So the driving of this is basically related to power and future.
INT	Future prospects. Ok. Excellent. Any other thoughts? Any?
F6	Sometimes erm.. After I graduated here I am not going to stop there I am going to get Master's degree or PhD or do sometime else and have a look for my career.
INT	So it's kind of like the first stop here along the road?
F6	Yes
INT	Good. So again that's another driver for you. Ok. Excellent. So think more specifically about your program what made you decide to study the programs that you studying again thinking generally rather than.. you don't have to think what would you invest in...you are all business minded. What was the drivers there? Do you want to start?
F1	My dad. It was mainly because I did like college cos I did health and social care for 4 years cause I did it in school as well and I though like I wanted to go into like the NHS or care or stuff but I just didn't like it and I didn't want to like do something to do with care so I talked to me dad about it for ages and he just said like why don't you go into business? Business opens a lot of doors so...
INT	Here you are (general laughter). So any different? Any want to share thoughts?
M3	I was focussed on engineering and anything that is related to science and stuffs but then again I noticed the long term I would be working for...doing errands so erm... basically I needed to actually stop somewhere. Where you acknowledge you are limited to that field only whereas if you take general business and management, you have knowledge of almost every field but you have a life and as she mentioned before, your father is right. Take it from someone who has been working for like 15 years, airplane fly an airplanes land but at the end its always business and management if you want to grow and get higher social power as Hamid mentioned or if you want to expand or expand your knowledge on what is going on in real life.
INT	Ok. Thank you. Anyone else?

F4	Just working in marketing. I thought I like business and management so...
INT	So you thought you study a similar subject. Ok. Anyone else? Anyone has anything different?
M5	If you can't manage your finances you can't go into business
INT	So that is more of the specifics on what you want to get out. What about erm... kind of the wider experiences like {inaudible}..... was that in your mind kind of proudly when you came into university? Was it there or was it something you developed while here as a student? Your idea of being a student? So what made you decide?.....
M5	Developed. {inaudible 18:18} it was something like studying abroad, I wasn't even aware, I wasn't even interested in it. But he told me he wants to check it out and so.. {inaudible 1:29} put my mind to it.
F4	Always wanted to study in a different country. I was looking at Canada even before even coming to this university kind like Australia or somewhere else but I came here and I found out that during even university that there are doing {inaudible} that I want to get out of it.
INT	So it was kind of like erm, you were influenced on while here than before? I guess the employability do you have any expectations of where you would be in 3 or 4 years' time? What you want to do or is it still cloudy?
F1	Oh no.
INT	No idea still? No that's fair. I don't think that's erm.. anything to be concerned about. Any similar or different?
F2	Erm... I know I want to go into HR but that was because I did a placement with me ma'ams work and it was good. It was when I was in year 11 actually so it was great. But since then, it sort of made us determined to want to do that kind of thing because I enjoyed what she did Interviewer: so you think about placements, anyone else thinking about placements? Again where you thinking of those before you came? Did you sign up with the intentions of doing placements? Yeah? Yeah? So that was a bit more...a bit more {inaudible}. Okay erm... and after graduation I guess it just a case of erm {inaudible}. Ok so going back again about your background a little bit more which we spoke about earlier when you first thought about coming to university what you expected erm...do you feel like your feelings have changed you know you said you were feeling anxious, has that changed? The anxiety do you feel better, feel worse?
F1	Yeah when I first came like to university like I was so shy like I never thought I could sit here and talk to new people... {inaudible}.
INT	and yeah so it has helped you kind of.. yeah? Anyone else?
F4	I wasn't like nervous coming here but if you put it in the fact that we were going to study abroad, to that university and I am... so many things in my head like what is the teaching style going to be like, what's the students going to be like? Is the exams going to be hard compared to here? You know all these different things...erm... so there are a lot of you know doubts and uncertainties which....
INT	Do you think you had all those coming here initially?
F4	Yeah because I already studied here for one or two years.
M5	I don't know I just wanted to go. I thought it would be harder than this you know but since I come it's just too easy. It's not challenging. I didn't come in with {inaudible} grades, they were average. But I thought university would be much harder. Like from other open days I attended of other universities like Northumbria, that was much harder. The process, the structure and the things that they do in contrast to what's here so I thought it would be the same standard here.
INT	So do you think that maintained itself or did that change or...
M5	No that's changed. First year, second year like I spoke to second year students and third year students told me a completely different story.
INT	So when we sitting here by this time next year erm... (general laughter)
F6	me I am just... I don't get my {inaudible} probably after this so it's something I was scared about.
INT	Ok anybody else?
M7	Yeah to be honest erm... before I came to university I was interested in like access course so to be honest in this country I don't have like any experience about the system of education. I didn't know how it works. The first time I met like the system of education in here is erm access course and I was doing some kind of research before while actually I was doing y access course I find out it would be quite hard for especially mature students like personally for me like thinking which

	level of educational background in this country... language was one of them... erm my number one fear but after I started I found out that yeah why not erm... I should be erm successful because every individual is people who call themselves erm...like how I can describe it? Let's say cleverish those individual once you are in it looks like when you get into the water you have to swim with it so its opportunity you swim or you get in deep you know just like this so that's the opportunity and we are here and the days is passing very quickly so just erm pay attention and just do your best in all you can do and you get result of it.
INT	Great. Excellent. Any other thoughts about how your initial concerns about being in university does anyone have anything else like worse?
M3	When I first started what I expected was tests unlike research I was planning test just like that and get over but research is much harder extremely more hard and then my main concern was going back to university as a mature student at my age with kids and married {inaudible} but then you know its excepts by my father so I was worried about that going, the whole people around here not everyone was quite comfortable each and every student has his own personality {inaudible} I find that anyone can go into education I find people much more older than me which was quite a while ago.
INT	OK so your experience so far think just first semester has it been you know how would you sum of your experience think of your whole university experiences so teaching, that's kind of facilities, you know if you have been involved in a club or society, opportunities for...
F4	Are you asking for specific modules?
INT	No. not specific modules... I just mean university experience how do you feel you know good, bad, indifferent? What kind of is your thought?
M3	In education? Or in the facilities or in the whole ...
INT	However you want to say it.
M3	so step by step is how I would put it, so facilities erm... each campus has its own facilities, its benefits and downsides. Over there at the Murray library no parking space and I suffered with it and I ended up with a parking ticket and I came here and I was so happy but nothing proper to eat and drink and proper coffee is only available in one building. And then I would try to look at education I think it wonderful compared to previous school its quite nice but the research as in groups {inaudible}.... Which annoys me off is lack of attendance I wish some.... Which affects my group work which stresses me out because I have life outside the university and I have to study for my workshops and attend sessions.
INT	Lack of attendance, well let me put it this way I think attendance is vital important and I think it an area that needs erm... high attention.
M5	The thing is working in groups as well, they don't turn out all the people.
INT	What I would say it goes back to the point where people are being treated as adults full stop. People work in groups as adults. You know it's how do you manage adults? They should have certain responsibilities on themselves but yeah,
M3	It is very annoying} I don't know If I am communicating with my kids or communicating with my colleagues and they are looking at my grades falling down because my group work started depending on 7 people or 5 people now its depending on 2. Sometimes even 1 and they are doing it alone and I can't do anything about it, my tutor can't do anything about it.
INT	OK thank you. Talking positives like facilities any facilities for example?
F4	Sorry erm I really hate it that the libraries are not open 24/7 in this erm... it shuts at 9 over there in David Goldman and this closes at 12. That doesn't make sense to me at all. Because then I have to go all the way to Murray and that closes in the holidays as well so you can't go there either. It closes at certain times and you don't know especially if you are coming from Newcastle all that way and then its closed.
M7	Other concerns I want to indicate about is the teaching style. For example the teaching style when we came here some of our lecturers they can erm... like teach us more than what they are offering us. If I give example, last week one of our lecturers I am not going to say who it was when she asked us to do about 20 questions and you fill them up and this is half an hour you spend to do this and in the end she give us the result. So that half an hour she could teach us something else than give us this. This is like one of them things or the time between lectures like for example one time we came here from 9 and you have an hour lecture and you stay here and you get another lecture at 1 o'clock. I know you will say like its ok like this time gap between you can like go to library and do some kind of work but we always don't have work and we always don't have things to do you know so basically you just struggle with this timing. Me I can say I am

	living here it is easy for me but some people for example came from Newcastle, Durham, they don't have transportation to go {inaudible} or stuff like that so it is one of the concern. Some people came here just for an hour. You came her for an hour and then you find out you go to your workshop or whatever It is called then you say what the heck I came here for this like my time for nought.
INT	What about sometimes you know you have back to back lectures is that...
M3	One time only.
F4	Maybe an hour break but to make you feel refreshed...
INT	But not 4 hours!
M3	These are things actual I might be against you on this one. There might actually be to be honest. It does give you a chance to communicate with other fellow students. Nothing wrong I do respect that I have to navigate between 2 {inaudible} but when I gave 4 or 5 hours break, I like to sometimes just sit and get to look at my colleagues work, reflect on whatever I studied previously which is rare to be honest and erm... it is a good thing at the same time I have 4 or 5 hour break on Monday next week so that's bad.. and there is no food facilities. Food sucks here to be perfectly honest...
INT	I agree. I suppose does that on a wider scale I take on all these issues on why for example price of food impact on your overall university experience?
F4	Yes for example we compare to Northumbria or Newcastle all the time because we think that they have got everything there. They have got you know all sorts. In its city centre everything is close by...
M7	Another point I want to indicate about for example many people like we say it is a cultural thing like for example some people they share different religions for example Muslim and Jewish people they won't eat what normal people eat so concern of how our foods is made in the factory for example t would be like one of the main things. So like it's one of the main points for like international students because you can visually see say at least 40% of students like sharing different religion which is erm like meat towards food. I guess the...so this one of the problems exactly as he said about the quality of food, me personally I never eat food from here and sometimes I don't have time to go out there and come back for example I here now without eating and I would go home like that so this affects my concentration and feelings of course
INT	Ok it's close to time cos we have just 12 minutes left so anyone who has not spoken about experience about your experience to date, good bad? Did you want to say something?
M5	No, I was going to ask you about the question about what you spoke about before.
INT	So it is about your experience so whether that be the wider university experience like teaching, research...
M5	Well I studied previous at Northumbria in the first semester there we honestly cannot communicate with the lecturers a lot like communicating with them, speaking with them whereas over here the lecturers are more friendly and I can communicate.
M7	I can give example about erm... like communication bit with lecturers for example. Last year I started studying psychology and this year I change my course to business management. Approaching the lecturers in this same university and in this exactly the same building is completely different for example business lecturers they are really open and they give you as much as they can. They support. But for example psychology when you go ask them something they say it is on sunspace go check it yourself.
F6	It is exactly the same in criminology they don't even...
INT	So it is kind of different attitude from staff...
M7	When it comes to widely in the whole university because me personally I don't know about other universities like Northumbria or Newcastle or Durham university so I cannot like erm... be very realistic like put the pressure on which is the weakness and which is not the weakness side of the university. So the things we have been talking about this is the general idea of like for example of my personal idea what I say. But it could be better than other university as well so we don't know about this.
INT	Excellent so any other thoughts?
F2	The only thing I would say is that if I did this year again I would have moved into accommodation rather than live at home. It's not like I don't come like all the time but it would make us more willing to want to come all the time because on a Thursday where I have just an hour lecture it takes us longer to get here and get home. It is just... it's just the fact that it is too...if it takes us

	longer to get here and get home compared to how long I am here for and sometime you got your assignment and stuff on the lecture it is worth it to come but... if not we just get on with the assignment and just go...
INT	I guess that fall under the erm... the structures of timetable really
F1	Always like on a Tuesday we have like 9 to half 10 and I have to get up like 6 to get here and like it's awful and then we got a break like from half 10 to 1 like every other Tuesday so like we have missed out cos we are just like waiting around.
INT	It is difficult isn't it. Okay..
F4	Coming from that point I totally agree with that erm... you live far away its very difficult to get buses and metros and if they are on time or if they are delayed and things like this erm... so many different factors but I think one of the main concerns for me was that why couldn't we as students have control over what seminar we want to be in because if you are travelling from far distance then you should be allowed to change your seminar to something more reasonable to you whereas people who live nearby could come in the night time one...
INT	So like a bit of flexibility in your sessions but again I would actually...
F4	We can pay for it. We do actually pay for this so we may as well have!
M3	Like those 9 o'clock lecture well... (General Laughter)..
M7	Well if I say my personal opinion I think the facilities of teaching like libraries and computers the opportunity is quite good. It's quite good like for example if you like specially online like e-books and journals and stuff the accessibility of information is quite erm... very good point to get information
F4	But the thing is you are using... because you have only been here. If you go to Northumbria and compare with them or Newcastle university...
M7	That's what I am saying. This is only my personal opinion. For me it is alright. Because I get the benefit of it and when I do my assignments or research and I am doing it around here I don't go to Northumbria and when I get good results from it is positive for me.
INT	I thing that's the thing cos obviously they are all... I mean you can go to different universities and they are going to have different facilities so I suppose university have to work within their erm... limits and manage but yes I think it is a fair point. But again if you on about you doing what you want to do then you know.. so last one. I promise I keep it under 5 minutes cos its coming up to 5 to.. so let's talk about kind of your thoughts on things like we have mentioned attendance which we have talked about, you have mentioned access to lecturers so that's good. What about feedback on... feedback on assignments? Assessments? Good? Or bad?
M5	One feedback that I got from one course but would mention no names was "Ali you are not God". I got 94% and when I told him why not 100% his feedback was Ali you are not God. So what I am going to do with that feedback? None of your colleagues would {inaudible} if you get 93% why you not get the 7%? And you have got to find a reason.
INT	So it is about...
M5	Constructiveness
INT	So getting clarity on the assignment...
M7	I am going to be quite harsh here because the first assignment we handed in we had.. we didn't get any feedback and now the next assignment is next week so we would have like the feedback maybe we resubmit our last assignment before we get the feedback this is quite erm...
INT	So a timescale for feedback?
M7	Yes and the ability to ask for it!
INT	No actually I that's a fair point. So timely feedback and it could be more constructive.
F2	And also different types of feedback like me and Haley did the same question and we did the referencing in exactly the same way and one lecturer was like you haven't referenced it properly and another lecturer was saying you have done it perfectly. But we did it exactly the same way so you think what I have done wrong you...
M3	I have had that issue as well
F1	They can't really well say I have done it perfectly so I would take that.
INT	So it is about consistency of feedback as well.
M3	Also I don't like the grading system here in the uk no offence to anyone...

F4	I take offense [General Laughter]
M3	Well sorry about that if it is good enough for you. Well it erm ore of like I am, compared to a students and then to be compared to an extremely intelligent business man. Would have been great. I have compared it here and I have compared it to US where the grading system was up to a 100 you could get 99, 97 or 95 where over here as much as you do... he told you are not God. But he is not god but he is just a student who is trying to be an A student and he deserves a 100 or a 90 that is more motivation for me to give more and more.
INT	So the challenge of bettering you more is if you are getting top marks...
M3	Yes and you are getting a 50 and a 60 like I have been getting 50s and 60s and I don't think that's a good like I am going to jump off the bridge with my diploma...{inaudible}... Just fun. [General laughter] especially with what is happening. Anyway, I really which I would be graded as compared to an A student that to be grades as compare to Bill Gates.
INT	Ok so I see so it's it more about clarity. With feedback it erm...it's a whole... we can probably talk for a whole hour but I think it is important. So did you think that's one of the key...how well would you rate feedback is it more than teaching? Is teaching more...
M5	Feedback is very important. Cos if you know what you have done wrong next time you don't do it and you improve the point. But if you get a rubbish feedback you can't do anything about it either.
F4	Some lecturers do give you good feedback
M3	It's the consistency.
INT	Ok then in the last 2 minutes then is there any other comments that you have generally that you think is relevant kind of to your experience or your time here so far? Things that helped a little bit...
F4	I think overall positive. The environment well the place is not like a busy play you know things like that. But the downside is like where you gonna eat and things like that but erm... yeah like I have just said, the seminar 9 am [General laughter] and things like that
M3	And the chairs, the chairs need to be better like this one is killing me
INT	Well mine is great! (General laughter). OK thanks for your time everyone, I will draw the focus group to a close now.

INT = Interviewer

F1 – Female 1

F2 – Female 2

F3 – Female 3

F4 – Female 4

M1 – Male 1

M2 – Male 2

M3 – Male 3

Focus Group 2

INT	Thanks everyone for coming. As I previously mentioned this is all to be used for my own research, for my PhD. It's confidential and anything you say in this room, won't leave this room. The way I'd like to run this focus group; I've got some themes I'd like to discuss, areas that I've found in my own research and prior focus groups that I've ran with some Stage 1 students. So, what I'm trying to do is to ascertain your views on some things you think are an issue. I just ask the question and just check in as and when you feel comfortable. The first question is thinking back to when you first thought about coming to university and your pre-university experiences. What was your thought processes on coming to university? What were your thoughts, your rationale, I suppose, for wanting to come and study at university?
M3	I think the massive difference for me when I was considering coming to university was when I left my own country, which was Germany, to decide to do an English education, in secondary school, and they were pretty much preparing everyone to go to university after you sort of left, so I was bilingual by the end of my education so I thought well, I've just put myself through all of that, I can speak another language, I thought I might as well carry on that education as I've an opportunity to go to any university that offers an English course and that's what made me think about going to university. I think my school offered a Business subject, I had some interest in that and I thought I'd like to expand my knowledge in it.
INT	So, there's an interest from your schooling, your prior education. I don't want to put words in your mouth but was it almost an expectation.
M3	Yes. Very much. They were very much shaping you into your subject. If you liked to do Maths, they sort of based all of your subjects around your Maths. You could then take that on to university. I did Economics at a higher level and Business at higher level but I only did Maths at standard level because I'm not a scientist, but that led you to go to university. Obviously, they never told you, you have to go. It seemed kind of reasonable to go.
INT	Is that true of others or was there a different pathway.
F2	From my experience, my school also shaped me and all the other students too, they didn't say you should but, in my school, it was really a general school, general knowledge, so you didn't really have any other field except the general vision. So, you kind of have to go to university to get that field of expertise. To choose a university in the UK was an adventure.
INT	So, you saw university as something different, a challenge?
M2	When I was in high school I didn't know what I wanted to study. I was in classes for Maths and Physics. Then after my exams I was taking external English and after that I was thinking I want to finish uni because I was thinking coming to England would give me a proper respected education, as an international student.
M1	I was studying for one year in Poland. It wasn't my first choice. After one year, I realised I don't have too many prospective. Especially in my country and I need to go abroad anyway, and I hear that university in the UK prepare you much more for real life better than universities in Poland, so that was my thinking.
INT	So, to clarify the preparation element, what do you think that was about?
M1	I was thinking about the consequences of the university, because I think it will be better for job after I qualify.
F1	For me it was more like I didn't know what I wanted to do yet. I decided to go to university in England because I can speak English already. It's going to be more interesting for me to study here than in Czech Republic.
INT	Was there any kind of influences specifically? Was it school or parents or was it your own choice?
F1	I just wanted to do something different.
F3	Originally, I went to college to do Art and Design. I went to uni to study Art then I realised I wasn't going to have a career and needed to pick something more adaptable. I still didn't know what I wanted to do so I took a couple of years out at work, at an events company doing like wedding planning, so then I came to uni to do Events Management, so I can get a better role in Events. I didn't like the Events course so I ended up going on to Marketing. I think now it's quite essential to have a degree, to get a decent job. Everyone does so if

	you don't...
INT	...so almost a kind of qualification was a driver, almost like a future graduation and future employability.
M1	I agree. Nowadays you have to have a degree. I don't think a degree is essential to succeed, however, it is more difficult to achieve something without a degree, and when you realise it's easier to get one, so that's why I wasn't waiting....
INTto put you in a good position?
M1	Yes.
M3	I do agree with that but I think when I decided to go to uni it was more for the experience and opportunity university would offer me rather than the job I would get later on because I think you go to uni to get a better job and get better paid. That's a normal outcome. I think for the moment, for the 3 years I'm here, I haven't thought about that. I've thought about the experience, what do I learn, what I've never learned before, what are all the new things that can happen in the 3 years.
INT	On that point, to date do you feel you are exploring those opportunities? Are you making the most of those opportunities?
M3	I think there's certain things but definitely not taking every opportunity too but I think in the general university interest and what I'm learning, on my course, I do feel like I've properly found myself (and enjoying it) and know what I want to do later on. It's one of the things I was scared of. I didn't know when I came to university would I enjoy the course. Will I feel part of it? Will it be absolutely not what I want to do? It's a lot to do but you have to put some interest in it. You have to engage in your course I think because if you don't, then you can never really get to know what it can be all about. I think it's the best choice I've done. The best choice.
INT	What about others and their university experience? What do you feel about that and what you have and haven't engaged with? Is it all about your programme of study or is there other elements do you think are important?
M2	I feel from my own perspective it gives me, how do you say, distraction from my life. I'm working part-time as well. I feel it's this kind of secure place. We are used to being in high school, sixth form, and we are there for a long time. Then some people start working and they can feel quite unsafe because it's such a drastic change. You have a schedule when you go to work but it's not the same thing as being at school, so I feel being here gives me some sense of security.
INT	Good. Any other thought?
M2	It gives you a good chance for your studies and work which you don't have in my home country. If you study you study for 8 hours a day, so there's no chance to do any work.
INT	So that's work-study balance. Is that important?
F3	Yes. I find it hard, I feel like I want to change my hours.
INT	That's the other side of it, isn't it, where the priorities and I know everyone has different circumstances behind that. What about the wider university experience. How you engage with the careers service, library, or have you taken advantage of any part-time work like internship at the university?
M1	The Sunderland Futures; it's really helpful. I've had many meetings in one or 2 years. I did my CV. Many things happen during that time but all of my previous experience is presented in a nice form, so that's one thing. Another thing, I did this 20 days internship. It was an opportunity I was hoping I was going to get when I came to university. There's still not that much of opportunities but you can have some. It's extra points when you are looking for a job.
INT	Anyone else been involved in anything?
M3	I never got around to it and I don't know why. It's so important later on, but I just never seem to get around to it.
INT	Is it as a Stage 2 student, the thought of getting a full-time job is still a little while off?
M3	Yes. I read all the emails as well and I get all the messages, but it's not as if it's not appealing to me, I think I probably could quite like that but I also want to do my Masters straight after, so I'm not really looking at what job I'm doing and I think that's putting me off going to the meetings and seeing what they've got to say. Even if it's only for my CV as I'll

	need it later on.
M1	It's like the first question. We have different aims for coming to university.
INT	Yes perhaps. So different rationale to coming to university. Again, anything that you feel (F1), or are you sitting on Max's side of the fence or it is more Damian's?
F1	I think with Careers they are quite helpful and I used to go quite a lot when I was looking for a job. But now I have a part time job I'm not looking for any help from them.
INT	So, they've met your needs so to speak.
F1	Yes, it was useful but I don't need to use it at the minute.
INT	You may want to think about that next year when you're in Stage 3. When you're thinking about that big wide world that's on the horizon.
INT	Alice, you're working part-time. When you mentioned earlier about your priorities well you didn't say priorities, but you did say pressures, could you please tell us?
F3	I really like the placement now as you get to meet people and talk to them. You're putting your face about and that works.
INT	Yes, you're always thinking about embedding yourself in university curriculum. Do you think that your expectations of the service and the support like careers, do you think that's changed from when you first came to the university to the, back end, of what is your second year now? Are they different or the same?
M1	I think different expectations about the hours we are going to spend at the university. We are spending nothing at all, almost. For me, I thought it would be more hours if I'm honest, make some more practical exercises, and you know people from the campus but on a night, you don't even speak. That is one thing I would change or do differently.
INT	OK, I think that's very fair and honest. Is that agreed?
M3	I agree that we're not spending a lot of time in university. We spend 10 hours a week, if that. It may be 12 hours, I don't know. I do think there is a lot which you are meant to be doing outside of university, which I know people don't do. I think they say it's 10 hours per module, per week, which may be a bit exaggerating but you are told you are very much an individual. So, you come to a lecture, you get told what to do, and you get off to do your work, but really, it's very supportive. Like the careers thing, individual meetings with your lecturer, your programme leader. Anything like that is very, well, they always seem to be there for you which I thought was completely the opposite. I thought you would just sit on your course and you were going to have to be our own man so to speak.
M1	I think that you have to do your job on your own, no one is going to know if you do it or not but I know you need to think about yourself. However, I do not need to go to university to be thinking for myself. They are marking the assignment at the end of the module so the job is done already so even if I fail it won't help me.
INT	I totally take that point. [M2] do you have any expectations prior to where you are now?
M2	First of all, like I said earlier, there are much less hours than when you're stuck in the Polish educational system. It has completely changed when I came here. It was much better when I came here for young persons. Much different. We don't have like tests every week like back at home. Working towards completely your assessments, you have much more time to do them. I know you can find much more resources as I know you have a few months to do that. It's nearly impossible to fail, for example, upload the work on time so I really like studying here. It's the same with the ones we had on Digital Marketing last year. Last term's wasn't that hard because we had MCQs and I can't imagine having an MCQ in Poland. It's something that wouldn't happen.
INT	So, your expectations are a positive one?
M2	It's a positive one because it's completely different from what I thought it was going to be.
INT	Alice, any thoughts.
F3	I think not my expectations but my experience. I feel that this course is a lot more me. On Events, you didn't go in-depth on a subject, that was because on Stage 1 and Stage 2 you were kind of like spoon-fed which was really basic, whereas with this course it's like you are given the subject matter and then it's up to you how deeply you go into it in your own time. You're given the information and the support is there but it's down to you.
INT	So how do you feel about that. Has your view on that changed from Stage 1 to Stage 2 in the sense of you're told to do 10 hours reading a week, is that a scary thing? Is it

	something you're comfortable with because you've got the time? Does anyone have any thoughts on that.
M3	I don't know. It's not a scary thing because everyone, speaking quite generally, knows that if you don't do it, you're not going to massively struggle, you can go back and look on the lecture slide. It's getting your own knowledge and engaging on your course. If you want to get to know everything and you want to get a broad knowledge of what we're doing, but I only started doing it in the second year. I thought after 3 years I don't want to think I've only done just a half-arsed sort of job and if I do what the teachers ask of me at uni then I will probably be more knowledgeable in my employment later on. That's one thing I've realised now between Stage 1 and Stage 2; Stage 1 was like you can miss a bit and you'll be alright. As you came to Stage 2 you've got all this reading, it's very much up to you to be independent and you either do or you don't.
INT	So, there's an independence and you also have to take accountability?
M2	There was a good comment as I feel that there is an independence and what Damian spoke of that we have quite not as many hours and we only have one or two assessments per module. I feel that this independence and this free space effects the whole process of lectures and workshops. Because, we are currently having this problem where people do not turn up and I think this is because they are given this freedom, and they know they don't need to attend as many times because I will just look at the slides; I will just somehow put the final assignment together, I don't really need to study the subject which I think is scary. I mean if we were doctors, it would be scary as the people without any knowledge would just get a degree, which I believe there will be people without knowledge of the field getting a degree. I find it a shame and I find it sad.
INT	I suppose from your experience, should the university put more accountability on or more onus on students to be attending or undertaking the 10 hours reading, or do you think that would take it back to a different environment?
M3	I don't know if we can judge as I don't know how hard the third year is going to be. I feel by now that everyone can sort of, like Teresa said, that somebody who doesn't turn up can still manage to pass the year and people put 20 hours in a week, and they get through as well but I don't know what next year is going to be like. It might be that a lot of people will fail their degree, because they've not paid attention for the last 2 years or 3 years. I don't think the uni is to blame. They could perhaps do a couple of more hours, but I think being an individual is a good thing. You're not going to get that later on in your job. You're not going to sit there going make me do that in an hour or make me do that by the end of the week. You can do it however fast you want to or, however, fast you want to work at.
INT	Any other thoughts on that?
F3	I think the uni, obviously it's not their responsibility but how much people attend and how much people put into their course reflects in their final dissertation; that affects their statistics.
INT	Is that kind of an end goal for both sides?
F3	Yeah, where they are in relation?
INT	Yes, fair point. Any other points, Jacob or Damian?
M2	The work should be complete both from the students and from the university.
INT	Do you think on the programme itself, has your programme, so far, met your expectations, or has it been different to what you expected? We've talked about teaching hours as in content and how you engage the subject, how interesting you find it, is it as you expected, less than, better than?
M1	I was expecting more from Marketing modules. We have only had 2 assignments so far, so not many. There's a lot of time, that for me, is just wasted. You could do much more and also with the Marketing I'm not sure how many skills I've gained so far: I think I was expecting more Marketing focused modules.
M3	Like Damian was saying, we don't have that many Marketing modules yet. I think a lot of the things that have sat alongside with the modules are quite important. Things like Quality as you do need that with Marketing. I do sometimes think the Marketing modules are the smallest portion of everything. I think some of the modules I've chosen like Digital Marketing and Integrated Digital Marketing they do link quite well together. It's got quite a lot of future potential which is quite interesting for us. I think it's balanced between things that are important for us and, in the future, hold the theories of Business and Marketing

	now.
INT	OK. Teresa, on that point, when you came to sign up to university, how closely did you look at those modules. Was it a case of the degree appeals to me because I'm studying this specific module or was it because of the degree title, how and where do you rank a specific module. I know they are very important now, and I agree that they should be focused but, for my own benefit, kind of reflecting back, was that really something you'd looked in to? Or was it 'this is the degree I'm doing' or was it the modules?
M2	For me it was mostly the modules. I was looking around the modules and they were much like for my vocation so I took them.
M1	I knew I wanted to do the Business module and then again, I was looking at what I was going to do after the university, and it simply was something I would like to do. That's why I chose it.
F2	Initially when I looked at the modules, I was quite happy with the first year being that Finance included, HR included, so I was happy about that. But now, I remember semester 2 in year one, I didn't have the same view anymore, because I wanted it to be more Marketing concentrated, but I changed course in that time so it was discovering that for myself. When I initially came here, my expectations were different, it was that I thought we would sit for long hours in lectures and listen but it's way more practical, way more...I knew about workshops but I didn't know it would be that engaging with us.
INT	So that's a positive.
F2	Yes, it's a positive. Definitely and I come back to do support and also the careers, and the academic advisors. I didn't think this would be offered to us, and I feel that even the tutors and the lecturers give us so much support, they sit down with us and they offer us sessions. I was really surprised about that and I really appreciate that. I think in our countries it wouldn't be possible. They just don't care.
F1	I think it's a good thing they are so good because in the first year, I signed up for HR and then I saw the other modules and I realised that's not what I want to do. It helped me to decide my career.
INT	To summarise the modules are important because it guides and develops your knowledge. Ultimately, it's about the degree and the progression. So, based on that and the wider university experience, how you feel about yourself and the university, as a second-year student compared to when you were a first-year student. Do you feel different now? How do you feel...I'll leave it that, I don't want to guide, do you feel different in...
M1	I have a feeling that the other thing I said was unfair, but to be honest I see the progress. Also, the first year was very easy, firstly we got an introduction to everything but I also know that there are a few things I'd like to do/wouldn't like to do. There are things I like to do, that give me the other side of everything. Also, when I'm checking the assignment from the first semester and I'm comparing it now I see how much better I am writing now. There are fewer things I don't like but all the progress is positive, and I...
INT	So, you feel you are developing. I suppose on that, did you have any fears, concerns, prior to that first experience at university; how do you feel about those fears now?
M2	For me at first, I was afraid of writing assessments. The ones I'd done previously were 300 words or 400 words. But once I understood how to write that, my writing skills are much better at this point, and my revision skills, so I can see progress and also with the knowledge. I have to put thought into it but I can see the progress.
M3	I think that too in my first year, but I guess that was due to my education I didn't struggle with writing assignments. I had to do a lot of writing in my IB so I think the thing I was most nervous about was I was not sure that I'd come out with a degree and know anything of what I'm doing. In the first year I had a lot of recap because I did Business at higher level, and Economics, so a lot of things were similar to what I knew so when it came to second year there were modules that I'd never heard about before. I realised this is where I need to start throwing myself into the course. That's what I've learned that if you don't engage with the course and do outside things, do read recommended things and read the paper, I don't know but you will probably never get the experience, you sit in a lecture for an hour and write 3 things down, you get nothing out of it.
INT	It's that engagement.
M3	Yes. I've realised that's very important, well for me anyway.
INT	Any other comments on that.

F2	When I initially came here I was really worried that I wouldn't be good enough to just proceed. But in my first year I saw that it was quite easy as Damian said, and I appreciate that, and adapt to university living and also living outside, in a different country for most of us. As part of the transition to the second year, I can see the positives as well and I can see I'm not as scared anymore, because I was really worried in year one when the first assignments were in and I was so lost. Now we know how it's going and the structure, so even though it's getting harder and the assignments are on different topics and different fields, not fields but modules, we have this structure to go off. We know there will be a brief and if we decode it, as William likes to say, that we have the support and we know how it goes. That's a big part.
INT	So that's familiarity.
M2	Yes. Familiarity.
INT	Expectations upon you is that – in that initial first year, you're not sure of the tutors, not sure of the expectations upon you, is that fair to say? I suppose that initial first year you're not sure of the tutors, you're not sure of the assignments, whereas in Stage 2 you've been through that for one year and I know that subjects change but do you feel a bit more comfortable in Stage 2?
M2	Yes. There is also the challenge. You see your results from year one and you want to do better, as least that's me.
INT	Do we all want to do better?
M1	Yes.
INT	Yes, I hope so. It goes back to what Max was saying, it's about classification, engagement, commitment.
F3	To be fair, I didn't really have the ideas(?) in the first year but in the second year I improved. Not massively different but I had improved. There was things that had been mentioned in Stage 1 and sometimes that does happen and different models that we use and they are like ah, in first year they were have you covered this and I was like, no. Sometimes if you ask they do help but I do try and read on it.
INT	Yes, it's that kind of prior knowledge I suppose. You missed that initial year.
F1	Before I came to university, I wasn't fearing it. I wasn't thinking about it enough. When I came here and I realised I'm here and I'm on my own, it was kind of like really scary. I feel like the first 8 months, I struggled a lot.
INT	What helped you kind of overcome that. Was it friendship groups, was it support in the university?
F1	I think in the first year I started I tried to engage a lot in the course. I was attending my every lecture. Not missing anything as that would make it harder for me. Making new friends.
INT	Did that help.
F1	[nods head]
INT	Do you feel more comfortable now?
F1	I don't know because second year is like a whole new level. I've been working quite a lot and I've got uni on the side.
INT	So again, it's that timetable of your own personal time. Excellent. So, something on satisfaction. Do you feel satisfied that about your university experience to date?
F3	Not fully no.
INT	What satisfies, what doesn't.
F3	The course itself is fine. You talk about work/study balance. I work that much I feel I can't engage myself that much to do my course. But then it's you don't have a choice really.
INT	So is that negative satisfaction relating to you personally.
F3	Yes, it's not the university's fault.
INT	Yes, but it's an important consideration isn't it. Good, well not good, but thank you! Any other thoughts?
M3	I think I'm probably the only person who's not worked throughout my 2 years at university. That's given me quite a lot of time to engage with my course so I'm satisfied because I can allow myself a lot and taking my days off to do uni work. To do the reading, I can have

	days off. I was quite scared it would be quite stressful at times but I think with the time you spend at uni and the freedom you can enjoy yourself a lot. I think that balancing; I do a lot of hockey, 3 times a week, I go to a gym and I go to uni and I've still got time to do reading, I do research and I think it all sits perfectly how I like it to be. I don't feel I'm missing out on anything. I don't feel I can't do this because I've got too much uni work or I can't because I've got too much work. I feel it's quite perfect really.
F2	So jealous!!
INT	What's that for?
F2	It's just the free time.
INT	Are you satisfied, are you weighing it up? How do you feel so far?
F2	With university and what we receive, I'm very satisfied I think. I'm not satisfied with myself. I could do better. It's also hard to juggle work and university and I can relate and also having to tend to yourself, which there is that but university wise it's fun and I'm satisfied and it's much better than I expected and its nice you can have a friendly word with your lecturer, and workshop tutors and yes, I'm satisfied.
INT	So, it's that support of staff again.
F2	Yes, its really nice.
INT	Is that general?
M3	I'd say it's made a massive difference to my experience at university. I was initially wanting to go to Newcastle. I was thinking of transferring after the first year. After first year I didn't want to because speaking to everyone there, they said you get absolutely no time with your lecturers or teachers. At all. At least here you can email someone not every day but when you need to and I quite like that. It gives me a lot of confidence as well. You feel quite appreciated by whoever you want to speak to.
INT	Yes, its appreciation. I suppose it's that how that is supported and staff are there to help you succeed. [F1] What are your thoughts – are you satisfied?
F1	Yes. I think it's quite good as it's helped me find what I want to do. In the second year like I said the modules are different so it helps you find what you want to do.
INT	Satisfaction like in the next steps.
F1	Yes.
M1	Like I said before I'm also satisfied. I get to choose. Again, I do the same. Even the assignments I really like them. Of course, at the beginning when you see what you've to do you have no idea. But when you're doing them, I think I'm really enjoying it because there's a lot from real life learning too. They go round and round again to make it as good as possible. Yes, I think that you can talk with your tutor, about the assignment and other points. Yes, I think I'm satisfied.
M2	That's the same for me. Especially with the support from the teachers. Sometimes when I'm struggling, as I have a few friends studying in Newcastle, it is really difficult to get private time with your tutor to explain how to get things done to get through. Here it is much easier. So yes, I'm satisfied.
INT	So, you kind of touched on it Teresa. You kind of introduced it. Without asking too deeply, what about your own performance at university, if you could rate yourself from 1 to 10 do you think you're exceeding where you are? Are you happy with what you are doing?
F3	5!
INT	Why a 5 particularly.
F3	I don't think I'm delivering the full potential because if I did perhaps I'd try to do more reading and do stuff like that rather than sort of looking at the brief and sort of ticking the boxes rather than exceeding the boxes. I'm not doing that.
INT	Thank you for an honest assessment there. Jacob what about you.
M2	On a scale of 1-10, a 6 or 7 as I know I can do much more but sometimes work comes into private time. Or you can go to the cinema!
INT	Go to the cinema! Yes, I understand. I was a student. Great.
M1	I could do more reading. We are not marked doing that. If I was, then I'd do that. As I'm not there's no incentive.

F1	I could do more but as I'm working and full-time hours, and since this semester started, I've missed quite a lot. I think I could have done better to catch up on everything. I could have done more reading but I still find it quite hard to balance everything.
INT	Thank you for your honesty. Teresa?
F2	I need to brace myself!
INT	Do you think you can do more/less?
F2	I always self-structure myself when I submit an assignment. I would rate myself a 7 or an 8 because I always need a structure. When we get the brief, I start with the structure, and I plan this and this and I always do something additional because I want to exceed the expectations but then I don't do anything but, no last minute, but shortly before last minute....I have the structure but I don't have the time or energy to fulfil everything on the list so I just tick the boxes and maybe do something additional to get the first, but I would like to get into the 80s, 90s and not be stuck on the 70s.
M3	I'm quite happy with myself I think. I was a bit too confident especially with my last semester's results. I genuinely thought I'd done a lot better than I actually had. That's purely because I was far too confident, with my own ideas and what I wanted to do. I should have done much more rather what was given to me. So, following that up I hope I do a lot better than I did last term. In general, like I said I'm enjoying my whole time at university, I feel like I'm giving university my full potential.
INT	I suppose as Max and others mentioned, you're in Stage 2 and as you progress to Stage 3, it's to see if those balances can be managed. Last question from me, as I did say we'd try to keep it under the hour. I suppose it's a yes or a no and a bit of explanation but would you see yourselves as customers of the university?
M1	Yes, I do.
INT	With being a customer, how does that influence your expectation?
M1	When I'm giving feedback, I'm hoping that someone will do something about it. That's the only point.
M2	I can't think!
INT	That's OK. Alice?
F3	I didn't see myself as that until you used that phrase. It makes sense as they are essentially providing a service to us. That service, people come and use it based usually on recommendations made by other people. Providing they give us a good service, we'll give them good feedback.
INT	It's the nature of service as well isn't it. It's the service you receive and the provision you are given, rather than the service you perceive. Thinking about the discussion earlier about how much you are putting in as a customer, and how much you get back it's an interesting one...Max any thoughts?
M3	I don't know about a customer but I definitely think it's a service and it's the give and take between the student and the university is quite important. I was going to say but probably invested but we're not – no one teaching anyone essentially (<i>sorry couldn't make this out</i>)
INT	I suppose the end product that you come out with is a representation of the university. You could think of it that way.
F2	I do agree with that but I think it's the reality that we are the customers, but what I think is a little different. From my experience I see that most of the tutors are so genuinely happy to teach that I don't really see them as performing a service.
INT	I suppose that the teaching staff in the wider university, you could look at the distinctions of what is a service and what you are given. Things like employability, is that part of the service or is that something you have to engage with to get an end product.
F3	It's a 2-way street really. I'd say they're providing both really.
M3	More like a corporation between you and the students.
INT	Any thoughts Jacob?
M2	The university provides a service because we are the customers. We use that service and if anyone wants our feedback...
M1	For me it's a good thing.
F1	Like they've said we are the customers but it doesn't really feel like it. It's more a friendly

	environment.
F2	When there's a session not happening, we're not like ' want our money back'.
INT	That is an interesting one! OK I'll call it a session there. All I'd like to say is thanks very much. That was really good, really insightful. It's very useful for me. Thanks for your time. I do appreciate it.

INT = Interviewer

F1 – Female 1

F2 – Female 2

F3 – Female 3

M1 – Male 1

M2 – Male 2

M3 – Male 3

Focus Group 3

INT	Thank you for coming. As I explained before, this is about the focus group for my PhD. It's confidential so anything discussed in this room and won't go anywhere or anywhere that you study. I'd like to start by chatting about...you guys are in stage 3, so thinking back to before you started university or thinking about coming to university what kind of was the key thought processes? What were the deciding factors in you deciding to come to university?
B1	Didn't want a dead-end job.
INT	Didn't want a dead-end job so it was about employability.
B1	Basically, you are told the best jobs you can get are by coming to university. When you're 18 you don't really know what you want to do. I didn't want to get a full-time job and it was another 3 years delaying getting a proper job in a way.
INT	When you were thinking about coming to university was there any kind of influences, was it college tutors?
B1	My mum and dad had gone to uni, my sisters had gone to uni so it was kind of, not that I was pressured to do it but I've always thought that's what I'd do anyway. I was never told you have to go to uni.
INT	Something that you thought...
B1	Yes, I knew a while back I'd be going to uni.
INT	Was that the same for you?
B2	Yes, my mam and dad wanted me to go. They didn't go to uni, my sister didn't go to uni; she got an apprenticeship and went through that way. They really wanted me to go and when I was a sixth form, it was the thing to do. It was doing your personal statement for uni and everyone was you might as well apply and if you don't get a job you might as well go to uni.
INT	So, they were encouraging everyone to apply?
B2	Yes.
INT	So was that the main factor?
B2	My dad like, at sixth form, you should go to sixth form, its better education, otherwise you'll struggle getting a decent job, money and that. He said it widens the scope about jobs and stuff.
INT	Great, and you.
G1	Mine was a bit of a panic. I applied to go to uni. I did my stuff by the deadline and then I withdraw my application in the January. Then I went through clearing.
INT	So why did you change your mind?
G1	I was going to do History originally. Then I had to drop my History A Level because it was all too much. So, when I dropped my History A Level I just withdrew my application. Then on the day of clearing, I don't know why I thought I'd do a Business degree. I wanted to specify in something and I don't really like finance but it was just like a last-minute thing.
INT	Do you think there was any influence on your choice?
G1	There was with History, everyone was just like doing History and my tutor at sixth form was a history tutor so if you were in your history class, it was like, well you weren't forced....
INT	Do you think there was...?
G1	There was influence but it was more teachers. It wasn't really like my mam.
B3	I was just sick of working on doors.
INT	So, you were working.
B3	Aye and then I applied through clearing.
INT	So again, what was the....
B3	I was just sick of working on doors. It wasn't a nice lifestyle you could say. I thought I'd try and get an indoor job, a proper one.

INT	Exactly, you've got the cream of employment. When you decided on university you chose your programme of study so to speak. As we've had one example of wanting to change from one to another. What was it for the rest of you was it a clear and easy decision for you to make? Was it something you looked around and read literature on?
B1	At my school I was always doing sport. I got to the point at college I was sick of doing sport and like you, I wouldn't want to work outside, so that's why I'm doing the combined degree. I read around it and thought I'd never get on a Business degree as I'd never studied Business, so I applied for a Combined one and I'd get to do the Business side and stuff. I'm doing major Business now but that was the thought behind doing a Combined because I thought I'd get on the full-time Business one as I was sick of doing sport. So, I applied for a Combined.
INT	So, it was that interest alongside....
B1	Yes.
INT	So, what was the thought with Business.
B1	It's just the, if I could have gone back to college, I'd have done Business with hindsight. It was just something I think I can use in the future really.
B2	I did Combined too, Sport and Business and looking back now I wish I'd just done all out Business. I never did Sport before coming to uni and I thought I'd do Sport and Business as I've an interest in Sport and I like Business as I did that for my A Level and when I actually started doing Sport I didn't really like it, it wasn't my thing. It wasn't what I expected. It was all in a classroom and I thought it was actually going to be doing stuff, learning to be like a PE teacher but it was all theory.
INT	So, in the 3 years have you ever thought about changing to more Business.
B2	I changed the major but since the first year I just wish I changed to all Business, it's what I'd prefer to do.
B1	I would have changed as you had the opportunity but didn't!
B2	Yes, if I could go back. I would have swapped it.
INT	Is it on interest or is in on the qualification, the modules?
B1	A bit of both really. I prefer the Business classes to the Sport.
INT	You kind of changed from History to Business.
G1	I think it was Business. I did Business A Level and I failed it. I didn't want to fail it and that was part of the reason I wanted to do Business at uni so that I could pass it. I think it's always going to be something that will be there. If you specify in a certain subject, like with my 2 A levels, I'd be really limited to jobs and stuff. At least with Business you can pretty much go anywhere.
INT	It's more generalist.
G1	Yes.
B3	Mine was just I did Business at sixth form. When I applied it was last minute and I thought you could only do a degree in the subject you did at sixth form. With me it was the only one I was good at.
INT	So, the clearing process for you guys, was it clear, was it simple, could you have done with more information?
B3	I made 70 phone calls to uni to try and rush it through.
INT	Did you feel you were informed with what you were doing?
B3	I didn't find UCAS very good like. I find them poor. It was difficult.
G1	When I got mine, I thought I'm more likely to get into Sunderland than Newcastle or Northumbria. I just found Sunderland's clearing number and just rang them. I didn't go through UCAS and nobody in the school wanted to help you go through clearing.
INT	Did you talk to anyone at the university?
G1	It was just over the phone. They just asked what UCAS points I had and what previous stuff I had done, then I was on the course.
INT	You didn't speak to any staff or anything like that?
G1	No.

B3	I think I spoke to the reception here. It was emails the majority.
INT	Did you feel there was a lack of communication?
B3	Aye, it was lacking. You might get one email one day and you might get one the next day.
INT	In relation to the actual programme, I guess it goes back to what you guys were saying, do you think you felt fully informed about what the programme was going to be about. Do you feel you knew, for example, did you know what specific modules you would be studying?
B3	I don't even know now!!
B1	I had no idea. Obviously with doing the Combined Honours, I didn't know if it was the case of doing 2 full time ones, how do you go about studying so I came here not knowing....
INT	It's a case of coming into the programme title and not specific modules. Has that changed?
B3	Nah, nah, nah.
INT	Does that change as you get more into it? Do the modules become more important? The modules titles and the content?
B2	It became more focussed. We were doing finance, management and marketing. When we started choosing our own stuff we could choose whichever part we wanted to get into but it was all over the place at first. We were doing Psychology in Sport, then there was sport development, and there was finance, marketing and management all at the same time and it was all over the place.
B1	I think when we had the choice in second and third year about what you were going to do, we both (B2) wanted to focus on the marketing areas, when we had the choice to do a bit more about it.
INT	Yes, it's an interesting one, the concept of what impact the modules have, obviously the importance of studying them...cool.... we mentioned earlier about the reason you're undertaking your degree. It's about employability and a job after graduation, so do you think that now, after your 3 years here that you're better prepared to go out into the job market.
B3	More like knowledge wise I think.
INT	What kind of knowledge.
B3	Anything really.
INT	Subject or the nature of what employability is.
B3	Aye in the subject aye. Like about management, sort of. The strategic side.
INT	So, you kind of feel....
B3	I don't know. I was applying for jobs yesterday and I was doing my covering letter and adapting my CV to make it what they want to hear. I was going off the modules and talking about what modules I've done.
INT	So, there's that kind of link. Is that true of you Hope?
G1	I feel more academically prepared with terms and stuff and I think I could probably if somebody put a similar format in an assignment module I could probably do it but until I'm in the situation where I've just got to go off what I've learned; I'm not sure.
INT	Yeah, I suppose that's true but what the nature of the experience of the university has helped.
G1	Yes, I've got an understanding of it academically and that, but I don't know how quickly I could apply it.
B1	Obviously, I learned things academically but being at uni I'm definitely more prepared for working life, than I was when I was 18 or 19. Three years of doing assignments and being in classes. Obviously academically I've improved through being at uni.
B2	I know I'm a lot more employable but it would have been better to do a placement. I felt that there wasn't enough support from the uni to do a placement unless your parents are supporting you, type of thing. I've had to work all the way through uni as I didn't have the financial support.

INT	So, you've had to work part-time?
B2	Yeah, yeah.
INT	So, you've had to work through university, is that true of others?
G1	Yes.
B1	Yes. I took whatever came up.
INT	Does that help/hinder your studies?
B3	I was working 40 hours a week.
INT	It's that kind of balance – the pressure of getting through a job and putting the onus on you...
B2	It's even worse if you've got friends who work full time. They've got this money, a car and you're just like.....living on £500 a month.
INT	That's a living expense isn't it. Does it help or hinder studies? Is it a discussion you've had in class?
G1	I was alright until November gone, working and studying and then it just got too much for me doing all that in a week so I actually quit my job. I've started working again now, it was just too much.
INT	What was too much?
G1	Especially working in retail, I don't know where anyone else worked but they just expect so much of you. Even though you're just a sales assistant they expect you to be able to do everything. You just cannot because me personally, third year, it was so hard compared to the other 2 years. I feel like I just sailed through the other 2 years. Then obviously when I got my grades in January, which weren't what I wanted, that made me more focussed on not working and just trying to pull my grades back up.
INT	So, work pressure impacts on your study. Another point you made there about the change in expectations as you go through university, you've found a notable difference in stage 3; is that of others?
B1	Darren and I have nearly every lesson together from Thursday until this Christmas and the first 2 years we were both it's not as hard as we thought. You aren't told uni is going to hit you hard and we were its only our first year, it doesn't count, and if it doesn't count we can't be stressing, second is more but even that wasn't too bad but then third year and it's all the preparation you've got to do for that – assignments are a lot bigger and you've got to do dissertations.
B2	We've said for a while we've broke the system by doing Combined in Sport and Business. We seemed a lot more relaxed than other people were and I don't know why. It seemed really strange but I got to a really stressed out point at the beginning of the third year, I was working at the time and was running the night shift all through the weekend and on Wednesday nights and I was doing an 11-hour night shift and coming to uni and doing all the uni work. I got to the point where I was like I can't take this, I need another job and went to Sainsburys on a small contract.
INT	But it's still trying to get that balance. It's interesting as there is a point where you reach your break point, where you think what's the most important and it sounds as if it's study.
B2	I was so stressed out at that point it was horrible. They were saying can you do these hours and these hours and they put a rota up and I was like I've got to do these hours!
INT	That's a difficult balance when you've got to get control over you uni life in a sense but your working life...
B1	I was similar to you in I do all my working in retail. Over the summer it's not too bad as you've no work to do. I didn't even bother going back the Christmas just gone, it's long days and I had stuff to do so I couldn't do it.
INT	To B3 - have you noticed a change over the 3 years.
B3	The second year I was off the planet a bit but this year I sorted myself out.
INT	So, you've made decisions?
B3	I realised I had to change my lifestyle.
INT	Ultimately you are literally at the end of the 3-year process now. Looking back on it, how do you feel about it? Have you done as well as you thought you would? Did you

	have expectations of yourself.
B3	I did at first. I told all my mates I was doing this....
INT	And where are you now in terms of academic grades and things. Have your expectations of yourself changed?
B2	I thought it was going to be really hard and it would be harder than A Levels and what not. So, I was like I'd be happy with just a 2.2 and just get a degree and then in the last semester.... well in the first year my grades were like 50% and then second year they got a bit better, 50-60s, and then this year I started getting firsts in every module I did. I don't know how it happened.
INT	Does that go back to what you were saying earlier, it's that step up?
B2	Yeah, there was that and the fact that every spare time I just had to do uni work and I did work under pressure and it made me focus more.
B1	I'm probably similar to Darren, in a sense that I came thinking I'm going to come out with a first and see what happens kind of thing, then I remember that last summer after second year, I was thinking it's not that difficult and I hope I'll not be too disappointed if I don't get that first, but it's definitely achievable to get it. I've double passed two units. I didn't have that to start with but towards the end of the second year I started to think I hope I get a decent grade and started to try as it's not that difficult, like I thought it was going to be.
INT	So again, your personal expectations have probably increased based on your experience.
G1	My expectations only hit me a couple of weeks ago. It's probably too late now but because I didn't do as well in the first term, it's made me want to do really, really well in the second term. Whether it's too late or not I don't know but my expectations just hit me just recently.
INT	So, it was just one of those kinds of ones where you just kind of went along with it rather than having a clear plan.
G1	Yeah. I think because in second year and everyone is still like you can do it on the last day, and I did do that but I ended up with 2.1s throughout the second year. It's not like I did that in the third year, I still had weeks and stuff, but I just didn't realise that the expectations had gone so much. My expectations hadn't gone up.
INT	Could that have been made clearer, by module leaders, by programme leaders, by the tutors?
G1	As you know I wasn't here for some of October and November so it probably was but because I wasn't here I was playing catch up and catch up got too much.
INT	It had an impact.
G1	Yes.
B1	I've always said that the first 2 years don't prepare you for the final year. The first year your told doesn't count, the second year is 40% and you're not like, well the work in class wasn't like what I had to do for your class (INT) – we had to do a presentation for Derek, we never had to do anything like that for first year or second year really, and if I hadn't realised in the summer of second year that I wanted to do well, I would probably have come in thinking there's not going to be much difference.
INT	Perhaps that could be something more university wide....
B1	Yes, get you to read much more outside of class. Second year definitely giving you more stuff to do, say this is what you have to do next week.
INT	It goes back to the importance of it, to summarise it so in the third year you know it's important. The second year you think ah...
B3	I think you need a kick up the arse, I did! They were constantly....
G1	All of our class cos if someone came in, cos even I'd not always turn up, if somebody came in and said this is hard, whether you listen to it or not you've been told, that there is a jump and they do expect so much more from you.
INT	You could have Accounting Stage 3 students coming in to Accounting Stage 2 classes or something like that.
B3	They should have attendance things like that.

INT	That's why they've issued the attendance monitor – do you think that would help?
B3	Aye as soon as I got out them doors, I don't think about it again.
INT	I think that is the issue, you leave the uni or the building and you don't think about it. You need to have a better attitude, it's just that switch isn't it. Some people grasp it sooner, some don't. Equally how much responsibility is on the student, how much on the university.
B1	When we were in Stage 2 we heard more from Stage 3 people. Some girl came in to show us some work or module she'd did, and there was so much and she then went on to say you're going to have to do that times 4 next year. That was like this time last year, from that you realise you're going to have to step up so I think that would help if that happened more.
INT	Thank you. So, I suppose your initial thing before you came to university and your expectations of the university experience – have they been met?
B3	Aha, I found I'm more socialising. Aye it's bizarre. I'm watching films with Americans!
INT	What do you mean by more social?
B3	Talk to people at the bar. Ah dinnah, I might do more things, like group things.
INT	They used to have one at City Campus but they got rid of it.
B3	It used to be up there. It used to be alright but now there's nowt.
INT	Does that hinder the campus?
B3	When I was first here me and Phil? used to go drinking in the Library together but when you're not with your friends you just go your own way and go home. It's like having a study buddy.
INT	It's forming that social group. It doesn't just help socially but also acts as a study aid as well.
B3	Now when I'm asking Phil? He can't be bothered.
INT	It's interesting that because I know what you mean.
B3	At first it was good as we just clicked but then we started to separate.
INT	For various reasons I wonder? Do you think more activity on campus would have helped?
B3	Yes.
B1	When you first arrive you just think it's a big social club. That's why you come for the social side. I moved away from home and when my parents came to uni they made loads of friends and you think you're going to do the same but I haven't really felt... well I've come from college and I speak to you (B2) in class but if there was a common room or social area where you could sit down. There's times in first and second years where you have a big gap and you just go home. If there was somewhere to go and sit it would have been more social.
INT	It would have motivated you.
B2	I've never really had much of a social thing with the people... You come in for an hour or 2 a day and you say alright to someone and you listen to what the lecturer has to say and you go home. There's not much time unless your speaking to someone in the class. I don't know like, I expected uni to be a lot more hours. When you think of school, kids in school and people are working a lot of hours a week. You come to uni and it's like 8 hours a week and it's like what am I paying for.
INT	That's the interesting one isn't it. The finance element of it. So, I suppose the service we, or the university provides, is the hours of teaching so do you think you get enough for your fee?
B2	Not at all. I think it's ridiculous.
B3	We only there for 15 hours.
B2	There's a lad I went to school with and he's at Cambridge, I think. Doing some doctors thing. He gets an assignment every week of 2000 words. I'm thinking how is his degree like this is and up here we have a 1000 word one every 4 months.
INT	It depends on the qualification.
B3	Cambridge is a completely different institution.

INT	Would you like that?
B2	I wouldn't like that but I just feel...
INT	The difference is in standards.
B2	I just feel I'd like somewhere in between. More demand from the university but there hasn't been any whatsoever.
INT	Do you feel that's impacted on your experience?
B2	Yes, we're only in a certain amount of hours a week.
B3	It's proper chilled though.
B1	You can accept being in 8 hours a week when you're actually in you feel you're getting something out of it. There's been so many times you're in a for a 2-hour thing and you get sent away for an hour to do a presentation and you just spend your time listening to other people saying the stuff you've just said and not getting anything from the person.
B2	The lecturers are saying this is strategy and strategy comes from the Greek....
B1	...and then you go into the seminar, they give you a speech for 10 minutes and then send you away you come back and you speak to them. I'd rather get for 2 hours, you throwing stuff at me. You need more motivation to come in some times.
B2	I like the lectures where the lecturer gets involved with the whole class, discussing something like algorithms. Whereas you get some where you go in and you don't say anything, no one says anything, the lecturer is just constant, this is this, this is this. Right that's it, bang. You're just like I haven't learned anything.
B1	You do go online afterwards. Me being in is pointless, as you're not getting anything from being there.
B3	That's the good thing about Alan, he's done every single job under the sun. he says he worked for this company and it's not even real!
INT	So, what do you like about his sessions.
B3	He gives you examples every time.
B2	He doesn't teach you does he.
B3	He tells you what he's done in his life.
B2	We normally have lecture slides and they go through what you should have learned that week. Alan's like I want you to read these chapters. No one ever does read them but you come in and you discuss it all as if you have read them and you just kind of pick it up. He gives you the homework tasks where you look at the case studies and that and then you discuss them all session. Just listening to the way he talks and stuff, he says he's done certain things and you learn from it.
INT	That goes back to what you were saying about a lecturer or a tutor who's engaged.
B1	William, I've had him twice and I've got him this semester. I've had nothing from him, not academic, nothing. I've just got the assignment from him and I've just wasted 8 weeks. Not only me but I think I could have started that 8 weeks ago.
INT	The clarity of what you've been saying. I can see that being an issue and obviously and again going back to that experience of getting the best grades possible. The more you can understand what you're being taught that's going to increase the experience. I totally get that.
G1	Like you were saying about Alan, Joe was like that last year. You'd come into Joe's lecture and he would start, well he'd still have his slides, but then he'd be like he'd be like what does that mean and he'd pick on you. If you weren't listening or you hadn't read it you were knackered. I don't know why but last year I found him intimidating. He was actually really scary – he was joking but at the same time he wasn't.
B1	We were in a lecture with Joe before and he had a go at someone...
B2	What that about his phone or something?
INT	Is it a case of trying to stress importance? Is that what he's trying to do. Bearing in mind what you were saying earlier about the step up?
G1	I think it was good because, he would always go 'we did this last week'. He'd then have a go at you again. It made me want to go every week and read everything.

INT	That threat was there.
G1	Yeah.
INT	Not as in the physical but it's a lecture where you think I need to be switched on otherwise I'll be found out.
G1	I didn't want to be embarrassed as there were other people who always did go and then there were people who didn't have a clue or did go. But, you wanted to be more towards the others who did know.
B1	I remember checking my timetable and being glad I had you (INT) and not Joe as he scared me after the first one. Then after the first lesson I'd be worried I hadn't read it and he'd come in.
B2	There was this one time I didn't do it and he was have you done that work.
G1	I think this year he was totally different. He was so chilled out if you didn't go. He didn't pick on you or anything. It should have been the way it was in the second year this year.
B1	Was he worse in second year.
G1	He was worse in second year. In third year you just used to sail through because you only had him for an hour and you had an hour and a half last year.
B3	Everyone said that this year, not just our class.
G1	Yes, it was like if you weren't listening, you weren't listening. Which is fair enough if you're not listening that's fine but...
INT	It's that kind of responsibility and it goes back to who's responsibility is it. Ultimately, it's your degree so it's your responsibility. But there is some responsibility for the institution, the university and the staff within it to guide and assist you and I suppose that's kind of the discussion and the battle in a sense, that of ownership. Do you think your own personal expectations, I guess you 2 guys have answered this, but do you set your own expectations for yourself or is the university setting expectations for you as in relating to your performance?
B2	I felt there was more expectation once I was in the university. If you think back to school and stuff and you had an expected grade, targeted grade, here there's just nothing. No one cares if you get like 40% and no one cares if you get 70%. It's all on you, kind of thing.
B1	You hand in a piece of work. You get a grade and that's the last you hear from it unless you go them. They don't call you in and say we're disappointed with this. You could have done better. The feedback you get from some of your work is not even helpful sometimes it's like they just give you your grade and have done with it.
INT	Would it be beneficial?
B1	I think sometimes especially by second or third year to be able to go back in and have a word; they say you could have done better here, so you can take that through but they just wash their hands of you sometimes. You just check your grade online and the comments they leave sometimes don't really help you.
INT	Feedback would help?
B1	Yes, you only got his and this is why.
B2	Some of them are just really pedantic. You go down and you check the stuff what they said about your assignment and you're excepting sentences to say this bit was really good or this bit was really bad but there's a circle round someone's name saying sorry you spelt this wrong. You're just like....there's Derek Hardwood or Harkwood I'm not sure and he circled the D saying that's not how you spell it and I thought is that all you've got to say!
G1	I think in our class there are expectations within certain groups. There's loads of different groups and you always expect one group to do really well and one group to do not as well. Last year, the likes of Craig, Georgia, you always expected them to get firsts, if you were anywhere near them, you were clever.
INT	You were almost rating yourself against your peers?
G1	Yes, and say somebody asked what you got and say you got 62, there would be someone like, I got 68. It's expectations within the class.

INT	How does that make you feel, if that's the word for it?
G1	You were obviously really pleased if you got anywhere near the clever people. But because, like you said (B2), you don't have a target so if I got 62 and I was predicted 62, I would be really pleased with that. I wouldn't care that somebody else got 68 because I would have got what I was supposed to get.
INT	Do you ever look back on your kind of previous marks?
B3	Aye, from good to poor and poor!
B1	I agree with what you said that we've handed in (B2) from the very beginning and we've compared what each other got from the off. We've beat each other on some but it does go off expectations and after a few assignments we know how good we could be so we know if someone gets lower, we have done well from that.
G1	I think like you said, personal targets are really good. There's some ones I've come out of and I haven't really done that well. I feel worse because everybody else has done better. But then there's some I've felt I've done really good, so if you have a personal target, not for every assignment, but overall then you would know whether you were on the right lines with what you're supposed to get as well.
B1	You should be able to sit down with someone at the start of each academic year and say you want a 2.1 then you can get the guidance throughout so you would know how to achieve that. If the lecturer of the module knows you're setting out for a 2.1 they can help you along and tell you if you are going to get one.
B2	I tell you what would be good as well. You know the first semester of your first year, and if you've got your grades from your first semester, and someone says your calculator doesn't work and all that, I feel that the uni should be saying you should be aiming for this, this and this to get this grade or if you want to aim higher, to do this, this and this.
INT	That should be available on campus or something?
B2	Yes. Something should be. I feel it shouldn't be down to you to work it out.
INT	I think it's quite a complicated calculation to take your second year and say....
B1	I think especially say this Christmas, we've only got one semester left, they should be able to say if you get this and this you should be able to overall get this and to work towards it.
B2	Just like a little message on your phone. If you've got a black box and you've got the app it will tell you like, 'good job this week you got such and such score'. If you got something like that, just a little pop up message thing, 'good job last semester', if you achieve this and this you can carry on to get a 2.2 or 2.1.
G1	I think you sent me (INT) how to work it out and that helped me loads doing my dissertation because I thought I need at least 65 in my dissertation, so then I worked towards getting a really high 2.1 but if I hadn't had that, I would have had no idea.
INT	Did you talk to your dissertation supervisor?
G1	Yes. I kept saying I need to get this. What can I do to get this, because I knew what I needed. If I didn't know what I needed...
INT	It's about clarity. You feeling informed about what you need to do.
G1	Yes.
B3	It's taken me months to get my ethics form. Five weeks to get a thing to say what I was going to do and Sarah, I think it was worse for her.
INT	Support from staff – good, bad, indifferent, mixed?
G1	Mixed. You know if I have an issue I can talk, whether you know the answer or not because I know that I can. Out of all the lecturers I've had over the last 3 years, there are some that I feel I can never ask them anything, and then there's some like you and Joe, because obviously I know you and Joe a lot more. One of the modules I did last year: he (lecturer) terrified me, and I had no idea what I was doing for that assignment, but I wouldn't go and see him.
B3	But that was complicated that one. He was telling you one thing and someone was telling you another.
G1	If you (INT) had done that assignment I would have done a lot better. I felt you were

	all approachable and I went with Hannah and I didn't ask anything, and she sat down and I walked past and he just screamed at her for not having finished and I just thought I cannot ask him anything. I really wish I'd just bit the bullet and asked him to get a better mark but I was so scared.
INT	It's about the service element. You're here to receive a service of some type, so customer service is part of that, and there's the wider debate of students as customers and I'll ask you about that later, but customer service or service, you shouldn't feel uncomfortable approaching all of the teaching staff and if you don't go there, again, if that the fault of the university? We know individuals are different, but, it shouldn't impact on you.
G1	There were a couple of lecturers I felt I couldn't go to which has obviously affected my grades. Now I feel I wish I just had asked. Whether I was shouted at or not, I should have asked.
B2	The thing is, if you turn around and have a go at him, he's like, who you talking to, you're like I'm just trying to get some help kind of thing, and then you feel like he's going to mark you down.
INT	That's the other issue, kind of, you know that person is ultimately marking your work. It shouldn't matter as there are procedures in place to ensure consistency and fairness.
B2	If you'd disagreed with him, you'd just be so worried that he knows where I am, he knows my name, he's going to drop me a grade.
B1	In one of yours, last semester, I hadn't got a clue for a while. I didn't have a problem asking you after class. There were a lot of them, I'd ask them in class to give a brief answer and they'd kind of fob you off. I'd never felt comfortable...I'd email them afterwards with so many questions, and it was fine sometimes. But I think if you were somewhere else, you could go, maybe not to that lecturer but to someone who is there to help with an assignment.
INT	There are the academic advisors, but they're not subject specific. It's interesting. Daniel, thoughts, have you felt you've been approached?
B3	Aye, my situation and experience was similar
INT	What about wider support staff? People like library staff, reception, academic advisors, how do you engage with them?
B1	I've had no relationship with them if I'm honest. The only thing is with library staff to hand in assignments. That's the only time I've ever spoken to them.
B3	They told me I owe them £12. They're not getting that!
B1	Other than the staff you're actually face to face with in class and someone in Starbucks, that's about it.
INT	So, no one has used, for example, a member of the library staff to show them how to find journal articles.
B2	No, nothing like that.
B1	I only discovered that last year and that was when the lecturer sat you down after class to quickly show you. No one actually said you can get a load of useful stuff from this.
INT	So, if you'd been introduced to library staff earlier...
B1	I think some of the work I'd done would have been better, having been given some extra help on how to use things.
G1	Yes. Apart from lecturers in uni the only other person I know is Leah's mam and that's because she works here.
B3	Who's that.
G1	Leah's mam – she's got something to do with the uni.
INT	She used to work in the admin office.
B1	In first year, we had that CSP(?) stuff. We had to go out once a week and everyone on Combined...
B2	We had to go out for 3 hours or something and you'd sit there in a big seminar thing and they'd give you a couple of sheets and different references and you'd have to

	point out what was wrong with them. It was to help but it was so boring.
B1	The woman was really helpful but that's the first year and you don't see her again.
INT	On that note, have you engaged with the personal tutoring system? Do you know who your personal tutors are.
B3	No – who are they.
INT	For you I think it's Alan this year.
G1	We knew a lot more last year, because you were last year. But I haven't really spoken to him this year.
B1	I've got to tell you – I've no idea.
INT	It's a process ...
B3	It's like ????, if you give a question that's stupid, he will make sure you know that question is stupid. He gets mad about things, there was a term about something and he went out and got a book.
INT	Two final questions and then we're finished. If you were to rate your performance to date at university, if you want to give it a grade or not that's fine, is it better than expected, worse, the same – is it easy to rate your performance.
B2	The first year I'd rate it about 3 as I didn't have a clue what I was doing to be honest. There wasn't much help there or anything. Then I got better for this year and I'd give it a 9. Much better than I expected.
INT	That's an individual change that you've made.
B1	Like I said before I can't compare how I wanted to go from the start but I'm pretty happy with how this year has gone. I'd probably say 8/9. I know I set out to do well at the start of this year and I feel I've done that.
B3	I've done well at my own personal level but I could have done better if I'd applied myself more. So, I'm at 50/50
INT	Mid-range?
B3	Aye.
G1	I think first and second year I was really pleased with how I did. Especially second year. Then I think the first term I dipped. But I feel like I've picked myself back up. I am pleased and I will be gutted if I don't get what I wanted. I feel I have tried to pull myself back up so if I don't get it, I feel I've tried my best.
INT	The last question, would you see yourself as a customer of the university.
B3	Nah, I don't think a customer.
B2	You're not treated like a customer. You just get ripped off every month. You don't get anything out of it and they charge you £3 for a coffee. You've got to pay for printing.
INT	So, no, yes?
B2	If it was a hotel I wouldn't go.
B1	I've never felt like a customer. You probably are in some way.
B3	If I haven't got nothing in my hand. Maybe when I graduate then I'll feel like a customer.
G1	I feel like now you've mentioned it, I feel like I am but I never thought about it in that way. You are paying for a service. I don't know, like, I work in retail and you get customers who you prefer and customers who you don't prefer. I feel like it's similar in uni. If you're one of the people the tutors prefer, you're treated better. It's the same with customers if they aren't very nice with you or they are not very nice in general, you get a bit fobbed off.
B3	I don't feel that way yet as when in a shop you go and get something and you walk out with something. Whereas here, I'm 3 years in and I've not got anything yet. Once you've actually got the degree then you can say I've got this.
INT	Spinning it back then to the very start. When you started university in 2015 if you were called customers rather than students do you think that would have had a different...
B3	Feels different calling us customers instead of students. I don't know why.
INT	Would you have changed your behaviour towards the university? Would you have

	said, I'm a paying customer, I had higher expectations?
G1	I'd have had higher expectations.
B2	I think people would argue more if put across as a customer. If they were like you've got to be at this lecture, then they'd be hold on I'm the customer I'll do my own thing and it's up to me when I want to come in. I feel like saying you're a customer is kind of off putting. It's kind of you're buying your degree and not earning it and working hard for it.
B1	I think customer is probably the wrong term because if you go into a shop and you're a customer you get stuff done for you. As a student you've got to do so much for yourself. I wouldn't say customer was the right word.
B2	You're the one doing the work whereas when you're a customer you're paying someone else to do the work.
INT	That's the distinction. There's lots of literature around for students and customers on this.
B2	I think it's Alan who says, you're the customer, don't forget to ask if you need help.
INT	Brilliant, I will call it there. Thank you very much.

INT = Interviewer

F1 – Female 1

M1 – Male 1

M2 – Male 2

M3 – Male 3

APPENDIX 6

Focus group consent form and rules

Purpose of this Focus Group

The reason for having this focus group is to find out your thoughts on your University experience. Please share your honest and open feelings, this is for research purposes only and has no impact upon your university performance.

Ground Rules

1. I WANT YOU TO DO THE TALKING. I would like everyone to participate. I may call on you if I haven't heard from you in a while.
2. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. Every person's experiences and opinions are important. Speak up whether you agree or disagree. I want to hear a wide range of opinions.
3. WHAT IS SAID IN THIS ROOM STAYS HERE. I want all members to feel comfortable sharing discussions; this information will only be used for my research purposes.
4. DISCUSSIONS WILL BE RECORDED. I want to capture everything you have to say. I won't identify anyone by name in my research analysis and therefore you will remain anonymous.

I am happy with the above information and give my consent for my discussions to be used as part of Graeme Price's research.

NAME

SIGNED

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APPENDIX 7

Descriptive statistics from quantitative analysis

Year 1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	65	0	1	.43	.499
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	65	0	4	.34	.644
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did you relocate	65	0	1	.57	.499
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Where did you relocate from	65	0	4	.94	1.310
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Current living arrangements	65	0	5	1.86	1.570
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are you the first member to attend a university in your family	65	0	1	.46	.502
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is it important to have close friends at the university	65	2	4	3.18	.705
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Do you feel that your school/college has adequately prepared you for the university	65	1	4	3.02	.820
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

Prospect of study	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ExcitingProspect	65	.00	1.00	.5385	.50240
ScaryProspect	65	.00	1.00	.2769	.45096
ApprehensiveProspect	65	.00	1.00	.2769	.45096
MotivationalProspect	65	.00	1.00	.4615	.50240
InterestingProspect	65	.0	1.0	.692	.4651
TediousProspect	65	.00	1.00	.0308	.17404
EmpoweringProspect	65	.00	1.00	.3846	.49029
IntriguingProspect	65	.00	1.00	.2462	.43412
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My school/college gave me the necessary skills to be prepared for university study	65	1	4	2.83	.601
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are extra-curricular activities important (sports club, societies, structured social groups)	65	2	4	3.09	.678
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)	65	4	10	8.15	1.372
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Comparing your performance of college to university	65	.00	4.00	1.1538	.98791
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

Programme of study	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ProgContinueStudy	65	.00	1.00	.3846	.49029
ProgNotPreference	65	.00	1.00	.0308	.17404
ProgExpectationsFamily	65	.00	1.00	.1385	.34807
ProgAnotherDegree	65	.00	.00	.0000	.00000
ProgJobProspects	65	.00	1.00	.6462	.48188
ProgInterest	65	.00	1.00	.7692	.42460
ProgRecommendation	65	.00	1.00	.1385	.34807
ProgVisit	65	.00	1.00	.0462	.21145
ProgOther	65	.00	1.00	.0308	.17404
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Hours spent on Studies Per Week	65	0	4	1.85	1.107
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are Attending Lectures Important	65	2	4	3.45	.685
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did group working assist with your learning	65	2	4	3.08	.594
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did group work outside class time assist your learning	65	2	4	2.98	.484
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reasonable time taken for having your assignments back after marking	65	0	3	1.43	.728
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is contacting lecturers outside class/school hours important to your learning	65	2	4	3.42	.682
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Study material provided by the university	65	1	4	2.03	.901
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Having lecturers enthusiastic about teaching	65	3	4	3.72	.451
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Preparation time by lecturers	65	0	5	2.77	1.466
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Feedback from lecturers are important on submitted work	65	3	4	3.54	.502
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Feedback from lecturers are important on submitted/draft assignments	65	3	4	3.58	.497
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I will spend more time on interesting topics	65	2	4	3.17	.627
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is contribution to in class discussions Important	65	2	4	2.98	.573
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Am I capable to do well at university	65	2	4	3.26	.477
Valid N (listwise)	65				

Year 2

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	53	0	1	.57	.500
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	53	0	2	.57	.605
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did you relocate	53	0	1	.51	.505
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Where did you relocate from	53	0	4	.83	1.139
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Current living arrangements	53	0	5	2.40	1.736
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are you the first member to attend a university in your family	53	0	1	.49	.505
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is it important to have close friends at the university	53	2	4	3.13	.708
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Do you feel that your school/college has adequately prepared you for the university	53	1	4	2.58	.745
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

Prospect of study	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ExcitingProspect	53	.00	1.00	.4528	.50253
ScaryProspect	53	.00	1.00	.2642	.44510
ApprehensiveProspect	53	.00	1.00	.2075	.40943
MotivationalProspect	53	.00	1.00	.3962	.49379
InterestingProspect	53	.00	1.00	.7358	.44510
TediousProspect	53	.00	1.00	.0943	.29510
EmpoweringProspect	53	.00	1.00	.2453	.43437
IntriguingProspect	53	.00	1.00	.0755	.26668
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My school/college gave me the necessary skills to be prepared for university study	53	1	4	2.66	.732
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are extra-curricular activities important (sports club, societies, structured social groups)	53	1	4	3.04	.876
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)	53	6	9	7.60	.947
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Comparing your performance of college to university	53	0	3	1.51	.846
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

Programme choice	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ProgContinueStudy	53	.00	1.00	.5660	.50036
ProgNotPreference	53	.00	.00	.0000	.00000
ProgExpectationsFamily	53	.00	1.00	.0189	.13736
ProgAnotherDegree	53	.00	.00	.0000	.00000
ProgJobProspects	53	.00	1.00	.5472	.50253
ProgInterest	53	.00	1.00	.4906	.50469
ProgRecommendation	53	.00	1.00	.0189	.13736
ProgVisit	53	.00	.00	.0000	.00000
ProgOther	53	.00	1.00	.1321	.34181
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Hours spent on Studies Per Week	53	0	5	1.89	1.138
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are Attending Lectures Important	53	1	4	3.38	.686
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did group working assist with your learning	53	1	4	2.72	.601
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did group work outside class time assist your learning	53	1	4	2.57	.636
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reasonable time taken for having your assignments back after marking	53	1	4	1.96	.854
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is contacting lecturers outside class/school hours important to your learning	53	3	4	3.53	.504
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Study material provided by the university	53	2	4	2.98	.571
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Having lecturers enthusiastic about teaching	53	3	4	3.77	.423
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Preparation time by lecturers	53	1	4	2.75	.875
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Feedback from lecturers are important on submitted work	53	3	4	3.55	.503
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Feedback from lecturers are important on submitted/draft assignments	53	3	4	3.74	.445
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I will spend more time on interesting topics	53	2	4	3.09	.628
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is contribution to in class discussions Important	53	1	4	3.04	.784
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Am I capable to do well at university	53	3	4	3.17	.379
Valid N (listwise)	53				

Year 3

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	58	0	1	.43	.500
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	58	0	2	.95	.544
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did you relocate	58	0	1	.55	.502
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Where did you relocate from	58	0	4	.76	1.065
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Current living arrangements	58	1	5	2.16	1.211
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are you the first member to attend a university in your family	58	0	1	.52	.504
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is it important to have close friends at the university	58	2	4	3.34	.807
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Do you feel that your school/college has adequately prepared you for the university	58	1	4	2.69	.568
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

Prospect of study	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ExcitingProspect	58	.00	1.00	.3793	.48945
ScaryProspect	58	.00	1.00	.2586	.44170
ApprehensiveProspect	58	.00	1.00	.1207	.32861
MotivationalProspect	58	.00	1.00	.4138	.49681
InterestingProspect	58	.00	1.00	.7931	.40862
TediousProspect	58	.00	1.00	.1552	.36523
EmpoweringProspect	58	.00	1.00	.3276	.47343
IntriguingProspect	58	.00	1.00	.2069	.40862
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
My school/college gave me the necessary skills to be prepared for university study	58	2	4	2.72	.555
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are extra-curricular activities important (sports club, societies, structured social groups)	58	2	4	3.12	.677
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
University Experience (On a scale of 1 to 10)	58	3	10	7.69	1.287
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Comparing your performance of college to university	58	0	2	1.02	.805
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

Reason for study	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ProgContinueStudy	58	.00	1.00	.5000	.50437
ProgNotPreference	58	.00	.00	.0000	.00000
ProgExpectationsFamily	58	.00	1.00	.0345	.18406
ProgAnotherDegree	58	.00	.00	.0000	.00000
ProgJobProspects	58	.00	1.00	.6207	.48945
ProgInterest	58	.00	1.00	.5517	.50166
ProgRecommendation	58	.00	1.00	.1207	.32861
ProgVisit	58	.00	1.00	.0517	.22340
ProgOther	58	.00	1.00	.0345	.18406
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Hours spent on Studies Per Week	58	0	4	2.38	1.040
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Are Attending Lectures Important	58	2	4	3.34	.579
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did group working assist with your learning	58	1	4	3.00	.649
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did group work outside class time assist your learning	58	1	4	2.55	.730
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reasonable time taken for having your assignments back after marking	58	1	3	1.53	.599
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is contacting lecturers outside class/school hours important to your learning	58	2	4	3.47	.569
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Study material provided by the university	58	2	4	2.78	.531
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Having lecturers enthusiastic about teaching	58	3	4	3.64	.485
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Preparation time by lecturers	58	0	5	3.07	1.212
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Feedback from lecturers are important on submitted work	58	2	4	3.52	.569
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Feedback from lecturers are important on submitted/draft assignments	58	2	4	3.76	.506
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I will spend more time on interesting topics	58	1	4	3.03	.648
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

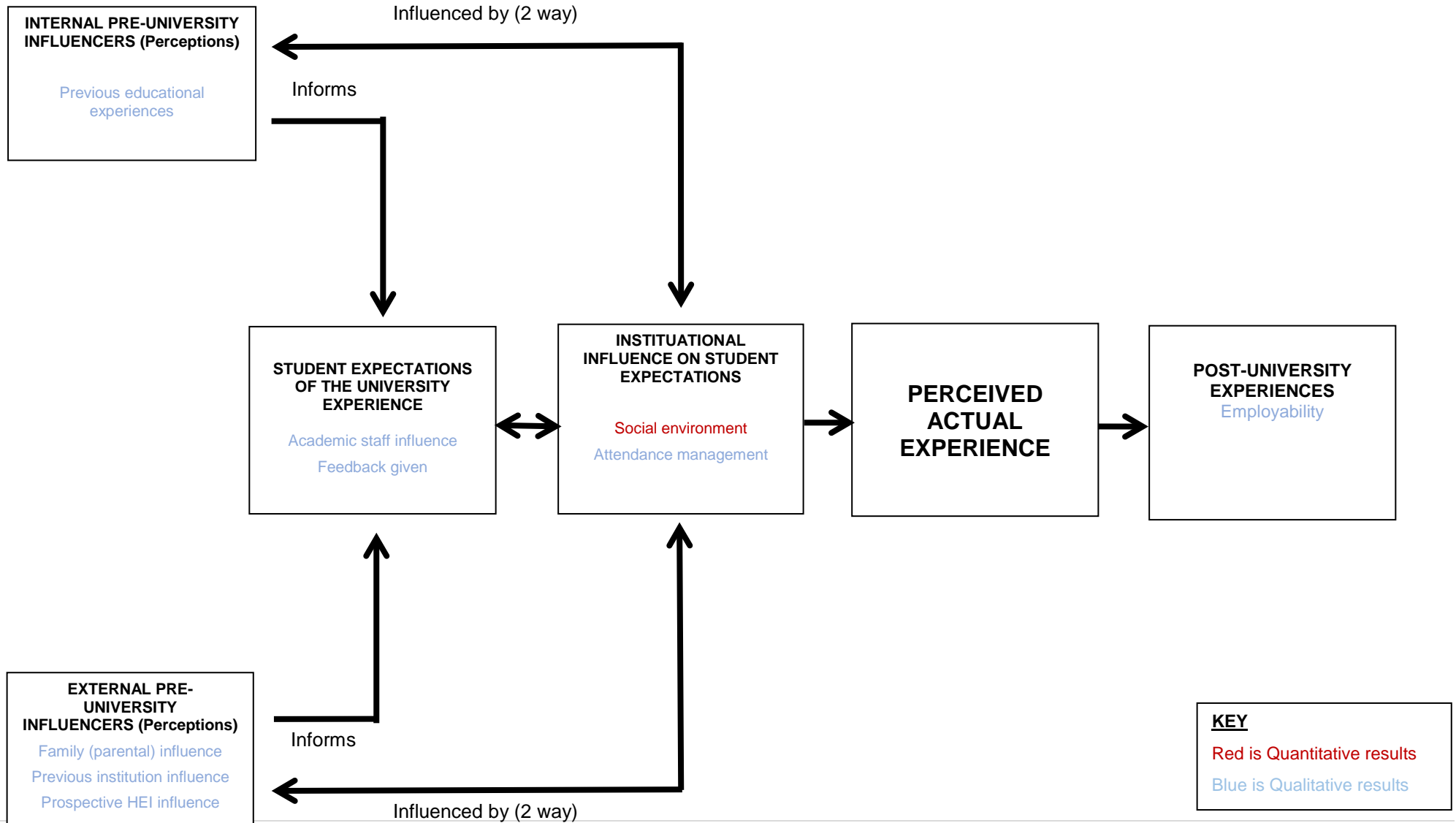
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Is contribution to in class discussions Important	58	1	4	3.09	.629
Valid N (listwise)	58				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Am I capable to do well at university	58	3	4	3.33	.473
Valid N (listwise)	58				

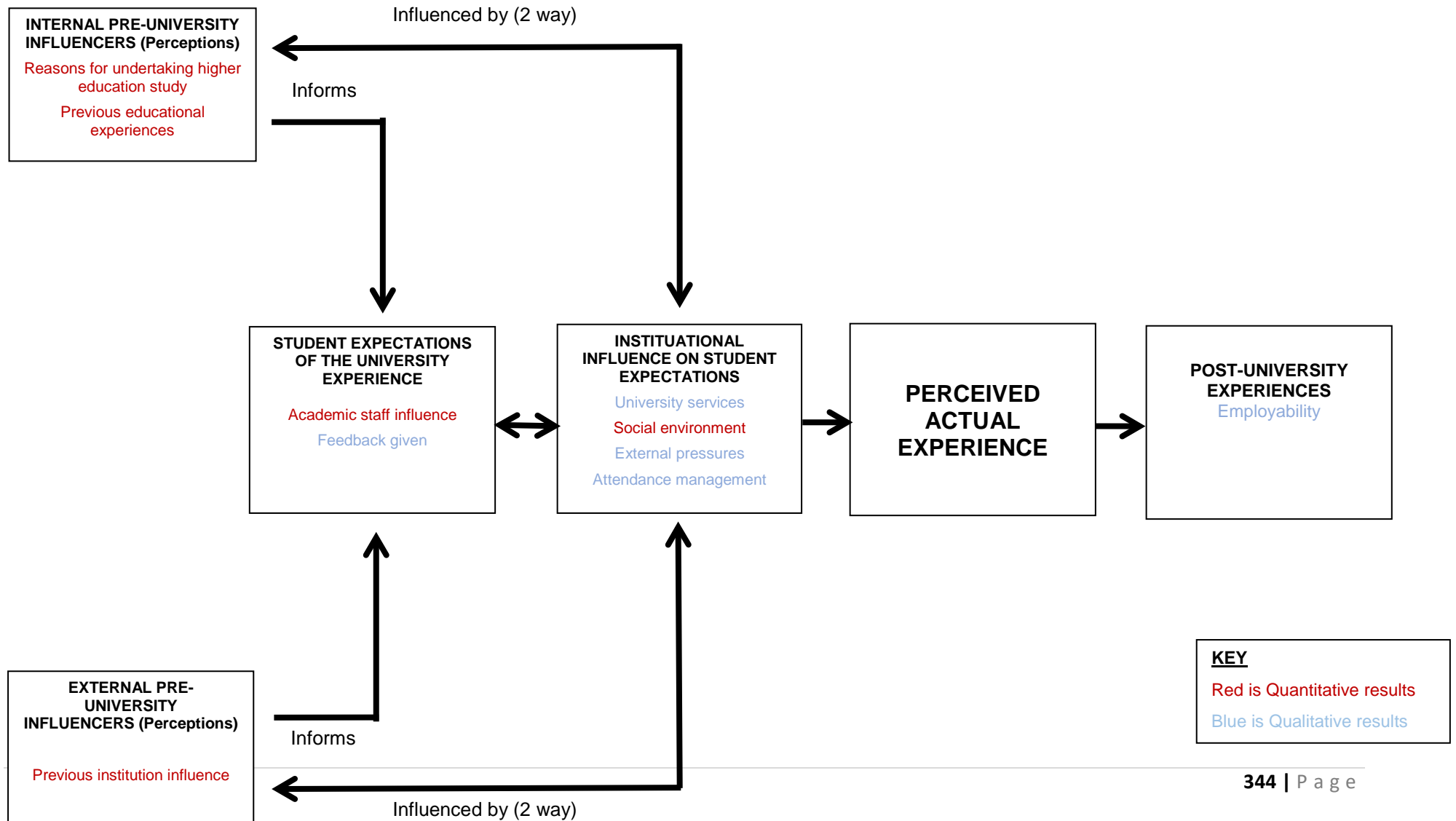
APPENDIX 8

Year 1 significant influencer's framework



APPENDIX 9

Year 2 significant influencer's framework



APPENDIX 10

Year 3 significant influencer's framework

